**Maranatha Bible Church 2020**

**Equipping Hour: Systematic Theology**

**Week 4: Attributes of God Part 2**

**Introduction**

In week one, we started with our ability to know that there is a God. For us to know that God exists was a choice up to God. Had He not revealed Himself to us, we would never have known that He existed. He has shown Himself in nature and creation and through our consciences, all which is called natural revelation. Through special (or divine) revelation, God has revealed Himself to us truly. This is through His word and the person and works of Jesus Christ. No person is saved apart from special revelation. You cannot convince or argue someone into heaven, they must have their eyes opened from God and be born again.

After that, we took on transcendence and immanence. This means that God is *out there* and *down here.* These terms refer not to God’s attributes but spatially where He resides. It is important to understand that while one of God’s attributes is omnipresence (He is everywhere), the doctrine of transcendence and immanence shows that God is working everywhere. If He was just all places, that may not bring much comfort, but He is in all places *working*. We know that God is above His creation, therefore not subjected to it. We also know that God is in His creation, working on our behalf.

Now we are diving into the attributes of God. Last week we looked at what the attributes are and are not, also we looked at the self-existence of God. We are going to go over a few every week so that we can get a broader and deeper understanding of the character of God, thus strengthening our resolve in Him. God has given us all this information about Him, we should do our diligence to know who He is.

Once again, our main purpose is not to walk away from this simply knowing more about the attributes of God. We want this information to impact our hearts as we draw closer to God in worship and praise.

**God’s Incommunicable attributes**:

1. **Immutability (constancy, unchanging)** 
   1. Out of all of His incommunicable attributes, this is probably the hardest to grasp as it seems that Scripture seems to point to both ways.
   2. “***God is absolutely unchangeable***. He can never be different in essence. God is always everlastingly the same. It is never possible that God should differ in any respect from what He always is and always has been. It is not possible, in other words, that God should possess one attribute at one time, and another attribute at another time. God in His absolute perfection is always the same.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
   3. If God is perfect (which He is), and He could change, it suggests that He was imperfect.
   4. Numbers 23:19 “***God is not a man***, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?
   5. Psalm 102:25-27 “Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. ***Even they will perish*, but You endure**; and all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing ***You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end***.”
   6. James 1:17 “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, ***with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow***.”
   7. Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is ***the same yesterday and today and forever***.”
   8. To understand that God cannot change, it is important to note a few things[[2]](#footnote-2):
      1. There is no quantitative change. This means that God cannot increase in anything because He is already perfect. If He decreases, He ceases to be God.
      2. There is no qualitative change. This means that God’s nature does not undergo any modification either.
      3. With these two things in mind, it is vital to understand that God does not change his mind, plans or actions, for these rest on his nature, which remains unchanged no matter what occurs.
         1. This would also include His intentions as well as His plans. Looking back at **Numbers 23:19**…*God is not a man*… therefore his actions must be unalterable.

***On a theological side note***…this is where those who hold to the amillennial position must make some concessions. If God chose the nation of Israel and then made promises specific to them, has He now changed His mind, His will or His plan?

1. Listen to Paul in Romans 11:1 “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”
   1. In short, the Amil position would have us believe that God’s promises no longer are valid for Israel and that the *new* Israel is the church.
   2. That is how they get around a changing God…God did not change, Israel did. So now the promises which were once the exclusive right of Israel, have come upon the church.
   3. Let me simply point out, there is **ZERO** reference to this supposed *change* happening in the Bible. Nowhere do we see the church replacing Israel. The only evidence we have of anything regarding that is found in the previous verse, **Romans 11:1**…and Paul is very explicit that God has not rejected Israel.
   4. This is why a robust understanding of systematic theology is vital to fully grasping all the doctrines of the Bible.
      1. If we were to believe as the Amil’s do, what’s the harm? Well, if God can change His mind about Israel, why not us? If God chose Israel and then because of their bad behavior left them, what does that mean for us?
2. **What about the passages where God seems to change His mind or repent?**
   1. There are those who wish to say that God does change and there are Scriptures which seem to point to this fact.
   2. Genesis 6:6 “The ***LORD was sorry*** that He had made man on the earth, and ***He was grieved in His heart.”***
   3. Exodus 32:14 So ***the LORD changed His mind*** about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”
   4. Jeremiah 18:10 “…if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice***, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it***.”
   5. Genesis 18:32 “Then he said, "Oh ***may the Lord not be angry***, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "***I will not destroy it on account of the ten."***
   6. Exodus 32:10, 14 “Now then let Me alone, ***that My anger may burn against them*** and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." ... 14 ***So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.***
   7. Numbers 11:1 “Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and ***when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled***, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.”
   8. We must keep in mind that when we talk about the Lord being unchangeable, we must keep to the what the Scriptures teach us about God. We must not have a philosophical, rational or emotional concept of God.
      1. These “ideas” of God, outside of Scripture, are all tainted with sin because of the fall.
   9. “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…God is unchanging – not in every way that we might imagine, but only in the ways that Scripture itself affirms.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
   10. “Immutability does not mean that God is static or inert, nor does it mean that he does not act distinctly in time or possess true affection. God is impassable – not in the sense that He is devoid of true feelings or has no affections but in the sense that his emotions are active and deliberate expressions of his holy dispositions, not (as is often the case with human emotions) involuntary passions by which he is drive.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
   11. Let me try and give some insight to what these men are saying. First of all, the terms passable and impassable are important to understand. MacArthur uses them here.
       1. Passable: this means to be capable of feelings, sufferings or to be susceptible to emotion
       2. Impassable: this means one is not subject to emotions, especially that of suffering
       3. If we believe God to be immutable (unchanging), can He have emotions? This incorrect response to this doctrine leads to *open theism*.
          1. That means that God does not know the future and is being as surprised as we are by each event that comes.
   12. **How can we reconcile all of this?** 
       1. While there are some who desire to attach emotions to God, it is important to understand that emotions are reactionary. This means that when something happens, we react because we did not know it was going to happen.
       2. So when we discuss passages in the Bible that have to do with God’s emotions, we have to keep some truths in mind.[[5]](#footnote-5)
          1. Some of the passages are to be understood as anthropomorphisms (assigning human traits or behavior to non-human entities) and anthropopathism’s (the designation of human emotions, or the acknowledgement of human feelings to a non-human being).
             1. This is the way an author would relate God to us using our own language.
          2. What we see as a change of mind are actually new stages in the working out of God’s plan. When we see God’s offer of salvation to the Gentiles, it was not a change in His plan but entering into a new stage of it.
          3. Some apparent changes of mind are changes of orientation resulting from people moving into a different relationship with God.
             1. God did not change His mind when Adam sinned nor did He change His mind when you and I repented. It was Adam and our wills that changed, not the plan of God.
          4. God is active but stable and consistent with His nature. When we meet a condition that He has set, the way in which God interacts with us changes.
             1. Deuteronomy 28:1-2 “Now it shall be, ***if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments*** which I command you today, ***the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth***. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God.”
             2. These were the conditions that God set forth for the nation of Israel to receive His blessing. It is a classic *if / then* statement.
          5. “…God reveals himself in his relations to people. They perceive only one aspect of God at a time. **God never changes**, but creatures do change, and they perceive God’s perfections and actions according to their current state. Thus, God’s actions do not imply a change of essence of purpose.”
             1. This is the overall key to immutability, God never changes in who He is or what His plans or promises are. As we change, our relationship with God changes. We move from death to life, from foe to friend, and how God interacts with us changes ***according to His nature.***
   13. “The unchanging God is related to his creature in **manifold** ways and participates in their lives. God is transcendent and immanent. Without losing himself he can give himself, and while absolutely maintaining his immutability, he can enter into an infinite number of relations to his creatures.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
3. **The Omnipresence / Immensity of God** 
   1. God’s omnipresence is best defined as “God is present in the totality of his being every place in space.”[[7]](#footnote-7) There is no place in the known or unknown universe that God does not exist.
   2. His Immensity is similar, “God transcends the physical dimensions of the created universe; God does not take up space.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
      1. We could say that omnipresence deals with the location of God while immensity deals with the measurements of God.
      2. “God is fully present in every place, but he is also sustaining space by his immensity.”[[9]](#footnote-9)
   3. Jeremiah 23:23-24 “Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.”
   4. 1 Kings 8:27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? ***Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You***, how much less this house which I have built!”
   5. Proverbs 5:21 “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.”
   6. These speak to God not being limited or bound to a location; in fact we read that God transcends even space. There is no place that someone can hide from the Lord. Our ways are always before the Lord, He is always watching where we are gong and what we are doing.
   7. It is because God created space that He is not limited by it (**Gen. 1:1**).
      1. Deuteronomy 10:14 “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.”
   8. God not only created the space, but He also sustains it very being.
      1. Colossians 1:17 “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”
      2. Hebrews 1:3 “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”
   9. Two truths to remember:
      1. God is distinct from space but He is not separate from it.
      2. God is present everything in His creation but is distinct from it.
   10. God is present **at** every place **in** space.
       1. Psalm 139:7-11 “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night.”
       2. “God is present everywhere, because he is the source of everything and of every person on the earth, and because he is the controller of nature and history. And he has controlled history in such a way that he is inevitably present to all.”[[10]](#footnote-10)
       3. We should not think of God as partly in one place and then partly in another. The totality of His being is in every place at all times. There is never a time when God is not fully somewhere in total space.
   11. God does not have size or spatial dimensions.
       1. John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
          1. God is spirit.
          2. He is not physically present in space.
          3. God is not present *as* each point or *in* each point in space (that would be pantheism) but is present *at* each point in space.[[11]](#footnote-11)
   12. Though God is everywhere, His presence at a location in space is manifested differently at different times.
       1. **The presence of God in fellowship and blessing:**
          1. Exodus 33:14-15 “And He said, "My presence shall go [with you,] and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go [with us,] do not lead us up from here.”
          2. Psalm 16:11 “You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”
          3. Psalm 51:11 “Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”.
          4. Jude 1:24 “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy…”
          5. Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”
             1. This is in the context of church discipline. God’s affirmation to us that He is working in the church.
       2. **The presence of God in judgment:** 
          1. Genesis 3:22-24 “Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.
             1. Notice that it was God who drove Adam and Eve out. He did not sent an angel nor just allow them to wander out, He Himself did the work.
          2. Genesis 4:14 “Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”
             1. God sent Cain out into the wilderness as punishment. It was his punishment (and judgment from God) for killing his brother.
          3. Genesis 7:16 “Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him.”
             1. God closed the door on the ark in judgment of the whole world. It was His decision to save those on the ark and allow those off the ark to drown in judgment.
          4. Numbers 14:42-43 “Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you.”
             1. When the Israelites when their own way, the presence of the Lord (not His actual presence but relationally) was not with them.
          5. Psalm 11:5 “The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.”
             1. God hating someone means that His relationship with them is not there.
          6. Psalm 66:18 “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”
          7. John 9:31 “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him.”
             1. Those who are not born again, actively sinning against God and not fearing Him, they are far from God. He is not working in their lives on their behalf.
          8. Revelation 14:10 “…he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone ***in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.***”
             1. God the Son will be present in Hell, tormenting those there.
4. **The Omnipotence of God** 
   1. “God’s omnipotence describes his ability to do anything *consistent with his nature*.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
   2. “The omnipotence of God is that by which He brings to pass everything He wills.”[[13]](#footnote-13)
   3. It is important to note that God cannot do anything, but He does anything that He wants to do. God is not bound by anything other than His own nature. If something is not according to His nature, then He neither desires to do it nor can or will He do it.
      1. Psalm 24:8 “Who is the King of glory? ***The LORD strong and mighty***, The LORD mighty in battle.”
      2. Psalm 115:3 “But our God is in the heavens; ***He does whatever He pleases.”***
      3. Matthew 19:26 “And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but ***with God all things are possible***.”
      4. Ephesians 3:20 “Now to ***Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond*** all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us…”
      5. Revelation 4:11 “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; f***or You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created***.”
         1. If God wants to do something, He is able to do it.
   4. As I previously said, He is not able to go against His nature. There are five verses to remember that speak to what God is not able to do:
      1. 1John 1:5 “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”
         1. God is not able to sin; in Him there is no darkness. If there is no evil inside something or someone, then no evil can come out. This is why we do not have to teach children to sin, we all sin because we are born with darkness in us.
      2. Habakkuk 1:13 “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?”
         1. God is not able to approve evil. Some of your Bibles will says *Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil.* The NASB pulls out the real meaning of the Hebrew word, to approve. If God were to look upon evil approvingly, He would be denying His own holiness. He must judge it righteously in order to maintain His character.
      3. Titus 1:2 “…in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago…”
         1. God cannot lie, what He says He will do…He must do.
      4. James 1:13 “Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”
         1. God is not a tempter, He does not try and entice people to do evil. Since God has no evil in Him, He cannot tempt people to do evil.
         2. But, remember, God will test us to see our hearts (or better put, that we would see our hearts) and to see if we truly serve and desire Him.
         3. If we end up sinning because of our testing, that is from our own volition. God always provides for us a way out (**1 Cor. 10:13**).
      5. 2 Timothy 2:13 “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”
         1. In the context of this passage, Paul is talking about salvation and judgment. If God were to deny us, the faithful believers, He would be going against His very nature. On the contrary, if He were to allow unsaved people into heaven, He would be denying His justice.
         2. Therefore, God cannot act on something that is against His character, thus denying Himself in the process.

Next week, we will finish up the incommunicable attributes with eternality (infinity) of God. We will discuss how He has no beginning or end. We will also begin looking at communicable attributes of God.

1. Martyn Lloyd Jones *Great Doctrines of the Bible* p. 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Millard Erickson pp. 249-250 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wayne Grudem p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John MacArthur p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Millard Erickson p. 249-250 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* Vol. 1, p. 148 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Andrew Snider, The Masters Seminary, TH605 Theology I Class Notes, pp. 81-82 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John MacArthur pp. 173-174 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Frame, *The Doctrines of God*, p. 581 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Andrew Snider, The Masters Seminary, TH605 Theology I Class Notes, pp. 81-82 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. John MacArthur p. 177 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. M. Lloyd Jones p. 66 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)