

## Spurgeon Room Studies ~ Knowing God ~ Fall 2018

### Session 2 – The Attributes of God (continued)

#### 1. God's Communicable Attributes

Communicable is the designation used to distinguish between attributes which are more shared by humans than incommunicable attributes.

##### A. Knowledge/Omniscience

As God's created beings, we share with him some degree of this attribute. Nevertheless, the distance between our knowledge and God's knowledge is infinite, not only in *the content* of knowledge but also in *the way* (mode) that we attain and retain knowledge.

I must labor to gain and retain knowledge. But God knows everything at once. He doesn't have to study or look anything up. He doesn't even have to recall anything. His cognizance is full, instantaneous and simultaneous. He knows everything exhaustively, because He knows Himself perfectly. He knows the specific and the general. He knows the hairs on our heads as well as "*all his works from the beginning of the world.*" (Acts 15.18 KJV)

- No wonder David said, "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*" (Psalm 139.6)
- Knowledge of the future? Yes, prophecy confirms it. (E.g. Luke 22.34, Jesus knowledge of Peter's denial.)

But what about God's foreknowledge of the free actions of men?

Though an element of mystery will always remain, the answer lies in a "revised" view of human freedom. It cannot be absolute, as is God's absolute freedom to act according to His own will.

## B. Will

God's will is an attribute of His purposefulness. It is the ultimate reason for everything that happens.<sup>1</sup> He works all things according to the counsel of His own will. (Ephesians 1.11)

“There is but one will of God; however, there is a distinction in the objects to which His will relates. Therefore in recognizing this distinction we differentiate between *the will of His decree* and *the will of His command*.”<sup>2</sup>

1. **The will of His decree** has also been called **the will of His good pleasure** (Ephesians 1.5) or **His secret will**.

“This refers to the ultimate outcome of all things which will be according to God's decree which He either has not revealed at all to man or which he reveals only after a period of time. This will can frequently be perceived only in retrospect, or in special situations by way of prophecy when specific elements of this will are revealed in His Word.”<sup>3</sup>

2. **The will of God's command** is also referred to as **His preceptive will** or **His revealed will**.

This has reference to the laws which God has made known and prescribed, such as His will revealed in the Ten Commandments.

Acts 2.23 provides an example where the two wills come together: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. ... *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

“There is danger in speaking about evil events as happening according to the will of God, even though we see Scripture speaking about them in this way. One danger is that we might begin to think

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelmus A' Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

that God takes pleasure in evil, which he does not do (cf. Ezekiel 33.11), though he can use it for his good purposes. Another danger is that we might begin to blame God for sin, rather than ourselves, or to think we're not responsible for our evil actions. Scripture does not hesitate to couple statements of God's sovereign will with statements of man's responsibility for evil."<sup>4</sup>

God is free to do whatever He pleases (Psalm 115.3). ... *he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"* (Daniel 4.35)

### **C. Power**

Closely related to this is the power or omnipotence of God. God is able to do all His holy will.

*Ah Lord GOD! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.* (Jeremiah 32.17)

*With God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19.26)

- But there are some things God cannot do. He cannot lie, he cannot deny Himself or do anything contrary to His perfect character.
- Could He make a rock so big He could not lift it? No, because the idea is logically contradictory, considering God's infinitude and power; either contradicting His omnipotence or denying it. (Cf. Frame, p. 520-21)
- In any discussion of God's power, we must not lose sight of how God has providentially manifested Himself in human history. The Christian view of providence ... "reveals not only the power of God, but His weakness also."<sup>5</sup> We serve a crucified Messiah.

### **D. Holiness** (Cf. Frame, p. 27-29; Berkhof, p. 73)

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<sup>4</sup> Grudem, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R, Phillipsburg, 2002, quoting Paul Helm, p. 527.

*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3.5-6)*

“The ground is ‘holy,’ not because there is something special or dangerous about it as such, but because Yahweh is there, the supremely holy one. God’s messenger is to stand back, to remove his shoes in respect. He is afraid to look at the face of God.”<sup>6</sup>

Holiness is not first of all a moral quality. Its fundamental idea is that of separation. God is absolutely distinct from His creatures, exalted above them in infinite majesty. This is clearly seen in the vision of Isaiah, Chapter 6, where God is described as thrice holy, so as to underscore this aspect of His nature.

This quality separates God from all His creation.

*There is none holy as the LORD, none besides Thee. (1 Samuel 2.2)*

*Who is like unto thee, O LORD among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15.11)*

But His transcendent holiness is matched by His willingness to dwell with His humble servants who tremble at His word. (Cf. Isaiah 57.15; 66.2)

The holiness of God also has an ethical dimension. Separation involves a distance from sin.

*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong. (Habakkuk 1.13a, cf. 1.12)*

Isaiah cried, *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts,* when he beheld God in His majestic glory (Isaiah 6.5 KJV). But God removed his uncleanness, symbolically communicating forgiveness to him.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

It is true, God does tell us to back away from His holiness. But He also acts to make us holy in order to draw us to Himself.

### **E. Goodness**

(Frame, p. 402; A' Brakel, p. 122)

*There is none good but one, that is, God. (Matthew 19.17)*

*The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works. (Psalm 145.9)*

The most common meaning of goodness in Scripture is benevolence—a good will or intention carried out. “A good person is one who acts to benefit others.”<sup>7</sup>

*‘As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for **good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50.20-21)*

The mercy of God is that aspect of His goodness that meets us as sinners deserving of judgment.

God is the final standard of goodness and all that He is and does is worthy of approval.

When philosophers get into this area, they often speak of goodness as an absolute concept apart from personality, as in Plato’s understanding of “The Good.”

But the God of Scripture is absolute *and* personal. Goodness characterizes Him.

*O taste and see that the LORD is good. (Psalm 34.8)*

This indicates that some action (to believe, consider, meditate, etc.) is required on our part to experience God’s goodness.

In fact, *His mercies are new every morning*, if we will but look up to see them. They must be called to mind. (Lamentations 3.21-25 in the context of suffering)

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 410.