



Care & Share

THE ALMIGHTY GOD

By Dr Marno Retief

Louis Cyr was a French-Canadian strongman who was born in 1863 and died in 1912. What was his claim to fame? Well, Louis Cyr is widely regarded as one of the strongest men who ever lived. In fact, some people claim he was the strongest man who ever lived. He performed a number of incredible feats of strength during his lifetime, but there's one accomplishment in particular that stands out. In 1895, he performed the heaviest confirmed lift on record by – listen to this – lifting a platform on his back with 18 large men on it, weighing 1967 kilograms in total. What an amazing feat! What strength! What power! When speaking about God as *almighty*, many Christians tend to think about God in similar terms, envisioning God as the ultimate strongman. The only difference being that God is the strongest, most powerful being there will ever be. He is all-powerful, or – as theologians would say – omnipotent. God's able to do anything He wants to do. Nothing is impossible for him. He's got infinite power at his disposal. When Christians confess faith in "God, the Father *almighty*", many have such a picture of God in mind. But is this really what the Apostles' Creed is trying to say? Should we simply understand the almightiness of God as a reference to his infinite power and ability? Or would it come as a surprise to you if I told you the Apostles' Creed is trying to communicate something quite different by calling God *almighty*?

There can be no doubt that the Bible teaches God is omnipotent, God is all-powerful. The truth of God's almightiness is asserted throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, God is called, "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1, ESV), "the Mighty One of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24, CSB), "the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel" (Isa. 1:24, ESV), "the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa. 40:28, ESV). The Psalms frequently proclaim the great power and majesty of God. Psalm 24:8 states, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle". Psalm 115:3 (NIV) affirms God "does whatever pleases him". The prophet Jeremiah declares, "Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17, ESV). In the New Testament, the angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luk. 1:37, ESV). And Jesus tells his disciples, "[W]ith God all things are possible" (Mat. 19:26, ESV). The book of Revelation frequently refers to God as "the Lord

God Almighty” (Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22). The biblical teaching is clear: God is almighty! But the Bible reveals many attributes or characteristics of God. The almightiness of God is just one of those characteristics, albeit a very important one.

So, what other characteristics of God does the Bible mention? Well, the Westminster Larger Catechism gives us a summary of some of the most important characteristics of God revealed in Scripture. Listen to this:

God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. (Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 7)

What a powerful description of God! And, yes, it does mention that God’s almighty, along with several other amazing characteristics of God. However, different theologians will give you different answers when asked about how many characteristics of God the Bible reveals. And what makes things even more complicated is that theologians utilise various classification systems to distinguish between various biblical attributes of God. As interesting as these classifications are, it’s important to remember that God is ultimately indescribable, above and beyond anything we can ever imagine. Having said that, there’s one distinction in particular that I think we should always bear in mind when speaking about the attributes of God. And that’s the distinction between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God.

I know that sounds extremely technical but it’s actually not. Simply said – theologians distinguish between those characteristics of God that are shared by human beings (that are communicable), and those characteristics of God that are exclusive to God alone (that are incommunicable). For example, love is a communicable attribute of God, since God is love and He has given us the capacity to love as well (although our love is always imperfect compared to God’s love). Holiness is another communicable attribute of God, since God is holy and has given us the capacity to be holy as well (although our holiness is always imperfect compared to God’s holiness). Love, holiness, righteousness, justice, knowledge – as human beings we’re able to share in these characteristics of God, albeit imperfectly and only to some degree. But there are certain attributes of God He shares with no one. These incommunicable attributes of God include God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, or – to use more familiar terms – the fact that God is all-powerful, knows all things, and is present everywhere. These characteristics are exclusive to God alone.

With this as background, let's get back to the Apostles' Creed. As I mentioned earlier, when people confess faith in "God, the Father *almighty*", most people tend to associate the term *almighty* with God's omnipotence, the fact that God is all-powerful. Yet, as wonderful as it is to celebrate the almightiness of God – to acknowledge that God and God alone is omnipotent – the Apostles' Creed confronts us with a peculiar dilemma. Given all the amazing attributes of God that could be mentioned – and we've already discussed a few of them – why does the Apostles' Creed only mention one attribute of God? Why does it only refer to God being *almighty*? And is it true that the almightiness of God is mainly about God being all-powerful? To answer these questions, we need to discuss a few important issues that have been lost in translation.

When we study the Apostles' Creed, it's important to remember that the earliest forms of the Apostles' Creed were written in Greek. It's only later that the Apostles' Creed was translated into Latin. Bearing this in mind, we should note the term *almighty* is an English translation of the Latin term *omnipotens*, which basically means "all-powerful" – the ability to do anything. However, this Latin term *omnipotens* is a translation of the Greek term *pantokrator*, which carries the sense of "all-ruling", "sovereign", "ruler of all", or "holding all things". So, when the Apostles' Creed refers to God as *almighty*, we should not interpret it primarily as a reference to God's power, but as a reference to God's sovereign rule over all things, and his power in sustaining all things.

But what does the Bible have to say about this Greek word *pantokrator*? How can the Bible help us to understand the term even better? In the Septuagint – which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament – the term *pantokrator* is used 16 times in the Book of Job to translate the Hebrew term *shaddai*, which is a title for God. While Bible translators aren't completely sure, the Hebrew word *shaddai* seems to be connected to the picture of a mountain, calling attention to the power and majesty of God. In that sense, God could be called "the God of the mountain". But *shaddai* is also associated with the term *breast*, calling attention to the nourishing character of God. In that sense, God could be called "the God who nourishes". Nevertheless, the translators who worked on the Septuagint felt the Greek word *pantokrator* best captures the essence of the Hebrew word *shaddai*. The term *pantokrator* is also used 118 times in the Septuagint as a way of translating the Hebrew term *sabaoth*, which forms part of the divine title *Adonai Sabaoth* (often translated into English as "Lord of hosts" or "Lord Almighty"). The word *sabaoth* seems to be connected to the notion of the armies of God, calling attention to any group of people or even heavenly beings that God uses to achieve his objectives. Once again, the translators of the Septuagint felt the word *pantokrator* best communicated this idea.

In the New Testament, the term *pantokrator* is found in 2 Corinthians 6:18 and in several places in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:6,15; 21:22). For example, in

Revelation 4:8, God is referred to by the Greek phrase, *Kyrios, ho Theos, ho Pantokrator*, which the NIV translates as “the Lord God Almighty”. Indeed, most English translations of the New Testament translate these instances of *pantokrator* with the word *almighty*. But – as I’ve pointed out – the meaning of the Greek word *pantokrator* is actually “all-ruling” or “ruler of all”, not “almighty” or “all-powerful”. So, why do so many Bible translations translate *pantokrator* as “almighty”? It would seem this is largely due to the immense influence of the fourth century Bible translator and theologian Jerome. In Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible (known as the Vulgate), Jerome translated both the Old Testament occurrences of *shaddai* and the New Testament occurrences of *pantokrator* with the same Latin word: *omnipotens*. And as we know *omnipotens* has the connotation of “all-powerful”, “almighty” – the ability to do anything. However, such a translation fails to consider the actual meaning of the Hebrew and Greek terms. All in all, the biblical understanding of *pantokrator* points clearly in the direction of God as the one who sovereignly rules all things.

Outside of the Bible, a number of Christian writers from the first few centuries of the church also utilised the term *pantokrator*. What’s interesting about their use of the term is that we find a slight shift in meaning. Whereas the Septuagint and the New Testament used *pantokrator* primarily in the sense of God as the sovereign ruler over all things, the Christian writers of the first centuries tended to use *pantokrator* as a way of referring to the sustaining power of God in creation. God is the one who holds all things together. This preserving and sustaining power of God was connected to his role as the Father of creation. The same God who is the almighty ruler over everything is also the loving Father and Creator of everything. For example, *First Epistle of Clement*, written about AD 96 or even earlier, connects the almightiness of God to his role as “God the Father and Creator”. The late second century *Epistle to Diognetus* refers to God as “the Almighty Creator of the Universe, the Invisible God Himself”. The *Didache*, a church manual dating from the late first to early second century, declares, “Thou, Almighty Master, didst create all things for Thy name’s sake”. In his *Apology to Autolycus*, the second century church father, Theophilus of Antioch, provides a great summary of the most important implications of God as *pantokrator*. Listen to what Theophilus says:

But he is Lord, because He rules over the universe; Father, because he is before all things; Fashioner and Maker, because He is creator and maker of the universe; the Highest, because of His being above all; and Almighty, because He Himself rules and embraces all. For the heights of heaven, and the depths of the abysses, and the ends of the earth, are in His hand, and there is no place of His rest. (Theophilus, *Apology to Autolycus*)

So, for Theophilus and other early Christian writers, the notion of God as *pantokrator* is intricately connected to his work as the Father and Creator who not only rules all things but sustains all things.

Asserting this truth was especially relevant for early Christians as they were confronted with a pagan worldview which believed the stars determined people's destiny. This pagan determinism had no room for the biblical idea of the God who rules and sustains all things. Confessing the truth of God as *pantokrator* in such a context was a radical statement of faith in the providence and sovereignty of God. Yet, confessing God as *pantokrator* – the one who rules and sustains all things – was also significant for another reason.

Christians of the first few centuries were not only confronted with pagan determinism, but there were also some dangerous ideas coming from inside Christian circles as well. One of the most pernicious threats faced by Christians in the second and third centuries was a movement that came to be known as Gnosticism. According to the Gnostic belief system, salvation could only be attained through knowledge. This saving knowledge was unlike any other form of knowledge – it was a secret, hidden knowledge about God and the universe. And Gnostic Christians claimed they alone possessed the special knowledge necessary for salvation. Another key Gnostic belief was that, while they regarded the human spirit as essentially good, they believed the material world was utterly evil. This led to Gnostic Christians making a radical separation between body and spirit. From a Gnostic perspective, God was only interested in saving the human spirit, not the body. This dualism led to other strange teachings, such as the idea that Jesus had a spiritual body, not a physical body. Gnostic Christians believed that, if Jesus had a physical body, he would've mixed the spirit (which is good) with the body (which is evil). One of the most influential Gnostic thinkers in the early church was a person named Marcion. He believed that the God of the Old Testament was a false god and that the true God was only revealed through Jesus Christ. Bearing all of this in mind, it's easy to understand why Christians regarded Marcion and the Gnostics as a serious threat to the faith of the church. Confessing God as *pantokrator* – ruler of all things, both spiritual things and material things – was a clear statement against the false Gnostic idea that God was only interested in the spirit and that the physical world could never be reconciled with God. The biblical message is quite different: The all-powerful God is ruler over all things and present in all things – both spiritual and physical. May this knowledge inform the way we live our lives every day, knowing that the God we serve is living and active in every sphere of life.

A THANKFUL HEART
by Helen Steiner Rice
Take nothing for granted,
For whenever you do,
The joy of enjoying
Is lessened for you.....
For the joy of enjoying
And the fullness of living
Are found in the heart
That is filled with thanksgiving.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Summer is here! We have had some hot days, a nice change from the cooler weather. But the gardens are having a difficult start. First we had a late frost, then it was hot and dry. It seems that we can't win. Is it not that way with our personal lives as well? Many ups and downs. A person told me once that God is the same when you are on top or in the valley. Give thanks and lean on Him.

Happy Canada Day! Enjoy your day off. Hopefully we can enjoy a bit more freedom, celebrating with friends and family. COVID19 has really put a strain on relationships and community. On the positive side, we live in a country which offers us so much beauty in nature. Enjoy and be amazed at the wonders shown every day!

We are looking forward to welcoming Dr. Marno Retief in the middle of July. His flight scheduled for July 8 was cancelled. He will now be leaving Cape Town on the 11th of July, arriving in Winnipeg on the 13th, Lord willing. We continue to pray that Benita and the children's visas will be approved soon so they can arrive as a family and we can welcome them all together.

Sietske Van Zwol is all done with her radiation. She thanks everyone for their support and prayer for her.

Katrina Koomans has graduated from Fort Frances High School. She will be going off to Dordt College in August and will be enrolled in a nursing program.

Jenna Mack graduated from Dordt University in May with a Bachelors of Science in Nursing. She plans to continue her education to become a certified Nurse Midwife.

Aidan Osadchuk graduated from Shevchenko School in Vita, Manitoba, on June 25th 2021. He plans to attain a Bachelor of Public Affairs and Policy Management Degree at the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario.

Davis Wielinga graduated from grade twelve and plans to work with Riley Caul Plumbing and Heating.

We congratulate all our graduates, whether from kindergarten, grade eight, grade twelve, college or university. We wish you God's blessing and success as you move forward in your journey.

We praise God with Brian and Tegan White with the birth of their son, Bodie Randall White, who was born on Wednesday, May 26th. Congratulations, Brian and Tegan and grandparents, Dale & Kathy!

Congratulations to Tobijas & Kacia (Veldhuisen) Gerber who were married on May 29th at an outdoor wedding on Kacia's parents' farm. May God bless them with many joy-filled years together.

Our community was shocked to hear of the accidental death of 5 year old Ellie Gough in Pinewood.

The birth mother of Olivia and Jordon (foster children of Jasper Van Zwol and Jen MacDonald) passed away suddenly, last week in Fort Frances.

Our prayers are with these families at this difficult time. May God strengthen them in their time of need and wrap His arms around all those who grieve.

The Dorcas Society is looking into meeting in July. We have no concrete plans as yet but will announce them as they are made.

Our seniors celebrating birthdays in July are: Dove Stahn on the 17th, Jack Wielinga on the 18th and Carrie Smid on the 29th.

Those celebrating 40+ anniversaries are John & Donna Sinninghe—their 41st on the 12th, Archie & Eleanor—their 55th on the 16th.

We wish all those who will be celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in July, a joy filled day.

Our thanks to you!

Before anything else, we would like to say a heartfelt 'thank you' to all of you. The emails we received in response to our loss were a gift from God. We felt your community, your hugs, and your prayers as we grieved. Thank you so much for coming alongside us. He is faithful and walks with us - and we are grateful for your role in carrying our burdens and lifting us up to Him.

Additionally, we are so thankful for your financial support. For regular gifts, one-time gifts, emails to check-in, and your countless hours of cumulative prayer - we feel so blessed and encouraged by each of you, so thank you! Your gifts and prayers enable us to minister to children in Central Asia and to enable other families to continue long term ministry here - we have heard many parent testimonies saying that they can do the work God has called them to do only because their kids can get good Christ-centered education here.



Extracurricular:

During this last term, some covid restrictions loosened up, we got vaccinated, and as a result, we enjoyed more extracurricular activities. It has been such a joy to get to know our students more through these events. These include a trip to a stunning canyon, garbage clean-up, school-wide sports day, Secondary student Banquet, a school-wide outdoor movie and picnic, elementary school musical, and even getting the opportunity to co-coach intramural volleyball and play some after-school soccer.

Summer travels - Here we go!

June 15: Central Asia → Michigan

July 7: Michigan → Emo, Ontario

Aug 3: Thunder Bay → Toronto

Aug 5: Toronto → Central Asia



Only God knows what all will be in store for us as we travel, so pray for patience, wisdom, that all our documents will be accepted at every stage of travel, and for all our covid tests to be 'negative' to allow us to arrive in time for a very important wedding! If you are in or near any of these places on these dates please get in touch with us as we would love to connect!

At the end of our time in NA, we will be doing a 48 hour "layover" in Hamilton so that we can see those of you who call Southern Ontario home and get covid tests. We would love to connect with you (most likely outdoors!) so please email us if you can, and we will do our best to make it happen.

Language:

We had our last class of the "Survivors Russian" course. While it always feels like our language skills are coming slowly, we have been so grateful for how we have been discovering culture through language. Culture gives us insight into the people we are living amongst - and we desire that in addition to the language. In our last few classes, (top right picture) we have been practicing how to barter which is a (relatively) foreign/out of practice concept in our recent personal practice. It is challenging, and we have so much to learn!

Pray for...

- Summer travels and covid testing
- Our continued Russian learning over summer
- Staff and Families who are leaving here and moving here. Saying goodbye is a difficult process in international transient places.

Praise God...

- We were both able to get both doses of the vaccine before commencing our travels.
- Staffing needs for next year are all filled - a very rare occurrence for schools like ours!
- We get to return to North America for the wedding of Jessica's youngest sister, Andrea!



Church:

Since April, we have been worshipping outdoors. We are very thankful that the international (English) church many school families attend has the space to do outdoor services. We have even been able to lead worship together a couple times which is a joy despite the heat of the outdoors! We are sad that the local (Russian) church we attended previously isn't able to meet together yet.

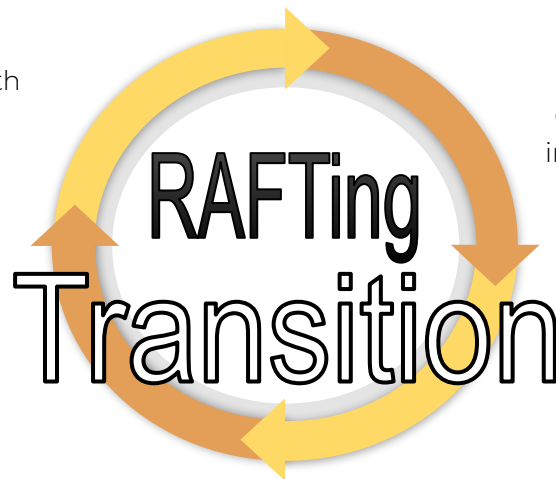


A unique aspect (opportunity and challenge) of international schools is preparing students for big transitions. Especially over the past month, we have spent focused time helping our students prepare for these transitions.

To do so, we go RAFTing with them! What does that mean you ask?

RECONCILIATION

It is crucial for students to leave with good relationships. This means apologies for wrongdoing, and restoring relationships so that grudges, anger, or hurt do not fester and sour a person or their relationship over time.



AFFIRMATION

We want to affirm character traits, God given gifts, and a students' role in our community. Being intentional to verbalize what we appreciate and will miss is a powerful way of communicating love and community.

THINK DESTINATION

We also plan, dream, and build excitement for where God is leading them. Sometimes it's an honest sad/difficult conversation, but often we seek to build expectation and joy for what is before them. We want to know about where they are going, what they will do, what they are nervous about, what they think will be hard, and what they are excited about.

FAREWELL

Designated times to honour students and reminisce together have been a key features this past month. We pray for/with students about trusting God with future unknowns. We encourage kids to make a list of the people they want to spend special time with before they leave. And lastly, farewell will eventually mean literally saying the word "goodbye" outloud.

Engaging People. Embracing Christ.



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JULY 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 John Hettinga 	2 Wayne Kooistra *Remco & Mindy Van Zwol (10th)	3 *Wayne & Wilma Kooistra (26th) *Matt & Kim Veldhuisen (17th)
4 *Dirk & Susan Crans (6th) *Kris & Katy Esselink (12th) *Gerald & Cassandra Wielinga (1st) 10:00 WORSHIP	5 *Darryl & Jessica Marissen (7th) *Albert & Carolyn Strydhorst (35th)	6 Jonathon Kaemingh	7	8 *Dan & Alyssa Hettinga (15th) *Josh & Tessie Spykma (4th)	9 Alex Veldhuisen	10 Jenelle Kaemingh
11 Arnold T Kaemingh 10:00 WORSHIP	12 Gerald Veldhuisen *John & Donna Sinninghe (41st)	13 Cole deGroot Teagan deGroot	14 Erica Lemelin Willeke Van Zwol	15	16 Reid Veldhuisen *Archie & Eleanor Wiersema (55th)	17 Dove Stahn Griffin Veldhuisen
18 Jack Wielinga 10:00 WORSHIP	19 *John & Grace Hettinga (41st)	20 Kathy Kaemingh	21	22	23	24 Turner Redford
25 10:00 WORSHIP	26 Isabelle Foster	27	28 Reta Dykstra Caleb Esselink	29 Marno Retief Carrie Smid *Lucas & Alyssa Koomans (4th)	30 *Peter & Yvonne Veldhuisen (27th)	31