

Essentials of Christianity (pt 8)
4/11/2010

Introduction _____

Today we will continue looking further into the essentials of the Christian faith. Specifically, we are now looking at the subject of the attributes of God.

2. Attributes of God

The first section of this category deals with **incommunicable attributes--**

God is Eternal (Infinite)

God is Immutable (Unchanging)

God is Self Existent (Independent, Self-Sufficient)

God is independent in His Being

...those attributes that belong to God and God alone, that He cannot share with us, nor any other of His created beings. No one else can possess these attributes.

We wrapped up our time together talking about **God's omnipotence--** meaning, that God is **“all powerful”**

This is where we'll pick things up today. Let me first summarize what we covered about God's omnipotence.

The omnipotence of God is that attribute by which He can bring to pass everything which He wills. God's power admits of no bounds or limitations. God's declaration of His intention is the pledge of the thing intended being carried out.

Scriptural Declaration of the Fact;

In general:

Job 42:2 “I know that thou canst do everything [all things], and that no purpose of thine can be restrained.”

In the world of nature:

Gen. 1:1-3—“God created the heaven and the earth.

In the experience of mankind:

Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4; and in the conversion of Saul, Acts 9

The heavenly inhabitants are subject to His will and word: Dan. 4:35
“He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven.” Even Satan is under the control of God. This fact is clearly established in the case of Job, and Peter.¹

Now let’s consider a few more essential aspects of God’s omnipotence. To begin, let’s first turn to some verses which highlight Him as our All Powerful God.

Turn to Jeremiah 32:27; Psalm 115:3: read.

^{NAU} Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"

^{NAU} Psalm 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Quote:

^{NAU} Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

¹ Evans-Quickverse

Now some other important details.

God's attribute of omnipotence has inherent qualities that further reflect God's greatness by exhibiting certain characteristics that defy the limitations that fallen man has placed on Him. Here's what I mean.

The term omnipotence signifies that God is all powerful. However, it does not suggest that because God is all powerful He can and does do anything or everything at random. A proper definition states: "God is all-powerful and able to do whatever he wills. Since his will is limited by his nature, God can do everything that is in harmony with his perfections."

God cannot do things that are not in harmony with His nature. He cannot go back on His word (2 Tim. 2:13); He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18); He has no relationship to sin.

Thus, God cannot lie, sin, deny himself, or be tempted with evil. He cannot cease to exist, or cease to be God, or act in a way inconsistent with any of his attributes.

In other words, the question, "Can God create a stone so large that He could not lift it?" is not a legitimate question. God can do all things that are in harmony with His nature and Person.

This is therefore another instance where misunderstanding would result if one attribute were isolated from the rest of God's character and emphasized in a disproportionate way.

God's exercise of power over his creation is also called God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is his exercise of rule (as "sovereign" or "king") over his creation.

Though human beings are not endowed with the ability to be omnipotent, it is appropriate to realize that he has made us in such a way that we show in our lives a faint reflection of this attribute. God has made us as creatures with a will. We

exercise choice and make real decisions regarding the events of our lives. Although our will is not absolutely free in the way God's is, God has nonetheless given us relative freedom within our spheres of activity in the universe he has created.

Of course our desire to exercise our wills and our desire to be free from restraint can show themselves in sinful ways. People can become proud and can desire a kind of freedom that involves rebellion against God's authority and a refusal to obey his will. Nonetheless, when we use our will and our freedom to make choices that are pleasing to God, we reflect his character and bring glory to him.

Even though we do not have omnipotence, God has given us power to bring about results, both physical power and other kinds of power: mental power, spiritual power, persuasive power, and power in various kinds of authority structures (family, church, civil government, and so forth). In all of these areas, the use of power in ways pleasing to God and consistent with his will is again something that brings him glory as it reflects his own character.

This is not to say that God will not violate man's freewill: throughout the scriptures we see that He does so frequently, in order to reassert his role as the only Sovereign; and man's freedoms can be stripped from him whenever God deems it necessary to do so.²

Closing verses

² Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

NET Isaiah 45:11 This is what the LORD says, the Holy One of Israel, the one who formed him, concerning things to come: "How dare you question me about my children! How dare you tell me what to do with the work of my own hands!

NET Isaiah 45:12 I made the earth, I created the people who live on it. It was me— my hands stretched out the sky, I give orders to all the heavenly lights.

NAU Proverbs 21:30 There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD.

God is Omnipresent

God is Omnipresent: His presence is boundless. This one has similar qualities to God being **infinite**, as well as **omniscient**. Let's **turn to** the classic text that speaks of His omnipresence--
Psalm 139:7-10: read

NAU Psalm 139:7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

¹⁰ Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things is present universally and simultaneously in every part of His wide domain, and is able to put forth His entire power in every place at one and the same time. He is present everywhere all the time.

Turn to Jeremiah 23:34

NAU Jeremiah 23:24 "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

Upon this attribute of omnipresence, hangs all the grandeur and sufficiency of all things in the universe whether spiritual or material. All the forces and laws of nature, even the prolonged existence of things are maintained because His presence fills the entirety of creation, sustaining it.⁴

NAU Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

There is nowhere in the entire universe, on land or sea, in heaven or in hell, where one can flee from God's presence.

While it seems necessary for us to say that God's whole being is present in every part of space, or at every point in space, it is also necessary to say that God cannot be contained by any space no matter how large. Solomon says in his prayer to God, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain God; indeed, he cannot be contained by the largest space imaginable (Isa 66:1-2; Acts 7:48).

God is a being who exists without size or dimensions in space. In fact, before God created the universe, there was no matter or material so there was no space either. Yet God still existed. Where was God? He

⁴ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible: A Study and Analysis of Major Bible Doctrines* (Zondervan Publishing Company, 1966).

was not in a place that we could call a "where," for there was no "where" or space. But God still was! This fact makes us realize that God relates to space in a far different way than we do or than any created thing does. He exists as a kind of being that is far different and far greater than we can imagine.

We must also be careful not to think that God himself is equivalent to any part of creation or to all of it. We must guard against the pantheistic idea which claims that God is everything, while maintaining the Scriptural doctrine that He is everywhere present in all things. Pantheism emphasizes the omnipresent activity of God, but denies His personality. Those holding the doctrine of pantheism make loud claims to philosophic ability and high intellectual training, but is it not remarkable that it is in connection with this very phase of the doctrine of God that the Apostle Paul says "professing to be wise, they became fools"? (Rom. 1.) God is everywhere and in every place; His center is everywhere; His circumference nowhere. But this presence is a spiritual and not a material presence; yet it is a real presence.⁵

Some theologians have expressed even more details about this attribute. For furthering study, you can visit www.biblicaltraining.org/

And you can read and listen till your hearts content.

Some Practical Inferences from This Doctrine

First, of Comfort:

The nearness of God to the believer. The omnipresence of God is protective. After dwelling on this great and awful attribute in Psalm 139, the psalmist, in vv. 17, 18, exclaims: "How precious are thy thoughts to me.... when I awake, I am still with thee." By this is meant that God stands by our side to help, and as One who loves and understands us.

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

Second, of Warning: As in the Roman empire the whole world was one great prison to a criminal, and in his flight to the most distant lands the emperor could track him, so under the government of God no sinner can escape the eye of the judge. Thus the omnipresence of God is detective as well as protective.⁶

NAU Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.

God is Omniscient

Let's look at another one of God's essential attributes.

God is Omniscient (All Knowing): By omniscience is meant that God knows all things and is absolutely perfect in knowledge.

Let's turn to Psalm 147:5; Romans 11:33: read

NAU Psalm 147:5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

NAU Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

A more comprehensive definition will state that God knows all things actual and possible, past, present, and future, in one eternal act. A number of things should be noted about God's omniscience.

(1) God knows all things that exist in actuality. The psalmist recognized the omniscience of God in that God knew his actions, his thoughts, his words before he even spoke them, and his entire life (Ps. 139:1-4).

⁶Evans--Quickverse

(2) God knows all the variables concerning things that have not occurred. Jesus knew what Tyre and Sidon would have done had the gospel been preached to them (Matt. 11:21).

(3) God knows all future events. Because God is eternal and knows all things in one eternal act, events that are future to man are an “eternal now” to God. He knew the nations that would dominate Israel (Dan. 2:36-43; 7:4-8), and He knows the events that will yet transpire upon the earth (Matt. 24-25; Rev. 6-19).

(4) God’s knowledge is intuitive. It is immediate, not coming through the senses; it is simultaneous, not acquired through observation or reason; it is actual, complete, and according to reality.⁷

Because of the problem that some people have with the implications of God’s omniscience-- that He foreknows all things: including who is going to **receive** or **reject** him; some, having a hard time reconciling with this, have embraced an aberrant view of omniscience.

Open Theism

Open Theism, also called openness and the open view, is a theological position dealing with human free will and its relationship to God and the nature of the future.

They hold that if God knows what we are going to choose, then how can we be truly free when it is time to make those choices --since a counter choice cannot then be made by us, because it is already "known" what we are going to do. In other words, we would not actually be able to make a contrary choice to what God "knows" we will choose thus implying that we would not then be free.

⁷ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

In Open Theism, the future is either knowable or not knowable. For the open theists who hold that the future is knowable by God, they maintain that God voluntarily limits His knowledge of free will choices so that they can remain truly free. Other open theists maintain that the future, being non-existent, is not knowable, even by God.

Gregory Boyd, a well-known advocate of Open Theism says,

"Much of it [the future], open theists will concede, is settled ahead of time, either by God's predestining will or by existing earthly causes, but it is not exhaustively settled ahead of time. To whatever degree the future is yet open to be decided by free agents, it is unsettled."

But open theists would not say that God is weak or powerless. They say that God is capable of predicting and ordaining certain future events because He is capable of working in the world and bringing certain events to pass when the time is needed. Therefore, God could inspire the Old Testament writers to prophesy certain events and then He could simply ensure that those events occurred at the right time.

Furthermore, open theists claim that they do not deny the omniscience of God. They, like classical theologians, state that God is indeed all-knowing. But they differ in that God can only know that which is knowable and since the future has not yet happened, it can not be exhaustively known by God. Instead, God only knows the present exhaustively, including the inclinations, desires, thoughts, and hopes of all people.

In Open Theism God can make mistakes because He does not know all things that will occur in the future. According to them, God also takes risks and adapts to the free-will choices of people. They claim biblical support for their position by citing scripture where God changes His mind (Exodus 32:14), is surprised (Isaiah 5:3–7), and tests people to see what they will do (Genesis 22:12). Finally, Open Theism tends to portray the God of orthodoxy as distant, controlling, and unyielding while promoting the God of openness as involved, adapting, loving, interacting, and caring for humanity.

Orthodox Christianity states that God knows all things, even the entirety of the future, exhaustively. 1 John 3:20 it says, "...for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." Likewise, Peter said to Jesus in John 21:17, "...You know all things; You know that I love You..." God's sovereignty is clearly taught in scripture and His sovereignty is tied to His omniscience. Orthodox Christianity teaches that God is very loving, very involved, and even condescends to our level and interacts with us in a manner that we can understand. This means that we will see what appears to be instances of God changing His mind, testing, and adapting. But, this is all due to God's working with creatures who have limited vision, short life spans, and are sinners. God must work on our level since we cannot work on His.

The question about God's knowledge of the future is very important because it deals with the actual definition of God's nature in relation to the nature of the future. Is God all-knowing about the future or not? Is God existing in the future or not? Is God limited to the present or not? The answers to these questions reflect the very nature and scope of God's existence. The open theists are pushing a description of God that reduces God from knowing all things, past, present, and future, to not knowing all things in the future. God's omnipresence is also in jeopardy in Open Theism, since some open theists deny the existence of the future and thereby deny the omnipresence of God in the future.⁸

Subtle, but dangerous.

NAU Proverbs 19:21 Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Next week, we'll cover the communicable attributes of God.

⁸ <http://www.carm.org/>