

DOCTRINE MATTERS: ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Message 3: **The Character of God:** Incommunicable Attributes

Romans 1:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ ... what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

Some **limitations** of general revelation:

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God.”

–A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

“Incommunicable” v. “communicable” attributes ...

5 considerations:

- 1) God’s attributes are identical to His _____. (God is what He has; God does what He is.)
- 2) God is _____ each of His attributes.
- 3) God’s attributes should be studied in _____ with one another.
- 4) No attribute is elevated over any other. Otherwise we have a _____ of God.
- 5) Only what we can know certainly about God’s attributes is what He reveals in _____.
This information is _____, but not _____. (1 Cor 13:12)

Attributes (or “perfections”) of God:

God is an invisible, personal, and living Spirit, distinguished from all other spirits by several kinds of attributes: metaphysically God is self-existent, eternal and unchanging; intellectually God is omniscient, faithful, and wise; ethically God is just, merciful, and loving; emotionally God detests evil, is longsuffering, and is compassionate; existentially God is free, authentic, and omnipotent; relationally God is transcendent in being, immanent universally in providential activity, and immanent with His people in redemptive activity.

- Gordon Lewis

God is independent of all things. He is perfectly self-sufficient, not depending on anything outside himself for anything, and is therefore the eternal, foundational being, the source of life and sustenance for all other beings.

Examples:

- God existed before all things, and through him alone all things exist. (Ps. 90:2, 1 Cor 8:6, Rev 4:11)
- God depends on nothing. All things depend on him. (Rom 11:36)
- He is the source of everything. (Deut 32:39, Isa 45:5-7, John 5:26, 1 Cor 8:6)
- He does whatever he wills. (Ps 115:3, Isa 46:10-11, 64:8, Jer 18:6, Dan 4:35, Rom 9:19-21, Eph 1:5, Rev 4:11)
- His own counsel is the basis of all that he does. (Ps 33:10-11, Prov 19:21, Isa 46:10, Matt 11:25-26, Acts 2:23, Eph 1)
- He does everything for his own sake. (Josh 7:9, 1 Sam 12:22, Ps 25:11, 31:3, 79:9, 106:8, 109:21, 143:11, Prov 16:4)
- He needs nothing. (Job 22:2-3, Acts 17:25)
- He is the first and last. (Isa 41:4, 44:6, 48:12, Rev 1:8, 21:6, 22:13)

God's immutability is his perfect unchangeability in his essence, character, purpose, and promises.

Examples:

- He is eternally the same. (Ps 102:25-27)
- He is what he is. (Ex 3:14)
- He is incorruptible. (Rom 1:23, 1 Tim 1:17, 6:15-16, Heb 1:11-12)
- His thought, purpose, will, and decrees are unchangeable:
 - He carries out his threats and fulfills his promises. (Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29)
 - He keeps his covenants. (Rom 11:1)
 - He does not rescind his gifts or calling. (Rom 11:29)
 - He secures our salvation. (Rom 8:29-30)
 - He perfects when he starts. (Ps 138:8, Phil 1:6)
 - He is forever faithful. (Lam 3:22-23)
- He does not change. (Mal 3:6, James 1:17)

God's infinity describes his nature as perfectly existing and acting beyond all limitations of time and space. Related to infinity is his eternity. God perfectly transcends all limitations of time, so that he is without beginning, without ending, and without succession of moments in the experience of his being and in his consciousness of all other reality. In other words, God is not limited by the moments of time.

Examples:

- He is the first and the last at once. (Isa 41:4, Rev 1:8)
- He existed before creation. (Gen 1:1, John 1:1, 17:5, 24)
- He will endure forever. (Ps 102:26-27)
- He is God from everlasting to everlasting. (Ps 90:2, 93:2)
- The number of his years cannot be discovered. (Job 36:36)
- 1000 years in his sight are as a day. (Ps 90:4, 2 Pet 3:8)
- He is God eternal. (Isa 40:28)

- He lives forever. (Deut 32:40, Rev 10:6,15:7)
- He is incorruptible and immortal. (Rom 1:23, 1 Tim 6:16)
- He was, is, and it is to come all at once. (Ex. 3:14, Rev.1:4,8)
- His purpose is eternal. (Eph 3:11)
- He is eternal King. (1 Tim 1:17)
- He existed at acted before time began. (2 Tim 1:9, Titus 1:2)

and

Immensity refers to the fact that God transcends and fills all space. Omnipresence indicates that God is present with every point of space in his entire being.

Examples:

- He is the creator and possessor of all things. (Gen 14:19,22, Deut 10:14, Col 1:16, Rev 10:6)
- Heaven and earth cannot contain him. (1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chron 2:6, Isa 66:1, Acts 7:48-49)
- He fills heaven and earth; nothing is hidden from his presence; he is both close and far off. (Ps 139:7-10, Jer 23:23-24, Acts 17:27-28)
- He manifests himself in various places:
 - He has his throne in heaven. (Deut 26:15, 2 Sam 22:7, 1 Kings 8:32, Ps 11:4, 33:13, 115:3,16, Isa 63:15, Matt 5:34,6:9, John 14:2, Eph 1:20, Heb 1:3, Rev 1:4-5)
 - He descends from heaven. (Gen 3:8, 11:5,7, 12:7, 15:1, 18:1, Ex 3:7-8, 19:9,11,18,20, Deut 33:2, Judg 5:4)
 - He dwells in the midst of his people. (Ex 20:24, 25:8, 40:34-35, Deut 12:11, 1 Sam 4:4, 2 Sam 6:2, 1 Kings 8:10-11, 2 Kings 19:15)
 - He is far from the wicked. (Ps 11:5,50:16-21,145:20)
 - He is close to the righteous. (Ps 11:7,51:19, Isa 57:15)
 - Christ is his fullness bodily. (Col 2:9)
 - He indwells the Church. (John 14:23, Rom 8:9,11, 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, Eph 2:22, 3:17)

God's unity is his perfect uniqueness of essence, so that neither is he more than one essence nor is there more than one divine essence. Each and all of his attributes are his essence.

Examples:

- God is unique. There is only one God. (Deut 4:35,32:39, Ps 18:31, Isa 40:18, 43:10-11, 44:6, 45:5)
- God is only one essence. (Deut 6:4, Mark 12:29)
- In the New Testament, God's unity is revealed in Jesus Christ. (John 17:3, Acts 17:24, Rom 3:30, 1 Cor 8:4-6, Eph 4:5-6, 1 Tim 2:5)

God perfectly knows all things of himself and outside of himself. There is nothing that is unknown to him.

Examples:

- God knows all things. (2 Chron 16:9, Isa 40:13, Rom 11:34, Heb 4:13, 1 John 3:20)
- God knows all needs. (Matt 6:8,32)
- God is aware of even the smallest physical things. (Matt 10:30)

- God knows the hearts of men. (1 Kings 8:39, Ps 7:9, Prov 15:11, Jer 11:20, 17:9-10, 20:12, Luke 16:15, Rom 8:27, 1 Thess 2:4, 1 John 3:20)
- God knows the thoughts of men. (Ps 139:2, Ezek 11:5, 1 Cor 3:20)
- God knows man in totality (being and acts). (Psalm 139)
- God knows man's sin and wickedness. (Ps 69:5, Jer 16:17,18:23,32:19)
- God knows contingent things (from our perspective) (1 Sam 23:10-13, 2 Kings 13:19, Ps 81:12-16, Jer 26:2-7, 38:17-20, Ezek 3:4-6, Matt 11:21)
- God knows future things. (Isa 41:22-26, 42:8-9, 43:9-12, 44:6-8, 46:9-11)
- God knows people before they are conceived. (Ps 139:13-16, Jer 1:5, Rom 8:28-30, Rev 13:8, 17:8)
- God knows the days and limits ordained for each person. (Ps 31:15, 39:4-5, 139:7-16, Job 14:5, Acts 17:26)

God is able to do anything he chooses (consistent with His nature).

Examples:

- Gods names and titles display his power:
 - El, Elohim - God
 - El Shaddai – God Almighty
 - Adonai – Lord of hosts
 - Yahweh – The Mighty one of Israel
 - King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim 6:15, Rev 19:6)
 - The Lord Almighty (2 Cor 6:18, Rev 1:8, 4:8, 11:17)
- Nothing is too hard for God. (Gen 18:14, Job 42:2, Jer 32:27, Zech 8:6, Matt 3:9, 19:26, 26:53, Luke 1:37, 18:27, Eph 3:20)
- God does whatever he pleases. (Ps 115:3, Isa 14:24,27, 46:10, 55:11, Dan 4:35)
- Gods works reveal his omnipotence:
 - Creation (Gen 1, Ps 8:3, Isa 42:5, 44:24, 45:12,18, 48:13, Zech 12:1, Rom 1:20)
 - Providence (Heb 1:3)
 - Redemption (Rom 1:16, 1 Cor 1:24)

He is perfectly holy, Just, loving, and good. God is the sum total of all of his attributes. All that is perfect is God.

Examples:

- God's greatness is beyond human discovery. (Ps 145:3, Isa 40:28)
- God's mercy is greater than we can imagine. (Ps 103:11)
- God's work is perfect and his acts are truthful and just. (Deut 32:4)
- Because God is perfect, so his word is perfectly true. (2 Sam 22:31)
- God is morally perfect. (Matt 5:48)

*Theology is for **doxology** and **devotion**—that is, the praise of God and the practice of godliness.*

- J.I. Packer

NEXT WEEK:
The Character of God: Incommunicable Attributes