

God's Incommunicable Attributes

Dear reader,

Last time we stated that God is God. That is, God exists; He is a distinct, particular being; and all the characteristics of deity are found perfectly in Him.

But what is God like?

It is an important question. Salvation is a matter of knowing this God, and enjoying His covenant friendship. Just like our committed earthly friendships, our friendship with God requires us to know Him as thoroughly and rightly as possible.

We begin answering the question by noting how very different He is from any earthly beings.

"God is a Spirit," Jesus said (John 4:24). This makes Him unique. This means that He is not composed of the material elements and compounds which make up everything we see on this earth. Those who say that this world *is* God, or that any particular creature *is* God, go wrong on this point.

Being Spirit, God does not have hands, eyes, or other creaturely features. Some Scripture passages *do* ascribe creaturely features to God, mainly to impress upon us that God has knowledge and power. Even though having no eyes, ears, and hands, He still sees, hears, and works powerfully.

Because God is a Spirit, we cannot see God; He is invisible. So John says, *"No man hath seen God at any time,"* (John 1:18).

We must know that God is a Spirit, in order to worship and serve Him rightly. God Himself commanded: *"Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image . . ."* (Exodus 20:4). Here God forbids us to make any creaturely representation of God. God is dishonored when we think of Him in terms of an animal, the sun, or any other creature. Said the apostle Paul, *"we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device"* (Acts 17:29). All humans must be careful not to think of God in earthly terms.

This does not mean that we cannot know what God is like. He tells us what He is like in the Bible. And He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the God-given image and revelation of God's grace and glory (John 1:14).

In seeing how different He is from any creature, we note five characteristics of God which are unique to Him.

First, God is infinite. Neither time nor space limit Him; He is eternal (above time) and omnipresent (above space). That He is not bound by time Moses confessed: *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from*

everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). That He is not bound by space Solomon confessed, when he prayed at the dedication of the temple building, *“Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”* (I Kings 8:27). He is above time and space, because these are creatures, while He is God, Creator.

Jesus Christ reveals God as infinite; He said He existed before Abraham (John 8:58) - and He did, not in His body, but in His person, for Jesus is God.

Second, God is independent. He depends on nobody or nothing to exist, or to accomplish His purposes. He does not need food or shelter, as Paul said: *“neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things”* (Acts 17:25).

Jesus reveals God as independent, by teaching and demonstrating that salvation is all of God, and nothing of man. How comforting to know that He is able to save us all by Himself! What could puny man possibly do to help Almighty God?

The third and fourth unique characteristics of God are His sovereignty and omnipotence. As sovereign, He has authority to determine right and wrong, and enforce right. As omnipotent, or all powerful, He is also able to do whatever He wants, and to enforce His will.

The many miracles which Jesus did demonstrate these characteristics of God. Nothing hindered Jesus from doing what He desired to do.

Finally, God is unchangeable. God does not change His mind or His will. When Scripture does speak of God as “repenting,” it does not mean to teach that God really changes His mind about what He wants to do or how He will do it. Rather, it underscores that fickle, changing man experiences God’s love and peace in the way of obedience, and God’s anger and wrath in the way of disobedience. When we change, we experience a different attribute of God. Yet God Himself is consistent: in the way of obeying Him, we will enjoy His blessing; in the way of disobedience, His wrath.

Because God is unchanging, His sinful people know that He will still save us, despite our unworthiness: *“I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”* (Malachi 3:6). The proof of this is once more Jesus Christ - who bore God’s wrath for us, that we might enjoy God’s favor.

God is unique; He is different from any other being. This is because He is God! This ought make us desire to enjoy His friendship. And this must lead us to sing out His praises: *“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”* (I Timothy 1:17).

Pastor Douglas Kuiper

To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? . . . for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.

Isaiah 46:5, 9

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

John 17:3

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

Belgic Confession, Art. 1 (The Belgic Confession, written in the 1500s, is a confession to which all Reformed believers subscribe).