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C0721 – June 6, 2007 – Ex 33:18-23 – Show Me Your Glory

I want to begin by bringing your attention to a couple of things from Exodus 32-33. Exodus 32 is well known for the apparently difficulty over God changing His mind. The people committed the sin of the golden calf and God said, “Let Me alone that I may destroy them” (32:10) and then “God changed His mind about the harm He said He would do to His people” (32:14). What does it mean that “God changed His mind”? We explored and rejected the Open Theist position which argues that God changed His mind in the sense that He chose a different course *that He had not anticipated before*. This heresy contradicts the biblical conception of God’s knowledge in an attempt to preserve libertarian free will. We explored the Classical Theist position which argues that no one’s prayers or arguments can actually move God to do anything He had not already planned to do. In other words, anthropomorphism. This position is suspect because it trivializes prayer and reduces God’s sovereignty to creature cause-effect. I consider the only viable solution to be that God relented from the proposed course of action in response to Moses’ prayer. God relents at times because He is free to respond to human prayer in a genuinely personal way when it does not infringe upon His revealed plan. In light of this difficult passage Exodus 33 is never brought into this discussion but it should be just as controversial because the same thing happens. God proposes a course of action and then He relents from that proposed course in response to prayer. Note in Exod 33:3 how God says, “I will not go up in your midst” and how in Exod 33:14 He says, “My presence shall go with you”. Once again, even though the terminology is not the same, God did relent from the first proposed course of action in response to Moses prayer. This is highlighting the fact that these chapters are some of the most powerful prayer chapters in the Bible. Moses prays like an awesome courtroom attorney who boldly approaches the bench within courtroom procedures and gives sound legal reasons in search of a decision in his clients favor. He’s not giving pansy prayers. He doesn’t pray “Lord, I need this and

help so and so and on and on for ten minutes just going through a list.” In his prayers he adds a vital element: biblical reasons. He even argues with God. The all-important element is that if you really want God to answer your prayers start giving God biblical reasons. Now, I’ve noticed that believers have a real difficulty with this and I think I’ve put my finger on why. It forces us to do two things; 1) listen closely to God’s word (be in constant study), other wise you can’t give biblical reasons and 2) think through the prayer request so we can give the proper biblical reasons. God wants His children to give reasons in the same way that a parent wants his child to give reasons for wanting or needing something. Prayer is not a mindless listing of wants or needs. It’s a confrontation with God. It’s confronting God with His own word. So, in each prayer so far in Exodus 32 & 33 Moses listens closely to God and then gives biblically based reasons. In response God says, “Yes” except in the next prayer which we’ll study tonight where he gets a “Yes” but with some reservations.

d. Show Me Your Glory! (33:18-23)

Exodus 33:18-23 Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” ¹⁹And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” ²⁰But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” ²¹Then the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³“Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”


Alright, this is one of the most astounding prayers in all of Scripture. One wonders why, after God promised to go up with Moses, does he pray, **show me Your glory?** I can only offer an educated guess to this question. Moses wants two things. First, he wants verification that He is the same One who spoke to him in the burning bush and took them out of Egypt. This is important because he wants to make sure this One can take them to the Promised Land. Second, he wants to know more about God. He knows

something about YHWH by virtue of the encounter at the burning bush but now he wants a fuller revelation of His name YHWH.

You want to observe a few things. First, in verse 19 God says that as He passes by He's going to proclaim the name of the Lord. What is that name? It's the name YHWH. Where did God first reveal this name to Moses? In the burning bush (Exod 3:14-15). So, there's a connection between the Burning Bush event and the Cleft in the Rock event. Both of these historical events are associated with the name YHWH. Before we look at this name we have to ask, "What is the importance of one's name?" We've been over and over this on various occasions. In the Book of Revelation we talked about the new name promised to the overcomer. We talked about Christ's new name. We talked about Saul's name changed to Paul and the significance of these names. What is the importance of one's name? It signifies one's reputation or attributes or character (Exod 24:14; 1 Sam 25:25). As one author stated, "Through the names and titles given, God unveils Himself, stripping off the layers of mystery, so that we might see Him as He really is."ⁱ This is why one way of studying the attributes of God is by studying the names of God. God literally has hundreds of names in Scripture and each name testifies to one or more of His attributes so let's look at the Doctrine of God.

The *first* point of the Doctrine of God is that God is Personal. He is not a force. He is a real person with mind, rationality and will. *Second*, God is the Sovereign Creator. He is not a part of the universe. He is distinct from the universe. He is the creator of the universe. The universe is not an extension of His being. Thus, when we talk about the God of the Bible at the most fundamental level He is the Personal Sovereign Creator. *Third*, since God's names reveal His attributes we would expect God to have names that reflect the fact that He is the Personal Sovereign Creator. The two primary names of God in Scripture depict Him in just this way. The first primary name of God in the Bible is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is used 36 times in the account of the creation of the universe (Gen 1:1-2:4) and so it emphasizes that He is the sovereign Creator. The second primary name of God in the Bible is *YHWH*. *YHWH* is used 6,828 times in the OT. "This name is unique among all the names of God, for it is the one personal name of God found in the Old Testament."ⁱⁱ Whenever you run across a name or attribute of God you need to check the context. Names of God are not given randomly but in context because context determines meaning. So, as you study the Scriptures the context will

illuminate the reason a certain name of God or attribute of God was used at that time. Genesis 1:1-2:4 is covered with the name Elohim indicative of His Sovereign work as Creator. Genesis 2:4ff is filled with the name YHWH indicative of His Personal relationship with man in the Garden. Thus, when we talk about the God of the Bible these two names, YHWH and Elohim, are fundamental to the essence of God. They indicate that whatever else we may say about God, whatever other attributes He has, if we are not talking about the Personal Sovereign Creator then we are not talking about the God of the Bible. Fundamentally, God is *YHWH-Elohim*, the Personal Sovereign Creator.



Personal
Sovereign
Creator

If we were studying Genesis we would focus on *Elohim* since Genesis is the book of creation. But since we are studying Exodus we will focus on *YHWH* since Exodus is the book where God gets personal with Moses and Israel. Right here in Exodus 33:19 God says, **I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you**, that is, the Hebrew **name** YHWH. This is the same name revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14-15) and the equivalent of the interesting name “I AM WHO I AM” from the verb “to be”. This is the personal name of God by which we remember Him. When we studied the burning bush and this name of God in Exodus 3:14-15 we said that the name revealed two basic attributes: eternity and immanence. In other words, the Personal Sovereign Creator is eternal (He exists, He has no beginning or end) and imminent (He is active within creation though not to the exclusion of His transcendence). But the name also reveals many more attributes of God. That’s what Moses is asking for when he says, “**Show me Your glory**”. He wants more revelation of who God is. Two things are going to reveal to Moses more about who God is. First, seeing God. “Show me Your glory” What is God’s glory? The word “glory” refers to “weight” or “essence”. Moses is saying, “I want to see your essential nature. I have seen you by fire and by form but now I want to see something that surpasses these prior manifestations.” Second, by hearing God’s name. God will not merely pass by He will also proclaim His name YHWH as He passes by. Thus, Moses will see more and

hear more about who God is. This unique request is granted only to Moses and possibly Elijah (1 Kings 19:11).

First let's deal with seeing God and then with hearing the name of God. This is a difficult passage because the Scriptures state in John 1:18 "No one has seen God at any time;" yet verse 23 says Moses saw God's back. Difficulty is added by the fact that verse 23 speaks of God's hand, back and face but God is Spirit (John 4:24). Probably these descriptions are anthropomorphisms (a common figure of speech meaning "like man") but these figures of speech still need to be explained in order to understand what Moses saw and why what Moses saw was not God since no one has ever seen God. It seems that verse 20 is the key since it equates seeing God's face with seeing God. **You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!** Since Moses did not see God's face but only his back it logically follows that he did not see God. Thus this passage easily harmonizes with John 1:18.

Now, when Moses says "**Show me Your glory**" how does the Lord respond? He responds in the affirmative but with specific reservations. I will pass before you, I will proclaim My name before you but you cannot see My face, you must be covered by my hand in the cleft of the rock so you shall see only My back. So, it's an affirmative answer but with reservations. What do these reservations mean? Cassuto says, "It is possible for you to hear the voice of the Lord speaking to you as one hears that of his friend (v. 11), but as far as seeing is concerned, that is to say, in regard to the comprehension of the Divine attributes, there is a boundary that man cannot cross. It is impossible for you to contemplate My attributes as one contemplates the face of his fellow who stands before him." Cassuto identifies seeing God with comprehending God's attributes. Yet this is impossible for man.

Thus, two vital doctrines related to the Doctrine of God are being introduced. *First*, the Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility. *Second*, the Doctrine of Man's Limitations. These two doctrines go hand-in-hand and reflect the Creator-creature distinction. This two-fold truth is illustrated in verse 20, **But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"** In other words, You cannot comprehend Me because you are limited. Let me illustrate. You've heard people say, "Never look directly into the sun." They're right, don't do it. The glory of the sun is very bright and when you look at the sun the energy of the sun is being focused onto a very small area

of your retina and it can destroy the eye within seconds. People don't think anything is happening because they don't feel any pain but that's because there are no pain receptors. But the eye is being damaged and you can go blind. Now, the glory of God is much greater than the sun and if you were to look directly at the glory of God it would not just destroy your eye you're your entire nature. That is how bright the glory of God is and how limited we are with respect to Him. That is how incomprehensible God is and how limited man is. So, when God says **My face** He's using an anthropomorphism that refers to the fullness of His attributes. His point is that no man can comprehend Me. Thus the Doctrine of Incomprehensibility states that God's essence cannot be exhaustively known by the mind of any rational creature, angel or man. Ultimately, in the final analysis, God is beyond comprehension. Paul expressed this by saying, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11:33-36). Think of the implications of this. He is beyond finding out. You can read every book in the Library of Congress that attempts to fathom the depths of God and you will still fall short of comprehending Him. Even if you had universal human experience, viewing every event of history from the origin of the universe to this moment you would still fall short of comprehending God. Even when you study Him for all eternity you will still never comprehend Him. God is beyond the ability of reason to encapture. If He were not incomprehensible then it would remove the reason we worship Him. It's precisely because He's incomprehensible that we worship Him. Thus, the hymn writer of *Holy, Holy, Holy* expressed this doctrine with the words "Tho the darkness hide Thee". In the final analysis God is shrouded in darkness. We can't see all of God. We can't comprehend all of God. If indeed He were comprehensible then He would be merely a passing interest. But as He is we have reason to draw near to Him and worship Him for all eternity. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" He is so far beyond us that collective humanity cannot even pose all the questions about God. His incomprehensibility explains why the more we study Scripture and find answers every answer seems to generate more questions. Being a creature of God you can never come to the end of who God is. There are always deeper levels of knowledge and more questions and God designed the human mind in

the image of God to thirst after Him. To think God's thoughts after Him. God gave humans a mind to think just as He gave birds wings to fly. A human that doesn't think is like a bird that doesn't fly or a fish that doesn't swim. You were built to think. You were built to go deeper and deeper into who and what God is. But even then you will never come to the end of God. Paul described this doctrine in 1 Tim 6:16 when he said of God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see." He's incomprehensible. Put another way, you will never get bored in the new heaven and new earth. There will always be something new to discover about God (Rev 21:6). Now, though the Bible is clear on the Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility the Bible is equally clear on the Doctrine of Gnosis. Gnosis is the Greek word for "knowledge". The Doctrine of Gnosis is that God is knowable. Man can know God. So, the Doctrine of Incomprehensibility has to be balanced with the Doctrine of Gnosis (Knowledge of God). God can be known by the mind of man. We cannot know Him exhaustively but we can know Him truly. Insofar as we understand the Bible we understand the mind of God. There is a one to one correspondence between the mind of God and the mind of man when man understands the mind of God in Scripture. So, can you know who God is? Yes. Why? Because of the Doctrine of Revelation, the Doctrine of the Image of God and the Doctrine of Gnosis. God has revealed Himself in the Bible and man is made in His image to know God. Can you know who God is exhaustively? No. The Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility and the Doctrine of Man's Limitations. God is incomprehensible and man is limited.

Therefore, God's **goodness will pass before** Moses. Notice the words **pass before**. God will not stand before him so he has time to contemplate Him but merely pass before him. Further, he will be in a cave covered by the hand of God which will not be removed until He has already passed by. Therefore, all that Moses will see is the after-effect, the after-glow or reflection of God's glory. His **goodness** is about as close as the Bible gets to a definition of God. Let me repeat that for those of you who missed it. His **goodness** is about as close as the Bible gets to a definition of God. I would state without reservation that it is the equivalent of His **glory**. Note verse 19 compared with verse 22. What does God say will pass before Moses in verse 19? His **goodness**. What does God say will pass before Moses in verse 22? His **glory**. So, His **glory**, which is His divine essence, is the equivalent of His **goodness**. This is what Moses cannot see so it is also equivalent to His **face**

in verses 20, 23. So, it will pass by but Moses must be shielded from it. Thus, God's goodness, God's glory and God's face are all equivalent and cannot be seen by man. They are each the equivalent of God's attributes. They are ways of expressing who God is. Verses 21-23 describe what will happen in Exodus 34. In light of Moses' human limitations **the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, some location where Moses could be safe and you shall stand *there on the rock*; probably a rocky formation on the top of Mt Sinai (Exod 34:2, 6). ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.** God is going to put Moses in a cave in the rock and **cover** it so he can't see His face, His essence, ²³**"Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."** "The back, as contrasted with the face, signifies the reflection of the glory of God that had just passed by."ⁱⁱⁱ Moses only saw the after-effect of God's glory. This is all he could comprehend as a sinful human being. Yet this was a stupendous revelation of God. In the end, no man can comprehend the Divine attributes, there is a boundary that man simply cannot cross. The Doctrine of Man's Limitations explains this boundary.

Now that we have dealt with seeing God let's deal with the second aspect: hearing God's name. While He is passing by He **will proclaim the name of the LORD before you**; that is, the name YHWH, one of the two primary names of God. It refers primarily to the fact that God is personal. Let's turn back to Exodus 3:13-15 to get some insight into this name.

Exodus 3:13-15 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the 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-name to all generations.

See, in the Hebrew if someone asks, "What is your name?" they are asking "Who are you?" "What is your character like?" Thus, when the sons of Israel ask Moses, "What is His name?" they are asking "Who is He?" "What is He

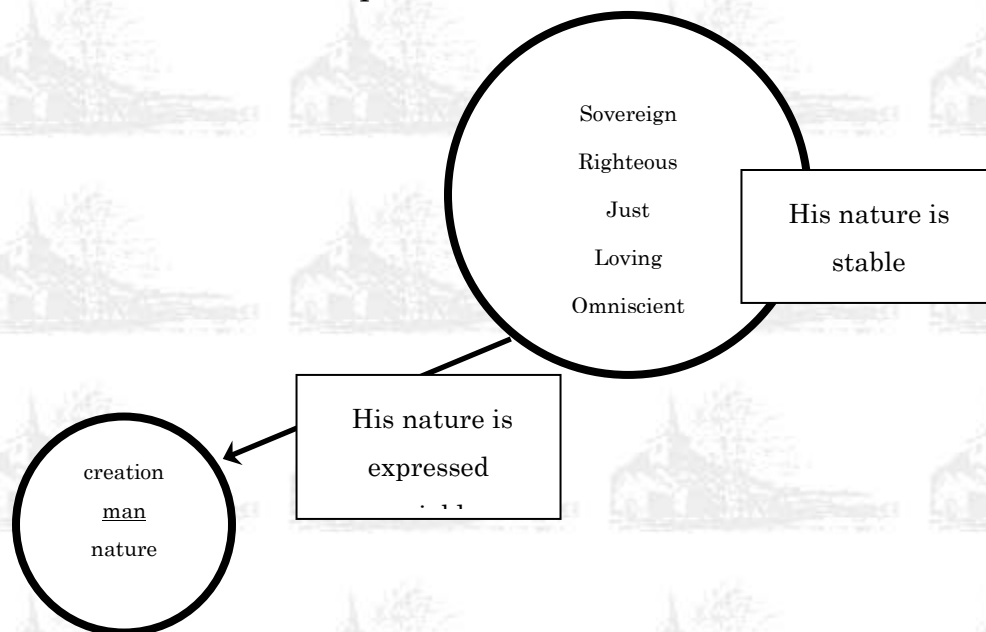
like?” and Moses will say “I AM has sent me to you”. The name “I AM WHO I AM” is the Hebrew EHYEH-ASHER-EHYEH and comes primarily from the verb “to be”. “In verse 15, the name becomes *yahweh*, which sounds in Hebrew like a form of the verb *to be*.”^{iv} And we are told that this YHWH is the God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Further, God says This is His name forever, His memorial name to all generations. This is the name God wants people to especially remember Him by forever. As I said before, of the two primary names of God, YHWH emphasizes His Person. He is not a force. He has a mind, rationality and will. He is the Personal Sovereign Creator. Now, when we studied this name YHWH earlier we learned that it pointed to the attributes imbedded in the name “I AM WHO I AM”. These two attributes are eternity and immanence.

This name is not proclaimed until Exodus 34:6-7 “Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD [YHWH], the LORD [YHWH] God [Elohim], compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” So, here we get more revelation about who God is when content is added to this name. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth. We’ll look at this next time but the important point now is that God is enlarging the meaning of His one Personal name.

Right now I want to turn back to verse 19 and the words **I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**” In other words, do not think that I will show you My goodness and proclaim My name to you for any other reason than the fact that it pleases Me and is in accordance with My will. I do not have to answer your prayer out of any necessity laid upon Me. Yet God will be gracious to Moses and will show compassion to Moses by sheltering him in a cave as He passes by.

Although grace and compassion are two of God’s eternal, infinite, immutable attributes the exercise of them (being gracious and compassionate) is solely up to His will. God chooses when and to whom He expresses grace and

compassion. It is important to distinguish between the attributes of God and the expression of His attributes upon the created order.



For example, while God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and this is a total expression of His being (i.e. He is not part love, part righteous, part just, part sovereign) it does not follow that His love is manifested equally at all times and all places within the created order. If God were to express His love equally and infinitely at all times and places then this would leave no room for justice. By way of example we say that the cross of Christ is God's supreme expression of love to the human race. This implies lesser expressions. In short, God's nature is perfectly stable but His nature is expressed variably upon the created order (see diagram above). The expression of His nature is conditioned solely on His will, **"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."** This is quoted by Paul in Romans 9:15 to prove the same point. God has the right to express His attributes to the degree He wants and to whom He wants and when He wants.

In conclusion, we've primarily looked at the Doctrine of God. Fundamentally, the God of the Bible is the Personal Sovereign Creator. This is expressed by the two primary names of God, *YHWH-Elohim*. In this chapter and the next, the name YHWH is pre-eminent. In Exodus 3:14-15 this name is equivalent to I AM WHO I AM and refers to two attributes, eternity and immanence. With further revelation this name will incorporate more attributes. Moses

wants to see God's glory in order to know more about YHWH. God answers in the affirmative but with reservations. No one can see God because of the Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility and the Doctrine of Man's Limitations. Yet, because of the Doctrine of Revelation, the Doctrine of the Image of God in Man and the Doctrine of Gnosis man can know God truly in part. Thus, when there is a one-to-one correspondence between our minds and God in the Scriptures our knowledge of God is the same as God's knowledge of Himself. This is the view of God which Moses receives in the next chapter and which we will explore more fully next time.

ⁱ Larry Richards, *Every Name of God in the Bible*, Includes Indexes., Everything in the Bible series (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 17.

ⁱⁱ Larry Richards, *Every Name of God in the Bible*, Includes Indexes., Everything in the Bible series (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 1:476.

^{iv} John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 21.

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