

THE INCOMMUNICABLE NATURES OF GOD: A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

God has some basic attributes that make Him different from angels, human beings and all others created beings. There are six divine attributes which belong to God Himself and cannot be communicable to other being. They are: Omnipresence, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Immutability, Self existence, and Eternal. The result of this study shows that God is present everywhere in His creation. The unchangeable nature of God guarantees that what He has proposed will be fulfilled by Him, for it is impossible for Him to lie; The ever present nature of God assures His people of His continued accompaniment to be their “help and shield;” His eternal and all-powerful nature assure His people of His power to raise the dead from the graves and to give them eternal life, that they will never die; The all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, unchangeable, and eternal natures of God assure His people of their present needs and of their welfare in the world to come; Only “he who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Keywords: *Nature of God, Biblical Understanding, Attributes*

Introduction

God has some basic attributes that make Him different from angles, human beings and all others created beings.¹ There are six divine attributes which belong to God Himself and cannot be communicable to other being they are: Omnipresence, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Immutability, Self existence,

¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 208.

and Eternal.² This paper will focus specifically on the omnipresence of God in response to pantheistic view of God's presence in the universe. These attributes of God will be discussed in this paper. The purpose of this paper is to explain the biblical understanding with regards to the incommunicable attributes. The result of this study will give understanding that God is present everywhere in His creation, but distinct from His creation. The importance of this study is to know and to understand the nature of the incommunicable attributes of God. Using Biblical information, this paper will endeavor to present incommunicable attributes of God in order to arrive of good understanding of these attributes.

The Omnipresence of God

God's omnipresence may be defined as, "God does not have size or dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places."³ The fact that God is Lord of space and cannot be limited by space is evident first from the fact that He created it, because the creation of material world (Gen. 1:1) implies the creation of space as well. Matter and space are two things which cannot be separated. Moses reminded the people of Israel regarding the lordship of God over universe, "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it" (Deut. 10:14, NKJV).

Speaking about the Omnipresence of God, He can be present in every place at the same time. There are specific passages that speak of God's presence in every part of universe. We read in Jeremiah, "Am I A God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? Says the Lord" (Jer. 23:23,24). Here God is rebuking the prophets who thing their words and thoughts are hidden from God. He is everywhere and fills heaven and earth. David expresses beautifully God's omnipresence as follows:

Whither shall I go from your Spirit? Or wither shall I flee from your presence? If I ascended to heaven, you are there! If I make bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me (Psalm 139:7-10).

²Aecio Cairus, *Class Handouts for THST 612 Doctrine of God*, Adventist International Institute of Advance studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines , 2002, 26.

³Grudmen, 173.

There is nowhere in the entire universe where one can flee from God's presence. There is no indication that simply a part of God is in one place and a part of Him in another. It is God Himself who is present wherever David might go. God is present with His whole being in every part of space, because God in one, "undivided and indivisible."⁴ Paul affirms: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and Col. 1:17, says of Christ, "in Him all things hold together."

The Omnipotence of God

The Bible clearly teaches the omnipotence of God. The Lord, who is called "Almighty" (Gen. 17:1), is also said to be able to do all things He purposes (Job 42:2), for with Him all things are possible (Matt. 19:26) and nothing is too difficult (Jer. 32:17).

God has power over the nature. For instance the Red Sea was dried by Him (Ex. 12 : 22), and the storm in the sea of Galilee was made calm. That is why we cannot equalize the power of God with the power of nature.

God not only has the power over the nature, but also He has the power to sustain or "upholding all things" (Heb. 1:3). We cannot fly to the sky because God sustains the law of gravitation. The earth is turning around at its axis and do not go out of it, because God keeps and sustains it. We are not burned up or frozen, because God has determined the precise distance between the sun and our earth.

The power of God is God born of Himself. He never needs something out of Himself in order to sustain His power. He has power in such a way that "by the Word of the Lord heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6) and when "He spoke, it was done" (Psalm 33:9).

God has both absolute and ordinate power. We can make a distinction between God's absolute power and His ordinate power. Absolute power means that God may work directly without any kind of help or secondary causes. Creation, miracles, inspiration, and regeneration are manifestation of His absolute power. The works of providence would be the examples of ordinate power whereby God uses second causes or certain tolls. In either case, God is exercising His divine efficiency.⁵

⁴Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 82.

⁵Grudem, 163

The Omniscience of God

God is infinite in knowledge. He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly.⁶ He knows all things as they actually come to pass, past, present, and future, and knows them in their real relations.⁷

Scripture declares that God's understanding is infinite (Isa. 46:10), that nothing is hidden from him (Ps. 147:5; Heb. 4:13), and that even the hairs on our head are numbered (Matt. 10:30). The Omniscience of God is comprehensive. God knows everything. Bible says "nothing is hidden from God! He sees through everything, and we will have to tell Him the truth." (Heb. 4:13, CEV). The knowledge is comprehensive and it includes moral factor. The Proverb says: "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3, NKJV). Nothing is hidden from His knowledge. He knows everything including the hair in our head (Matt. 10:30).

The Omniscience of God is not only limited to the things in the earth. Psalms says that every star in the sky is counted by God and God "calls them by name" (Psalms 147:4, NKJV).

God sees everything which we do secretly or openly in the darkness and they are the same for God (Psalms 139: 12). And we are reminded that our secret sins will be brought the light of His countenance (Psalms 90: 8).

God is omniscience. He knows what which is done in public in order to be seen by all people, and what which is done privately in order not to be seen by anybody.

The Immutability of God

We can define the immutability of God as follows: God is unchanging in his being, perfection, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels differently in response to different situations.⁸

In Psalm 102, we find a contrast between things that we may think to be permanent such as the earth or the heavens, on the one hand, and God, on the other hand. The psalmist says: "Of old you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they

⁶Herman Bavink, *The Doctrine of God*, Trans. by William Hendriksen (Edinburgh : Benner of Truth, 1977), 149.

⁷Thisessen, 81

⁸Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 61.

will all wear out like a garment. You change them like raiment, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end” (Ps. 102:25-27).

God existed before the heavens and earth were made, and he will exist long after they have been destroyed. God causes the universe to change, but in contrast to this change he is “the same.”

Referring to his own qualities of patience, long-suffering, and mercy, God says, “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). Here God uses a general statement of his unchangeableness to refer to some specific ways in which he does not change.

James reminds his readers that all good gifts come ultimately from God, “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). His argument is that since good gifts have always come from God, we can be confident that only good gifts will come from him in the future, because his character never changes in the slightest degree.

The definition given above specifies that God is unchanging not in every way that we might imagine, but only in ways that Scripture itself affirms. The Scripture passages already cited refer either to God’s own being or to some attribute of His character. From these we can conclude that God is unchanging, at least with respect to his “being”, and with respect to His “perfections” (that is, His attributes or the various aspects of His character).

I have spoken, and will bring it to pass;

I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isa. 46 : 9-11)

Furthermore, God is unchanging in his promises. One He has promised something, He will not be unfaithful to that promise: “God is a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. He has said, and will he not do it? or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Num. 23 : 19; cf. 1 Sam. 15 :29).

Does God sometimes change His mind? When we talk about being unchanging in His purposes, we may wonder about places in Scripture where God said He would judge His people and then because of prayer or people’s repentance (or both) God relented and did not bring judgment as He had said He would. Examples of such withdrawing from threatened judgment include the intervention of Moses in prayer to prevent the destruction of the people of Israel (Ex. 32: 9-14); the adding of another fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah (Isa. 38 :1-6) or the failure to bring promised judgment upon Nineveh when the people repented (Jonah 3:4,10). Are these not cases where God’s purposes in fact did change? Then there are other passages where God is said to be sorry that he had carried out some previous action. One thing of God being sorry that He had made man upon the earth (Gen. 6:6), or sorry that He had made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:10). Did not God’s purposes change in these cases?

These instances should all be understood as true expressions of God’s present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it existed at that

moment. If the situation changes, then of course God's attitude of intention will also change. This is just saying that God responds differently to different situations. The example of Jonah preaching to Nineveh is helpful. Here God sees the wickedness of Nineveh and sends Johan to proclaim, "yet forty says, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! (Jonah 3:4).

The possibility that God would, withhold judgment if the people repented is not explicitly mentioned in Jonah's proclamation as recorded in Scripture, but it is of course implicit in that warning: the purpose for proclaiming a warning is to bring about repentance. Once the people repented, the situation was different, and God responded differently to that changed situation: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil away, God repented of evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not to do it "(Jonah 3:10). If the Bible speaks of His repenting, change His intention, and renewing His relation to sinners when they repent, we should remember that this is only an anthropopathy way of speaking. In reality the change is not in God, but in person and in person' relations to God.⁹

Self-Existence

God's self-existence is defined as follows: 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. The idea of God's self-existence was generally expressed by the term *aseitas*, meaning literally by-Himself-ness or self-originated. As the self-existent God. He is not only independent in Himself, but also causes everything to depend on Him. Everything come into existence only through God (Rev. 4:11; Acts 17:24).

God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. He is life (John 14:6), the life which is "original, underived, and unborrowed. While man's ground of existence is outside of himself, God's existence is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. As Thomas Aquinas said, "He is the first cause; Himself uncaused." Paul Proclaims to the men of Athens, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of God who made the word and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (Acts. 17:24-25). The implication is that God does not need anything from mankind.

⁹Ellen G, White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountains View, California: Pacific Press, 1948, 530.

Eternal

God's eternity may be defined as follow: God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.¹⁰ The word "eternal" contains two meanings: (1) Time which continually exists and never ending or a "duration through endless ages;"¹¹ (2) The state which cannot be dead or state of "life forever" (1 Tim. 6:16, CEW) or "Immortality" (1 Tim. 6 :16, NKJV). So God is timeless in His own being.

The fact that God has no beginning or end is seen in Psalm 90:2: "Before the mountains were brought, or ever you had formed the earth and the word, from everlasting you are God." Similarly, in Job 36:26, Elihu says of God, "time number of his years is unsearchable."

God's eternity is also suggested by passages that talk about the fact God always is or always exist. "I am the Alpha and Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8; cf. 4:8).

God's eternity is also indicated in Jesus' bold use of a present tense verb that implies continuing present existence when he replied to his Jewish adversaries, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). This statement itself and explicit claiming of the name of God, I AM WHO I AM," form Exodus 3:14, a name that also suggests a continual present existence: God is the eternal " I AM," the one who eternally exists.

Conclusion

There are several natures of God which cannot be communicable to any other creatures. They are as follows: God's omnipresence may be defined as,' God does not have size or dimensions and is present at every point of space with His whole being, yet God acts differently in different places. God is infinite in knowledge. He knows Himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly. The immutability of God can be defined as follows: God is unchanging in his being, perfection, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels differently in response to different situations. God's self-existence is defined as follows: 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. God's eternity may be

¹⁰Grudem, 168.

¹¹Berkof, 60.

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