

Biblical Theology

Unit 2: Doctrine of God – Lesson 2: Incommunicable Attributes of God Part 1

Attributes of God

- Current Preferred Method of Classification
 1. **Incommunicable Attributes:** Attributes of God that he **does not share** with mankind.
 2. **Communicable Attributes:** Attributes of God that he **shares** with mankind.

Independence

- Definition: God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy.
 1. **God is the creator and owner of all.**
 - *Job 41:11 – Everything under heaven belongs to me.*
 - *Psalms 50:10-12 – ...for the world is mine, and all that is in it.*
 2. **He is self sufficient and needs nothing.**
 - *Acts 17:24-25 – And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything.*
 - *John 17:5 – "...the glory which I had with you before the world was made."*
 3. **God transcends creation; he is set apart from it and is not dependent on it.**
 - *Isaiah 40:25-26 – "To whom will you compare me?"*
 - *Psalms 90:2 – ...from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
 - *Exodus 3:14 – "I AM WHO I AM."*

 - No limitation or imperfection in creation should be projected onto our thought of God. He is the Creator, all else is creaturely. (Wayne Grudem)
 4. **Though God does not need man, mankind brings Him glory and joy**
 - *Isaiah 43:7 – "...whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*
 - *Isaiah 62:3-5 – "...for the Lord will take delight in you..."*
 - *Zephaniah 3:17-18 – "...will rejoice over you with singing..."*

Unchangeable

- Definition: God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.
 - Biblical References
 - *Psalms 102:25-27 – But you remain the same, and your years will never end.*
 - *Malachi 3:6 – I the Lord do not change.*
 - *James 1:17 – with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*
 - *Numbers 23:19 – God is not human, that he should change his mind.*

 - "The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the Rock." (Herman Bavinck)

- God's Unchangeableness Relating to Man
 1. **God is personal: Though God is immutable (unchanging), he is not impassible (he's not without emotion).**
 - God allows himself to be affected in relationship to mankind.
 - This "effect" never changes his nature, perfection, purposes or promises.
 - *Exodus 32:9-14 - Moses intercedes for Israel*
 - *Isaiah 38:1-6 – Hezekiah asks for 15 more years of life.*
 - *Jonah 3:4,10 – Ninevites repentance in*
 - These instances [of God's being affected] should all be understood as true expressions of God's present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at that moment. If the situation changes, then of course God's attitude or expression of intention will also change. This is just saying that God responds differently to different situations. (Grudem)
 - God's ability to be affected flows out of his Ontological Immutability. For example, God's restraint displayed in response to the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah displays God's immutability as it regards his response to repentance. (Ware)
 2. **When God repents he is not changing but expressing grief.**
 - There are 28 passages describing God changing his mind 7 passages stating God can't/doesn't change his mind.
 - *1 Samuel 15:11,29,35 – God "regretted" and God cannot "regret".*
 - Affirms difference between Godly repentance and human repentance
 - The term repent in reference to God is most often used in a context of grief and disapproval, not regret and wishing he had done differently or implying lack of anticipation or foreknowledge. In fact, his wish is that the subject of his regret had conducted themselves differently, not that he himself had conducted himself differently.
- Importance of God's Unchangeableness: Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem: Page 168

Discussion Questions

1. Define the following terms:
 - Incommunicable Attributes:
 - Communicable Attributes:
2. Explain how each aspect of the doctrine of God's independence makes you feel emotionally. Does this doctrine have a positive or negative effect on your spiritual life? Explain.
3. If God is independent, why does the Bible seem to beg for human devotion and obedience? Explain.
4. If God doesn't change, why do we pray?
5. How does God's unchangeableness impact your ability to put your trust in him? Explain.

Reading Assignment

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem – Chapter 11: The Character of God: "Incommunicable" Attributes Eternity, Omnipresence, and Unity.