

Christian Theology 1

Lesson 3 – The Study of God (Part 2)

I. Attributes of God

a. The Attributes (Perfections of God)

- i. 1 Peter 2:9 ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

1. According to 1 Peter 2:9, why is it important for us to know the excellencies (perfections) of God?
2. What other reasons is it important to know God’s perfections?

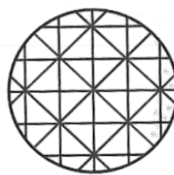
- ii. “Each perfection characterizes God’s complete essence simply and eternally. That is to say, God is what he has. He does not merely possess love, justice, and goodness; he is love and justice, eternally, fully and completely. God is eternally all-powerful, all-holy, and all-loving.”¹ (See *Wayne Grudem Diagram*)²



GOD'S ATTRIBUTES ARE NOT ADDITIONS TO HIS REAL BEING
Figure 11.3



GOD'S BEING IS NOT A COLLECTION OF ATTRIBUTES ADDED TOGETHER
Figure 11.2



GOD'S LOVE, JUSTICE, HOLINESS, AND WISDOM
Figure 11.5

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2017), 164.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, 178-180.

- iii. "The term *perfections*, derived from the Greek term *aretas* ('excellencies') in 1 Peter 2:9, works better than *attributes* because *perfections* specifies that the characteristics of God are each perfect and inherently characterize the God who is perfect. The term *attributes* does not inherently specify perfect characteristics and might hint that these originate in someone's concept of God rather than in God himself."³
 - iv. "God's perfections are the essential characteristics of his nature. Because these characteristics are necessary to his nature, all his attributes are absolutely perfect and thus rightly called perfections."
 - v. Implications:⁴
 - 1. God is fully each of his perfections (God's unity)
 - 2. God's perfections complement and qualify each other (e.g. holy-love)
 - 3. God's perfections are active (never inactive nor passive)
 - 4. God's perfections should never be isolated from one another in study
 - 5. God's perfections are always first and foremost directed toward himself
3. What would the logical conclusion be if someone denied the reality of even just one of God's perfections?

b. Classifying and Categorizing God's Perfections

"The incommunicable perfections are those characteristics unique to God (e.g. self-existence, simplicity, immensity), whereas the communicable perfections are those characteristics transferable in part to humans (e.g., goodness, righteousness, love)."⁵

i. Incommunicable

- 1. God is **Independent**
 - a. Definition: God has no cause or origin and is not in need of anyone or anything.
 - b. Exodus 3:14 ***"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'"***
 - c. Acts 17:24-25 ***"²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."***
4. If God does not need us or anything we can give, why did he create us?

³ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 164-65.

⁴ *Biblical Doctrine*, 164-65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

2. God is infinite

a. *Definition*: God exists and acts beyond all limitations in time and space. He is unlimited.

b. God is eternal

- i. *Definition*: God is distinct from time both existing outside of time but also interacting within it; He did not have a beginning and he will never cease to exist.
- ii. Genesis 1:1 ***"In the beginning God created..."***
- iii. Genesis 21:33 ***"the Everlasting God"***
- iv. Isaiah 40:28 ***"The LORD is the everlasting God"***
- v. Psalm 90:2 ***"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."***
- vi. Revelation 1:8 ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."***
- vii. 2 Timothy 1:9 ***"who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began"***

c. God is Omnipresent (Immense)

- i. *Definition*: Without limitations relating to space both existing beyond all space and filling all space at the same time (distinguished from pantheism).
- ii. 1 Kings 8:27 ***"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"***
- iii. Jeremiah 23:23-24 ²³ ***"Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD."***

5. How does God's omnipresence make the psalmist feel in Psalm 139:7-12?

Psalm 139:7-12 ***"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."***

d. God is **Omniscient**

- i. *Definition*: God perfectly knows himself and all things outside himself.
- ii. Psalm 147:4 ***“He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.”***
- iii. Psalm 139:1-4 ***“¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.”***
- i. Acts 1:24 ***“And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen”***
- ii. 1 John 3:20 ***“for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”***

6. Does God’s omniscience allow room for asking questions like “what if....” (e.g. ‘what if this person had only _____’ or ‘what if I hadn’t done _____’ or ‘what if _____ hadn’t happened to me’ etc.) Why or why not?

“...in God’s eternal mind and plan there are only actual things, not possible things. He does not what would have occurred if circumstances had been different, but since in his mind and plan they never would occur, they are not ‘possibilities.’ Only what is in God’s plan is ‘possible,’ because only that could ever become reality in time.”⁶ (i.e. middle knowledge is not biblical)

7. According to Isaiah 46:9-10, why does God know the future?

“⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” (Isaiah 46:9–11 ESV)

8. How should the omniscience of God impact our behavior when we encounter trials and suffering? (i.e. how does God’s omniscience relate to his wisdom?)

⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 175.

e. God is **Omnipotent**

- i. *Definition*: God has the ability to do anything consistent with his nature and perfections.
- ii. Genesis 17:1 ***“the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty’”***
- iii. Genesis 18:14 ***“Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”***
- iv. Isaiah 40:28 ***“He does not faint or grow weary”***
- v. Jeremiah 32:17 ***“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.”***
- vi. Matthew 19:26 ***“But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.””***

9. Based on the knowledge that God’s perfections qualify and complement, how would you respond to the following question: “Can God create a boulder too heavy for him to lift?”

10. What are some things that God cannot do? (cf. Num. 23:19; 2 Tim. 2:13; James 1:13, 17)

f. God is **Immutable** (i.e. unchangeable)

- i. *Definition*: God is unchangeable in his person, character, promises and his ways.
- ii. Numbers 23:19 ***“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”***
- iii. Malachi 3:6 ***“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed”***
- iv. James 1:17 ***“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”***

11. What impact does God’s immutability have on a believer when they struggle with sin or are walking through suffering?

12. If God does not change, how do we explain passages that describe him as “repenting/relenting” (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:12; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35) becoming angry or grieved (Ex. 4:14; Num 11:1, 10), or when people like Moses pray and God changes his mind (Gen. 18:23-32; Ex. 32:10-14; Jonah 3:10)?

Balance points with God's Immutability:

- God uses anthropopathic statements – God uses and applies human language and terms to Himself condescendingly to help communicate with us creatures (e.g. God rested from his work in Genesis 1).
- A word like “repent” can mean something two different things in the same chapter of the Bible because context shapes the meaning of a word (1 Sam. 15:29, 35).
- God is impassible which means he does not experience emotional change in any way and is not involuntarily controlled by his passions like we are.
- The Bible describes things from two different perspectives – man’s perspective and God’s perspective (e.g. salvation). We have to be discerning about how the context determines which perspective is being used.

“Immutability does not mean that God is static or inert, nor does it mean that he does not act distinctly in time or possess true affections. God is impassible – not in the sense that he is devoid of true feeling or has no affections but in the sense that his emotions are active and deliberate expressions of his holy dispositions, not (as if often the case with human emotions) involuntary passions by which he is driven.”⁷

“Impassibility, a corollary to immutability, means God does not experience emotional change in any way, nor does God suffer. To clarify, God does not merely choose to be impassible; he is impassible by nature. Impassibility is intrinsic to his very being. Impassibility does not mean God is apathetic, nor does it undermine divine love. God is maximally alive; he is his attributes in infinite measure. Therefore, impassibility guarantees that God’s love could not be more infinite in its loveliness. Finally, impassibility provides great hope, for only a God who is not vulnerable to suffering in his divinity is capable of rescuing a world drowning in suffering.”⁸

II. For Class Credit (choose one)

- Maria is a believer struggling with discouragement and despair to the point where she isn’t acting like her usual self, has become increasingly irregular in attendance at life group, and often watches church over the internet rather than attending in person. Maria does have some chronic health issues related to joint pain and she has troubles sleeping. She reaches out to you to ask for prayer about her discouragement. Write a brief paragraph describing how you would counsel and encourage her using 2-3 of the incommunicable attributes of God including a verse for each attribute.
- Jimmy is a believer who is struggling with acting one way when he is at church, but living a completely different way when he is at work or with his friends. He will often join in with coarse language and crude humor in the work place. Jimmy is convicted about this disparity after a recent sermon and mentions it to you during life group. Write a brief paragraph describing how you would counsel and encourage him using 2-3 of the incommunicable attributes of God including a verse for each attribute.

⁷MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 170.

⁸ Matthew Barret, “The Immutability and Impassibility of God,” The Gospel Coalition (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/immutability-impassibility-god/>), Accessed 04/28/2023.