

God is Independent

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- [0 : 0 0] It's looking at the doctrine of God, so doing topicals, which means we've got to jump around a bit. I said to people in the room before, if you want to open to a passage, we're going to start in Isaiah and finish there.
- But I'll put it on the screen nonetheless anyway. When my daughter was younger, much younger, she couldn't speak particularly well.
- And so we gave her some speech pathology lessons, speech path lessons, is that what it's called? I can't remember. But now she hasn't stopped talking, so it was great value for money, I think.
- But one of the few things that she could say was, by myself. And she was very independent. Every time we wanted to try and help her, no, by myself. And at one level, this is a good thing. We want children to grow up and become independent, to do things by themselves, don't we?
- Last week, my son, with a few others in the room, finished school forever, last Friday. And in 10 days' time, they will start their VCE exams.
- [1 : 0 7] I've said to a couple of people at church, I don't know who's more nervous, me or him. And then I said, no, actually, I don't know, it's me. And yet again, this is all part of growing up and becoming independent, isn't it?
- And yet none of us will ever be completely independent, do you realise? For example, just at a basic level, we all depend on oxygen to keep breathing and food and water to keep living.
- We often depend on medical treatment for healing and the like. But today, we'll see that God alone is truly independent.
- He alone is self-sufficient. And so he alone can truly say, by myself. The fancy word for God's self-sufficiency is aseity or aseity.
- It's from the Latin ase, which means from or by himself. In other words, it means God has life from himself.
- [2 : 1 3] He is self-sufficient. He doesn't need anything or anyone to continue to live. As Jesus said in John's Gospel, the Father has life in himself.
- And so just to try and draw things together from last week, for those who are here, last week we saw that God is simple. And if you weren't here last week, this might go over your head. But God is simple, not in that he's slow or dim-witted, but he's one unified being without parts.
- He's not a compound or a composite. And so I showed you, for example, a compound leaf versus a simple leaf. And a compound leaf is made up of parts like leaflets. But God is one unified being.
- He doesn't have one leaflet of wisdom and one leaflet of love and one leaflet of faithfulness and so on. To use a different illustration I showed you, he's not like a pie graph where he has a slice of this and a slice of that.

And now, if you remember, he is completely holy and at the same time, completely faithful and completely love and light and goodness and wisdom and so on.

[3 : 25] He is all these things all the time. He doesn't just have some of these things. He is these things. Which means he has everything he needs in himself to keep living, to be self-sufficient, to be independent.

What's more, we also saw last week that God is infinite. And so he's infinitely self-sufficient, if you like. He doesn't run out of anything. Remember those old Duracell ads?

You know, the Duracell bunny? The bunny that keeps going and going? Well, God is way better than a Duracell battery because even they run out after a while.

But God never runs out. He is perpetually self-sufficient. He doesn't need anyone or anything but has ongoing life from himself. And so he is truly independent.

He alone can say, by myself, you see. And this is one of the things that makes our God the true God. And so in our first reading from Isaiah 40, Isaiah begins the chapter by announcing comfort or salvation to his people, saying that the time for their exile is over.

[4 : 47] He's going to bring them back and regather them as their shepherd. And they can trust that God will deliver. Because as the rest of chapter 40 goes on to say, God is like no other.

He alone has the goods to deliver. And one of the things that makes him like no other is that he is independent. He is not like an idol which is dependent.

And so if we pick it up from our reading from verse 18, Isaiah says, With whom then will you compare God? To what image will you like him? In other words, who is his equal?

And he goes on to say, none actually. And as for an idol, well, they're dependent. An idol is dependent on a metal worker to create it or cast it. And it's dependent on a goldsmith to put golden skin on it.

And even fashion some silver jewelry for it. And if a person can't afford a silver and gold to bring to this idol-making exercise, well, then they can select some wood for a stand.

[5 : 55] But it has to be wood that will not rot. Otherwise, the idol, that's the idol and topple together. The idol will topple over.

But you see the point that Isaiah's making? He's kind of mocking idols and saying that this thing is dependent on people, not only to create it and make it look nice, but even to help it stand up.

I mean, what kind of God is that? It's laughable. But our God does not depend on people. He's eternally self-sufficient. So completely independent.

He doesn't need us to hold him up. And we see this in the New Testament as well. And so in Acts 17, Paul is addressing a crowd in Athens.

He's just walked through the streets and there's idols everywhere. And then he says, look, guys, let me tell you about the true God. He starts off by saying, the God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.

[7 : 01] We saw that last week. He's too immense to fit in, if you like. But then notice the yellow verse 25. God does not need us.

As though he's an idol who depends on us. God is independent. And yet he still created us, didn't he? As I said last week, sometimes kids ask who created God?

And the answer is, well, no one. He always existed. That's what makes him God. And sometimes kids ask, well, why did God create us? And I've heard people say, well, because God was lonely.

He wanted the company. But he doesn't need us. God in himself, his father, son and spirit was perfectly happy. And he could have remained so for all of eternity.

He's self-sufficient, independent. And so why did he create us? Well, because he freely chose to. He freely chose to share his love, his infinite love that he has in himself with us.

[8 : 10] And to share his life, his life eternal with us. Which is a huge act of grace when you think about it. Because it meant not only creating us, but then sending his son to die for us.

Because he knew humanity would turn away from him. And yet he still went through with it, didn't he? That all who believe in Jesus might be adopted into his family.

And enjoy his love and life eternal with him. Andrew Moody gave me a really helpful illustration about this. It's like a married couple who are perfectly happy by themselves.

I remember those days. But they freely choose to have kids. I do love my kids for the record. And I know sadly, to be more serious, I know sadly not every couple can have kids.

But, you know, and I really feel for that. But this is just an illustration. And in this illustration, this couple choose to have kids. Not because they were unhappy. Like where, you know, you see those couples on TV.

[9 : 16] And their marriage is in all sorts of trouble. So they say, oh, let's have kids to fix it. It never works out, does it? But this couple doesn't choose to have kids because they're unhappy or they're lonely.

They were perfectly happy by themselves. But they freely choose to because they wanted to share their love with another. They wanted to share their life with another.

And it's an act of grace because as any parent knows, kids cost a lot, don't they? But one day the kids might turn around and think and praise their parents for their grace.

Maybe. But that's the idea we see in Ephesians 1. Though it's talking about choosing to be in his family in particular. So in love, God predestined or chose us for adoption into his family.

Sonship is the idea of inheritance. It's not to do with gender. And so the first application really this morning is to praise God for his grace.

[10 : 32] His independence reminds us that he doesn't need us. And yet graciously chose to create us and then even adopt us.

While it costs him his only son. That we who believe in Jesus might share in his love and enjoy his life eternal with him. So if you don't yet believe in Jesus, then you're missing out on God's purpose, his desire for you.

To know his love and to share in his life eternal. So do believe. And for us who do, then I wonder, when was the last time we praised God for his grace that gave us life?

Both life in this world and then life in his family. I'm often so busy thinking about all the difficulties we face in life because we live in this fallen world.

Floods, for example. War, interest rates, social angst. I was in the city yesterday and there was yet another protest marching around the city.

[11 : 41] There's a lot of angst around society. This fallen world doesn't make life easy, does it? And yet we mustn't forget that our very life in this world, not to mention in God's family, is a gracious gift from him.

He didn't need us, but graciously chose to create us and then adopt us. And so it's right that we praise him for his glorious grace, isn't it?

His grace which gave us this life. But it's a life where we are still dependent on him. For while God is independent, we are God dependent.

So at point two in the outline. In Acts 17, where Paul is giving this speech, he says, which we just saw a moment ago, he's not served by human hands as if he needed anything.

And then he continues immediately to show that we depend on him, even though God doesn't depend on us. He says, rather, God himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

[12 : 47] From one man, he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they might seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.

Though he's not far from any of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of Athens' own poets had said, we are his offspring.

God is the one who gives everyone life and breath and everything else. And even non-Christians, it's amazing how many non-Christians still search for some sort of spiritual, something other, because they have this sense that there is something more to this world.

And it's God. It says there that God created us from one man that we might reach out to him. That we might be adopted by him through Christ, as we saw a moment ago.

But notice in yellow there, it also says that in him we live and move and have our being. In other words, God didn't just give us initial life.

[13 : 57] He continues to sustain our lives. We're dependent on him in an ongoing way, did you realize? God is not like a clockmaker who creates a clock, winds it up, then walks away, lets the clock kind of keep ticking on its own.

Now, God is still involved in his creation. Still sustaining our lives through Christ. You were seeing a couple of weeks ago from Hebrews chapter 1.

The sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Notice, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

It's kind of like the sun that Andrew also mentioned a couple of weeks ago. We depend on the sun, S-U-N, for life. But you might say that the sun gives life through its rays, even though it's still one sun.

And so, for example, the father could be likened to the center of the sun and the S-O-N, kind of like the rays. That is, that God the father gives life and sustains through Christ.

[15 : 05] It's still one sun, of course. It's God, through Christ, that not only created all things, but continues to sustain all things, even our lungs, to that breath you just took.

And that one, and that one is from God. We depend on him to keep making our bodies work. That's how dependent we are on God, did you realize?

And so the second application then is to live like it. As Christians, we are to live God-dependent lives because the reality is we are dependent on him.

We're not to say by myself, but we're to say by God's help. Both when it comes to our physical life in this world and our spiritual life in God's family.

Let me give you a couple of general examples. When it comes to living rightly in life as Christians, then we're to depend on God for guidance. And here we come to our kid song for today.

[16 : 12] We're to trust or depend on the Lord with all our heart. Not lean on our own understanding or the world's understanding when it comes to the best way to live, but rather to submit to God's way to live.

And he will lead you down the right path. He will help you to live right in life. Or when it comes to finding contentment in life as Christians, we're to depend on God's strength.

Because finding contentment these days can be a struggle, can't it? It's very hard. There's so much happening in our world. And there's so much suffering.

And yet in our second reading, Paul says, I know what is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Paul says he's learned the secret of being content in any of those situations. The secret to being able to cope without being consumed by fears or stress. Stress.

[17 : 25] Such that he can have a peace and calm. The word for content here, ironically, means literally self-sufficient.

He's learned the secret of being self-sufficient, which is a bit of play on words, because the secret to being content or self-sufficient is actually being God-dependent.

That's what he goes on to say. I can do all this, verse 12, through God who gives him strength. Paul says he can do all this.

He can find contentment in all situations, in all these things that he faces, whether plenty or want, by relying on God's strength. And so the secret to being self-sufficient is actually being God-dependent.

Depending on him to give us strength so that we're not consumed by stress or fear, that can have a sense of calm and peace.

[18 : 27] A strength to say, it's okay, I can get through this, not by myself, but by God's help. But it's not always easy, is it?

I mean, to be content essentially means to trust God. And it's not always easy to hand over to God in prayer those things that are worrying us and to leave it with him.

That's the hard part, isn't it? To pray about it, hand it over, and say, I need you to deal with this, and then leave it there without it coming back and consuming us with stress and worry.

Leaving it with him is the hard part, isn't it? We need strength to do that. It's also not always easy to trust God when it comes to his goodness. You know, when he doesn't give you the answer you want or when you want, what's God doing?

Is he really good? We need strength to trust that he is, to remember that he is. I mean, he wouldn't give his only son for us if he wasn't. So we need God's strength to trust him, to be content, no matter the situation.

[19 : 36] I remember at Bible study this year, a person prayed for their health, and then they added, and pray that I'll be content whatever the doctors find.

Isn't that a great thing to add for prayer? They prayed not just for healing, but for God's strength to cope whatever the outcome. And the outcome was, sadly, that they'll have to live with their condition for the rest of their lives, not the outcome they were hoping to hear.

And yet, God did give them strength to be content. For they weren't overcome with stress, but did have a sense of peace. They didn't rail against God, what are you doing?

They continued to trust in God and his goodness. They were content. And so the second application for us this morning is, don't do life by yourself, but do life by God's help.

Because we are God-dependent, both for life in this world and life in his family. And the great thing about this doctrine of God's independence or God's self-sufficiency is that we can depend on him because he's always going to have help to give us.

[20 : 59] He never runs out of strength to bestow on us. Like in verse 19 of this same passage, the Philippians were giving money to Paul and Paul says they're not to worry if they suddenly get a need because he says at the end of our second reading, my God will meet all your needs, not wants, but needs according to his abundance, the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

God has infinite riches. He's self-sufficient. He doesn't need anything else, which means he always has something to give us in our time of need.

Psalms 36, I think, puts it quite beautifully. He says, You, Lord, preserve or sustain both people and animals. How priceless is your unfailing love, O God.

People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house. You give them drink from your river of delights, for with you is the fountain of life.

In your light we see light. Here is God's self-sufficiency. He has an abundant house of food and a river of water.

[22 : 19] He's set. He doesn't need anything else. He has an abundance in himself. And yet, oh, sorry, not yet, but so we can always get help from him.

From his house of abundance we feast. From his river of water we can drink. From his fountain of life we can live.

From his light of truth we can see light. In other words, we depend on his independence through Christ.

And we can always depend on him because he's always got an abundance of help to give. Life. Which is how our reading from Isaiah finishes.

And so at the end of our passage in Isaiah which we come back to now, Isaiah says, do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

[23 : 17] He will not grow tired or weary. And he's understanding no one can fathom. God never grows tired or weary because he's infinitely self-sufficient.

He's got ongoing strength that never runs out. And so we can depend on him to give us some of that strength which is exactly what Isaiah goes on to say.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. But those who depend on, who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. You see, God is self-sufficient, he's independent and from the riches of his self-sufficiency, he always has ample help, ample strength to give.

And so we can depend on him, we can hope in him, find strength from him that we can keep running or walking, not always physically of course, but spiritually, keep trusting in him to be content.

[24 : 32] It's kind of like that old Australian children's book called The Magic Pudding I don't know if you ever read this when you were little, it's a very old book, but it's about a pudding called Albert who is self-sufficient.

He has life in himself, if you like, and so no matter how often he is eaten by others, he always reforms to provide more pudding for them. Obviously, God is not a pudding, nor is he magic or reform, but he does have an endless self-sufficiency from which we can keep coming to draw from, and so we can depend on him.

So as we close, first, God is independent, he alone can say by myself, and yet while he doesn't need us, he graciously chose to create and adopt us, and so praise God for his grace that gave us life.

Second, we are God-dependent, not just for initial life in this world physically, or even in his family spiritually, but for ongoing life in both, and so we must live not by myself, but by God's help.

And thirdly, God's self-sufficiency, his independence, means he has an infinite supply of pudding to provide, so to speak. And so remember his character, his independence, that we can keep coming to him and depending on him for help and strength, like guidance to live rightly and strength to be content in life.

[26 : 13] Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you so much for your character, we thank you for your self-sufficiency, your independence, which reminds us of just how amazing your grace is that you would still create us and adopt us.

Help us to praise you for your grace, we ask. But thank you also that it reminds us that you have an endless supply of help for us, and so help us, we pray, to depend on you in life, and to do life not by myself, but by your help.

Help us in this, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.