

# The God Who Cannot Be Selfish – Aseity

Acts 17:24-25

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, June 2nd 2024

I'm curious. How many here have heard of God's aseity before you got the notice of what I was preaching on? I didn't think there would be too many hands. Now if I was really brave I might ask the question, "How many here would love to hear about God's aseity?" In most congregations we might get very few hands. For some reason, it's a doctrine that makes people's eyes glaze over. And I suspect that the main reason for that is that systematic theology books rarely if ever point out the practical implications of the doctrine. With the exception of John Frame, almost all of my books spend very little time on the subject, and when they do, it tends to be in very complicated philosophical terms.

Well, I promise you, this morning you will see that this doctrine is no exception to my belief that *all* doctrine is exceedingly practical and useful. And it's got more use than impressing your friends that you now know what aseity means. Dr. Gordon Clark asserts that this doctrine is one of the most foundational doctrines for understanding God. And I agree. So, let's define the doctrine and let's see first of all that it is Biblical before we begin to apply it.

## I. What Is Meant By God's Aseity?

**A. From the latin words "a se" meaning "on Himself." It means that God depends on Himself and no other. He is independent, self-sufficient, self-existent and in need of nothing. This is summarized by His name "I AM."**

Roman Numeral I, point A gives a definition. We've got to start there. The word aseity is taken from the Latin *a se* meaning on Himself or literally from oneself. It means God did not come from anywhere or receive anything or anyone from outside of Himself. He depends on Himself and no other. He is independent, self-sufficient, self-existent and in need of absolutely nothing. He doesn't need you and me. God doesn't even need your love, service, money, wisdom or good works. Isn't *that* a surprise? We tend to think a little more highly of ourselves than that. But before creation and time even existed, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit existed alone, yet in perfect love, fellowship, and without any sense of need. There was a total satisfaction and contentment within the Godhead. All that He has done and given in creation is an *overflow* of His character.

Why do I say this such good news? Someone might feel, "If God doesn't need me, than I am insignificant and unimportant. And I don't know that I like this doctrine. It doesn't give me any self-esteem." And I have to admit, this *is* a *very* humbling doctrine. There is zero self-esteem that you can get from the doctrine of aseity.

*But* once we are humbled, it is also an incredibly encouraging and freeing doctrine. Can you imagine how awful it would be to discover that the only reason God said He loved you was because He needed you, or wanted to get things out of you, or wanted to use you and manipulate you? You've probably all felt what its like to be used by other people in relationships. Perhaps you thought the person loved you, but it turns out that all they had in mind was you filling their own needs. And so, if it was not for this doctrine of aseity, God could be misunderstood as being the biggest user of all. And I have read books that claim that God created us because He was lonely and needed our love and fellowship. But Scripture insists that God has never been lonely and has always had perfect fellowship since He existed as a Trinity composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three Persons in one Godhead. There is only one God, but that God exists in three Persons. But the point is that *need* is not a good basis for love in human relations, and it certainly would not be good if God had such emotional needs.

Another example: Can you imagine how frightening it would be to discover that God couldn't do certain things in your life because He had needs and inadequacies just like any other person. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a horrible book called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He saw God as having needs and insufficiencies. Listen to this sample statement of why I consider his book to contain absolutely horrible and blasphemous theology. He said,

“Bad things do happen to good people in this world, but it is not God who wills it. God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but He cannot always arrange it. Even God has a hard time keeping chaos in check and limiting the damage evil can do.”<sup>1</sup>

Oh wow! What a depressing idea of God! Today we will be seeing that this is a horrible view of God that leaves people feeling hopeless. It might make you feel that your financial deal fell through because God needed more time or He wasn't able to work all things together for good. Maybe God *could* have done it if He had a little more time, or perhaps a few more people who were willing to cooperate, etc. But we know this is false. Romans 8:28 is true because God has no needs - in other words, because of His attribute of aseity.

The aseity of God is a critically important doctrine, and yet it is a doctrine that many Arminian Evangelicals deny continually. Let me start with a quote on prayer that denies God's aseity. This quote comes from an incredibly popular book. And I have to admit, I have enjoyed and benefited from the book myself. But in this book the anonymous author makes this mistake. He says,

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 42–43.

“The fact remains that, when we pray for others, somehow or other it opens the way for God to influence those we pray for. God needs our prayers, or He would not beg us to pray.”<sup>2</sup>

Sorry! That is absolutely wrong! Here’s another quote from an Arminian author. Culbert Rutenber says,

God, who in his love wills to give so much, can be frustrated by our refusal to receive. At this point the sin that God hates inevitably determines the relationship and we know God only in his judgment, to our condemnation and to his infinite sorrow...

When God finds us, he comes ‘not as one who confers a favor out of his superfluity; He comes asking a favor of us. He stands as a beggar at our door; He makes no effort to break in upon our independence; He merely pleads that we will be so good as not to refuse the gift which He has traveled so far to bring.’<sup>3</sup>

That is as clear a denial of aseity as you could get. Talk about a depressing theology. Yet bad theology quotes like this could be multiplied many times over from Arminians, Openness of God theologians, Roman Catholics, and others. The doctrine of Aseity corrects these ill-founded ideas. Let’s look at a few Scriptures that clearly illustrate this doctrine.

## B. God needs nothing

### 1. He doesn’t need your service and worship (Acts 17:25; Luke 17:10)

People sometimes say that God needs our worship or our service, but let’s go back to Acts 17 and read once again what Paul said. It’s Acts 17, verses 24-25. These verses speak to more than one facet of God’s aseity. It says,

God, who made the world and everything in it [Now just think of that clause for a second. If God made everything, then logically God is not dependent upon creation. Creation is dependent upon Him. That independence from creation is a part of aseity. But He goes on to say:] since He is Lord of heaven and earth [as Lord he is not dependent. Instead, heaven and earth is dependent upon Him - “since He is Lord of heaven and earth”], and does not dwell in temples made with hands [In other words, God is not limited by space. He doesn’t need to be in the right place at the right time since He is everywhere. But notice verse 25:] Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath and all things.

Paul says that God doesn’t need our worship or anything else. After all, we wouldn’t be able to sing praises if God didn’t give us breath, and life and all things. There is nothing we can

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<sup>2</sup> The Unknown Christian, *The Kneeling Christian*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> Culbert G. Rutenber, *The Reconciling Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1960), pp. 35, 58.

give to God that God hasn't first given to us. Scripture says, "We love because He first loved us." In fact, Romans 5:5 says that the only reason we could have agape love is because God poured out His love in our hearts and enabled us to love with this divine love.

In Luke 17:10 Christ said, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" If Christ commands us to say that we are unprofitable servants, it means that our service doesn't profit God. It doesn't fill up some lack that He has. It's for *our* good that we serve, not for *His* profit.

## 2. He doesn't need your sacrifices (Psalm 50:8-13)

Next, He doesn't need all the sacrifices men might make. Turn with me to Psalm 50:8-13. We are going to be singing this Psalm after the message. This is another passage which puts us in our place when we start thinking a little too highly of ourselves. God commanded the Israelites to give sacrifices and so it was a duty to do so. No question about that. But rather than engaging in this duty out of love and gratitude, the Israelites began doing it in order to manipulate God into serving *their* wants and wishes. "We are doing this for you Lord, what are you going to do for us?" Since God doesn't have a need, He can't be manipulated, so God responds by saying (and we will begin reading in verse 8 of Psalm 50):

I will not reprove you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

He is saying that we are the only ones who benefit by glorifying the Lord. He needs nothing. But He calls us through worship to enter into the perfect fellowship that the Triune God already has. Because He has no need He overflows in generosity, desiring us to enter into the abundance that He has.

## 3. He doesn't need your gifts (Rom. 11:35)

Perhaps you have heard name-it-and-claim-it types commanding God to do things in their prayers. It makes the hair stand up on my neck when I hear them do that. They command God, "Heal!" No. You don't command God to do anything. They command God to multiply their money because they have given sacrificially.

But Romans 11:35 says, "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" The implied answer is, "No one." God is never indebted to us because He doesn't need our gifts in the first place. And further more, everything we give to Him in the offering box in the back has been first given to us. We aren't owners. We are merely stewards. So if you think you have earned God's favor by putting money into the offering box in the back, you are mistaken. It is a *love* relationship, not a merit relationship.

And I'm so thankful that part of the overflow of God's heart in giving to us enables us to imitate Him by giving to Him even though He doesn't need it. And let me use an illustration to show why giving gifts to God can still be seen as a significant act of love. A father doesn't need the scribbled love cards that his three-year-old child so proudly presents to him, but he delights in that love card, and the father's lack of need doesn't keep the child from delighting in giving to the father. It's love, not need that drives that. Well, in a similar way, God delights to receive our gifts, adoration, and love even though He doesn't need those things. Does that make sense?

#### 4. He doesn't need your wisdom (Job 22:2)

Next, God doesn't need your wisdom. You've already figured that one out - probably long before I preached last week's sermon on omniscience. But it bears repeating with respect to His aseity. Job 22:2 says,

Can a man be profitable to God, though he who is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless.

God doesn't gain from our wisdom since He already knows everything that needs to be known. But though this doctrine makes us feel small in a certain sense, it is liberating in another sense. We don't have to earn God's favor. Praise God! The whole world is not going to fall apart because of *our* limitations. Praise God!

#### 5. He doesn't need your righteousness (Job 35:7; 22:3)

Next, God doesn't command us to be righteous so as to help God out somehow. The verse we just read obviously shows that. Does He gain from our righteousness? That verse says "No." It's for our own good that He commands us to be righteous. But consider the following two verses from Job that deny that God gets any benefit whatsoever from our righteousness.

Job 35:7 If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand?

Job 22:3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?

#### 6. He doesn't need man's testimony (John 2:25)

Next, God doesn't need our witness or our testimony in order to advance His cause. John 2:25 says about Jesus, that He had no need that anyone should testify of Him. Well, if that's the case, why are we are commanded to engage in evangelism and testify to His name? Is it because God needs our testimony? No. He could convert the whole world in the snap of His fingers if He chose. He could just bypass us. It is for an entirely different reason that he calls us to give testimony. And don't get me wrong. Our testimony has significance, and *is* important, but it is only important and successful because *God* gives it significance and *God* makes it successful. It's a God-centered reason that ends up also being for our good.

**7. He doesn't need man to glorify Him since He is already "glorious...above all blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5)**

Nehemiah 9:5 says that God doesn't need man to glorify Him since He is already glorious far above all blessing and praise that we might bring. We glorify Him because it makes us more like the Triune God and thus benefits us. The Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father, and the Spirit glorifies the Son and Father. The attribute of aseity means that no person of the Trinity selfishly seeks His own glory. They are always selflessly glorifying each other. And the more we become transformed into the image of Jesus, the more we delight in glorifying God - not to gain His favor, but simply because we see how awesome He is and we can't help but adore Him and glorify Him.

*a) It should be remembered that even in glorifying God, God's creatures benefit (Eph. 3:9c-10)*

*b) Father, Son and Holy Spirit all glorify each other (John 8:54; 17:1) in showing forth His attributes*

**8. He doesn't need to examine men (Job 34:23)**

**9. He isn't diminished by man's disobedience (Job 35:6,7)**

**10. He created all things for the benefit of others (Eph. 3:9c-10).**

And you can study some of the other passages and sub-points in your outline for yourself. I give passages which show how the idols of man all need men in some way, but God is self-sufficient. And by the way, that's why humans tend to like idols. We tend to think that the idols are beholden to us in some way. They are dependent upon us in some way. They can be manipulated. They need us. We like to be needed. But God says that He doesn't need us. And that is humbling.

The outline points out that an aspect of aseity is that God owns everything in this universe and does not owe us anything. Job began to think that God owed him an explanation. Can you imagine that? But here is how the Living Bible nicely translates God's answer: "I owe no one anything. Everything under heaven is Mine." (Job 41:11 Living) Now if God owes us nothing, this means that when he binds Himself with a promise, it is *God's character alone* that obligates God to follow through on His promises. Well, God's character is a much better foundation for praying than thinking that God owes us.

So I'm not in any way questioning that God *must* follow through on His promises. But He must follow through because *He* has obligated *Himself* to do so, and His attributes of faithfulness and truthfulness mean that we can bank on His promises. I'm just saying that the obligation has nothing to do with us and has everything to do with Him. He makes His promises because He is a self-giving and generous God by nature. As Acts 17 says, "*He* gives...all things."

I want you to turn with me to Exodus 3 and we will finish off our description of God's aseity with this passage. I think this passage is one of the most beautiful summaries of God's

aseity in the Bible. It is the use of the name “I AM.” Moses was a man who sensed a great deal of need in himself. You might say that he was insecure. And God’s solution was not to build up Moses’s self-esteem. That’s a backwards way of gaining security. Self-esteem is not a very sure foundation for security at all. Look at Exodus 3, verse 4:

So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

God’s solution to Moses’ inadequacy is not to say what a swell guy Moses was. Moses knows he was not even worthy to be standing on the ground where God is. In verse 6 Moses covers his face because he is afraid to look at God. There was no way you could convince Moses to say, “I’m OK you’re OK” - as the title of one wretched book worded it. Instead, God focused Moses attention *off* of himself, and *off* of his inadequacies and *onto* God’s all-sufficiency. You see, if God needs nothing and has everything, then He is the one that can meet our needs, isn’t He? And so God speaks of all the blessings He had already given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in verses 6-9. Then in verse 10 he says,

Come now, therefore [and the “therefore” is pointing back to God’s total sufficiency, “Come now therefore”], and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

Moses initially misses the point. He is immediately overwhelmed with his sense of inadequacy and he says, “No way. I can’t do this.” The first excuse is given in verse 11.

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

In effect Moses was saying, “I’m needy. I can’t do this. I’ve got all kinds of lacks and inadequacies. I’m timid; I’m not a good speaker; I’m not well known. And here comes God’s solution.

So He said, “I will certainly be with you...”

*There* is the answer. You may not be adequate Moses, but I will be with you. And for each excuse that Moses brings up, God points Moses to Himself and the fact that He (that is, God) can handle any situation. Moses had a hard time trusting God’s sufficiency. Moses thought that God needed someone who could speak better, and God responded, “Who made the mouth? I did. You don’t think I can come through for you?” And God answers all seven of Moses’ excuses by pointing to God’s all-sufficiency. But I think God’s response in verses 14-15 sums up the aseity of God so well.

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The LORD [All capital letters LORD is Yehowah, God’s name, which is a variation on the root word for I Am: “The LORD] God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,

has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.

Central to God’s character and being is that He is eternally present and self-existing. He didn’t come from others. He just is. And by the way, when Christ used this title “I AM,” the Jews knew exactly what He was saying. When Christ said, “before Abraham was, I am,” He was making claims to aseity - to being very God of very God and they picked up stones to stone Him, thinking that He had uttered blasphemy by claiming to be God.

But wrapped up in the name “I am” and its sister word “Yehowah” is God’s Lordship over all. Nothing else is an eternally self-conscious I AM. We came from God and are therefore dependent upon and accountable to Him.

So that term I AM speaks of God’s all sufficiency. Not “I will become,” but “I am.” And because God has no needs, He can convince Moses that He can supply any needs that we may have. Are you weak? God said, “I am the Almighty.” Are you in bondage? God says, “I am the Redeemer of Israel.” Are you filled with sorrow and grief? God says, “I am your comfort.” He says, “I am the joy of your salvation. I am the Bread of life. I am the Living Water, I am the light of the world, I am the first and the last, I am the Deliverer, I am the True and Faithful One. And you can fill in the multitude of other I AM’s that Christ is. He has no needs, which means that He can supply all of our needs.

**C. Unlike other gods, He is self-sufficient (Is. 40:12-31; 41:1-29; 44:9-28; 46:1-10; Jer. 10:1-16)**

**D. God owns all things (Ps. 24:1; 50:10f.; Gen. 14:19,22; Ex. 19:5; Deut. 10:14)**

**E. God owes nothing (Job. 41:11; Rom. 11:35ff) and thus all His promises are free, voluntary acts to obligate Himself.**

**F. God is independent**

1. of all things (Psalm 94:8f; Is. 40:18ff.; Acts 7:25)
2. in His thought (Rom. 11:33,34)
3. in His will (Dan. 4:35; Rom. 9:19; Eph. 1:5; Rev. 4:11)
4. in His power (Ps. 115:3)
5. in His counsel (Ps. 33:11)
6. etc.

And I will skip over some of the other sub-points and Scriptures that show that God is independent of all things in His thought, will, power, and counsel. In contrast, Acts 17:25-28 says that all things are totally dependent upon Him. Thus there is a vast Creator-



creature distinction that can never be crossed. We will never become God (like some heretics assert) because we can never have aseity. It's an incommunicable attribute.

**G. All creation is dependent upon God (Acts 17:25-28)**

**H. Thus there is a Creator-creature distinction that will never be crossed.**

## II. What Differences Does His Aseity Make?

So hopefully by now you are convinced that this doctrine of the aseity of God is a Biblical doctrine. I want to look next at what difference it should make in how we live.

Obviously we can't imitate aseity itself or we would be God. Systematic theology books group God's attributes under two groupings: communicable attributes (like love, holiness, mercy, patience, etc.) and incommunicable attributes (like aseity, infinity, omnipresence, etc). Communicable attributes are attributes that God can reproduce in us. He can give us His divine love, mercy, holiness, patience, etc. But incommunicable attributes are attributes that are unique to God and cannot in even the least bit be communicated into the creature. Aseity is one of God's incommunicable attributes. That means that it is unique to God, and therefore we will never have any aseity. It is the nature of Godhood to have aseity and it is the nature of creaturehood to not have aseity - to be dependent. So we can't imitate the aseity itself. But it is still a very practical doctrine.

**A. It means we can never accuse God of being selfish or seeking His own needs since He has no needs (1 Chron. 29:14; John 3:35; 13:3; 17:7; Mark 9:7; Acts 17:25; Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:18; Philippians; 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:3; etc.)**

First, the more you understand this attribute, the more you realize how unselfish God is and how absolutely selfless God's love and other attributes are. And I am going to take the first three subpoints together because I think they answer a frequent objection of atheists (that I began this service with), and they also give us incredible comfort.

If you have listened to very many debates of atheists with Christians, you are probably familiar with their accusation that the Christian God is a narcissistic, self-absorbed, and selfish God. They might say, "Your God is selfish. All he wants is recognition, glory, attention, worship, and service. What kind of a God is that?! It's all about *Him* and *His* desires. He commands *you* to be self-sacrificing, but *Him?* - no, He wants everything for Himself." Here is a quote from an atheist's blog:

I am having trouble seeing the Christian God as anything other than totally narcissistic and self-centered. Here is a quick outline of why... God values his own glory and honor over the well-being of humans... God chooses himself over people for his own benefit. God is selfish.

What are we to think of that? I have read ill-informed Christian blogs that have had questions about what appears to them to be selfishness in God. One blog said, “So God is selfish. Get over it.” But I don’t think that’s a good answer. Selfishness is one of the great sins that ruin humans and that God warns us against. In fact, in the book of Philippians he calls us to imitate God’s *lack* of selfishness. Just read the book of Philippians sometime and you will see that it wants us to imitate God’s selfless concern for others. So if, as some people assert, God is selfish to the core of His being just like we humans tend to be, we have a major problem.

And the Scriptures in the first three points give some good answers. The first answer is that God is not a solitary Person, but a Trinity. The Islamic God is a solitary person, and if he had love at all, there would have been no one to love before creation except himself. There would have been no other person to love. And thus it is no surprise that the Islamic god has a self-oriented love leading to selfishness.

But since God is a Trinity, we see a radically different character to His love. His love is agape love, which is self-giving and self-sacrificing love. Agape love is the exact opposite of narcissistic love. The Father loves the Son and Spirit, not Himself. Likewise the Father praises and glorifies the Son and Spirit, not Himself. You see examples of the Father deflecting praise to the Son. “This is My beloved Son, hear Him.” (Mark 9:7). And on another occasion He said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

Likewise the Father is represented as giving the Son glory, and giving Him a people, a world, and all things. His love is always out-going and sacrificial. In fact, there was nothing that the Father did not give into the Son’s hands. He gave His all to the Son.

Well, the Son’s love is the same. He gives all things to the Spirit and at the Second Coming will give them all back to the Father. The Son’s intense desire is to glorify the Father and please Him. Hebrews 5:5 says, “So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” Acts 7:55 is one of many passages that shows that the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and Father. The Son so honors the Spirit that He promises that any sin or blasphemy against Himself or the Father would be forgiven, but not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And what is the Spirit’s passion? To lift up the Son and the Father.

So you can see that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always flowing outward to each other in their fellowship, praise, glory, and gifts. Why does the Son want you to glorify the Father? Because that is the passion of His heart. Why does the Father want you to glorify the Son? Because that is the passion of His heart. And if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you cannot help but glorify the Son and the Father, because that is the passion of the Holy Spirit. It is because the Holy Spirit fills you that you want to worship and to sing God’s praises. It brings you great joy just as glorifying Son and Father brings great joy to the Holy Spirit.

And it is because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so God-focused, that they created all things to be God-focused. That is not selfishness. That is considering the interests of each other Person in the Trinity to be better than their own. That is the antithesis of selfishness.

Humility and meekness are actually two of the communicable attributes of God. Did you know that? God is the most humble and meek Being in the universe.

And besides, how could God be selfish when He needs nothing? He can't. Acts 17:25 says, "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things." Because God doesn't have needs, it is impossible for Him to be selfish or to serve His own needs. If He doesn't have any needs He can't logically be said to serve His own needs, right? And yet it would be a mistake to say that because God doesn't need us that He doesn't love us. There could be no greater love than God has demonstrated toward us. God values us and delights in us not because we are good or because we contribute anything additional to Him, but because it is of His nature to be self-giving. So it would be a mistake to say that because God doesn't need us, He doesn't love us as much. It is precisely because He doesn't have any needs that He has the most selfless, highest degree of agape love (or self-giving, sacrificial love).

Just by way of illustration - it would be a mistake for us to say that we can only love a husband or wife who still meets our needs, or we can only love a person in the church who is lovable. I've read books that say that you can only love and accept others after you have first loved and accepted yourself. No. Scripture says the exact opposite. Christ said that you can't be His disciple unless you hate your own life also. We tend to love people who are easy to get along with; who are fun, or who in some way meet our needs. But Christ commanded us to love our enemies as well. If you have love for your enemies, you have begun to take on the character of divine love. Paul commanded us, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." (1 Cor. 10:24)

Because selfishness is so hateful to God, He has guaranteed that those who put themselves first will find themselves last; those who seek their own welfare only, will never be satisfied. Whereas God puts you first when you put yourself last. So we can imitate the *results* of God's aseity (His communicable attributes) because God has promised to meet all of our needs in Christ Jesus.

**B. It means that God doesn't love us for what He can get out of us. He is not self-serving or manipulative. His love is the purest form of agape. (John 3:16,35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:23; 15:9; 17:24; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; etc.)**

**C. Since the three Persons of the Trinity glorify each other, they have no need for self-glory (Ezek. 3:12; Mark 8:38; John 13:31-32; 14:13; John 17:1,24; Acts 7:55; Heb. 5:5; 2 Pet. 1:17; etc.) and they thus model to us to not seek self-glory**

**D. It means that God cannot be manipulated by us**

But another practical implication of God's aseity is that this attribute means that God cannot be manipulated by us. I know we have already hinted at this. The way some of us pray, you would think that God was dependent upon us. Listen to this quote from a popular book on the Gospel. The author over and over paints God as dependent upon us, and as

having needs. He says, “God... stands as a beggar at our door; He makes no effort to break in upon our independence.”<sup>4</sup> Well, that strips God of His Godhood. Our prayers need to be more full of praise for who He is; more full of His Scriptural promises we are laying claim to, and more full of thanksgiving for what He has done. In other words they need to be more God centered.

I was reading a blog where a Reformed guy was arguing with a Purpose Driven Life guy over whether God was God-centered or man-centered. The Reformed guy was rightly arguing that God was God-centered or He would cease to be God. The other guy said that God was man-centered or God would be selfish.

I hope by now you can see the foolishness of a man-centered theology. It will strip God of His Godhood and ironically rob man of all that man needs. I think it was Michael Horton who said that the God of evangelicals has become too small. If we see God for who He really is, and we see how feeble we really are, our prayer life will be energized. We won't try to manipulate Him. Instead, we will be able to pray in faith for this world's true needs and for our true needs, knowing that God loves to give all good things, but we will seek to glorify Him with all that He gives.

#### **E. It means we don't have to impress God. We can focus on loving Him instead.**

Next, God's aseity frees us from having to impress God. That was the point of Psalm 50. Rather than bringing worship out of hearts of love and gratitude, the Psalmist complains that the Israelites were seeking to impress God with pomp and ceremony and the amount of skill and sacrifice that was involved in their worship. God sees the heart and He knows whether it is outward show or whether there is genuine love. God would far rather receive singing that was off key that comes from a heart of love, then the most spectacular singing that comes from pride and self-seeking. Realizing that God isn't impressed; doesn't have needs, helps us to focus on what is important: relationship with Him - which again is the main theme of this mini-series.

#### **F. It means that God's actions are all sacrificial and self-giving.**

The next point says that if God needs nothing, this means that all of His actions towards others are self-giving rather than self-serving. And we need to interpret God's providences in this way. When a tragedy strikes, do we have the faith to believe with Joseph, God meant this for good? Or do we feel like God doesn't care, is being stingy or is being selfish with His abundance that He could have given, but has selfishly withheld?

God's wisdom assures us that this thing that came into our lives has meaning, is rational and part of an all-wise plan. God's power assures us that God is in complete control. God's

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

personality assures us that this was not done in a cold, calculated way. But this doctrine of aseity assures us that there was not a speck of selfishness involved.

Even when you think of reprobation of the non-elect in hell, this is true. Romans 9 tells us that God endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. Doing this was sacrificial. Ephesians 3 tells us that God allowed all this to show forth the glory of His attributes to the church. We would never have known the depths of God's love if God had not allowed sin. Nor would we have known His wrath, justice, mercy or other attributes to the same degree. God benefited the church in all He did.

**G. It means that there is no lack in God. He is the Great I Am for all our needs. He gives out of His superfluity.**

We have been seeing over the past four weeks that God is unbelievably generous in making all of His attributes work for our benefit. It is this doctrine of aseity that enables that to be true. And we can encourage our hearts in that. God is the great I AM who overflows in generosity to His people.

**H. Though God has made our work significant, the burden of success does not rest on our shoulders. He has made us significant, even though we are not needed. (Matt. 6:26; 10:31; 12:12; etc.)**

Next, it means that even though God has made our work significant, *the burden of success does not rest on our shoulders*. Praise God! He has made us significant even though we are not needed. In Matthew 6 Jesus spoke against the tyranny of the urgent that we seem to so frequently be driven by and said, "Are you not of more value than they?" *God values you as a person, not just for what you can produce*. I praise God for that. It is liberating. The God who created the universe on day one of creation could produce all the works of all His saints from creation to the present in an instant. But instead He gives us labors so that we can share in His attributes and enter into His fellowship. And it is fellowship with the Triune God that is the goal of all that we do.

**I. It means that your relationship to God is more important than trying to impress God (Amos 5:20-23), and God has ordained that it is better for us (Jer. 7:21-23)**

And that relates to the next point as well. It says, "It means that your relationship to God is more important than trying to impress God (Amos 5:20-23), and God has ordained that it is better for us (Jer. 7:21-23)." In Amos God despised the incredible sacrifices, songs, and offerings that the people made. And He despised them because they did it when they were not in relationship with Him. That means that their worship and service had lost its purpose. In Jeremiah 7 God said that the temple worship He instituted was not for the sake of temple worship. It was to draw them into relationship with Him. We serve Him not because He needs our service but because we love Him and want to bless Him just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless each other.

**J. Though we do not have aseity (since it is an incommunicable attribute), God does share the communicable attributes that flow from His aseity (generosity, responsibility, service, love, etc.)**

Next, though we do not have aseity (since it is an incommunicable attribute), God does share the communicable attributes that flow from His aseity (generosity, love, responsibility, service, etc.). I'll just illustrate with two verses from Galatians 6 that may at first seem contradictory, but give us this balance. Just as each Person of the Trinity loves, glorifies, serves, and points to the other Persons of the Trinity (and not to Himself), Galatians 2:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." But just as each Person of the Trinity is utterly unselfish, verse 5 says, "For each one shall bear his own load." When each person in the church is willing to bear His own load, but also is willing to be ministered to when others desire to do so, it becomes a joy to serve and be served.

And by the way, those who are unwilling to ever be served do not imitate the Trinity - since each Person in the Trinity (though serving, is also willing to be served). I know some prideful people who refuse to be served. They are not imitating the three Persons of the Trinity. So I think Galatians 6, verses 2 and 5 illustrate this balance of serving selflessly yet being willing to be served.

**K. We should acknowledge the Creator-creature distinction on aseity by not acting independently of God. In contrast to God, who is 100% independent and 100% self-sufficient, we are 100% dependent upon Him and not sufficient to ourselves.**

But another way we can grow to appreciate God's aseity is to not act as if we are self-sufficient. Unlike God (who is 100% independent of creation and 100% self-sufficient), we are 100% dependent upon Him and not sufficient to ourselves. So while we serve God faithfully, we can acknowledge that even the things we are doing for Him come from Him. We are dependent.

I once read a book about the Amazon river. And it is a river of incredible dimensions and force. It accounts for 1/5th of all the fresh water that pours into the oceans of the world. The estuary at the mouth is 150 miles across and its main stream is 50 miles wide. Its waters are so strong that it pushes fresh water out into the ocean for 200 miles. So you can be out in fresh water and not even see the land.

There are stories of sailings ships in the olden days that would be becalmed in the ocean far off the coast of south America and would run out of water and sometimes despair of their lives because you can't drink ocean water. On one occasion a vessel that had been becalmed for a long time called out to a nearby vessel and asked if they could spare just a little bit of water. The answer that came back was to lower the buckets. They were in the mouth of the mighty Amazon river! So much fresh water available and yet thirsting to death!

The doctrine of God's aseity assures us that there is no need for you to thirst. Because God has no need, He is always overflowing in supplying our needs. Lower your buckets and drink from the living rivers of water that Christ offers in His grace. There is more than

enough for your every need. Don't make up excuses to offer to God like Moses did. Believe Him, trust Him and go forth in obedience to His word. Amen.