

Examining Christian Doctrine

Lesson 8: The Attributes of God Part 2

In our study, we have been in the process of answering three questions as it relates to God: Does God exist, and if so, is it possible to know him, and if we can know him, what is he like? We've explored the first two questions having to do with God's existence and knowability. Last week we began looking at the attributes of God and answer the question "what is God like?".

In studying the attributes of God, we have broken them down into three parts:

1. God's Grandeur: Self-Existence and Omnipresence
2. God's Greatness: Omniscience and Omnipotence
3. God's Goodness (Moral Attributes): Justice and Love

Last week we looked at the attributes of God's Grandeur and today we will explore the attributes of God's Greatness.

Attributes of God's Greatness: God's Omniscience (All Knowing)

In exploring God's Omniscience, we will also explore attributes related to his omniscience: God's knowledge, God's wisdom, God foreknowledge, and God's will.

God is Omniscient

The omniscience of God is his attribute of being all-knowing. The word "omniscience" comes from the Latin words omni (which means "all") plus scientia (which means "knowledge"). It encompasses God's complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including the past, present, and future.

God's Knowledge: God's knowledge is comprehensive: it extends to every detail of existence, from the vastness of the cosmos to the innermost thoughts and intentions of every individual. Job 28:24 says, "*he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens.*"

Here are a few examples of God's limitless knowledge as portrayed in Scripture:

- He knows what we need before we ask him (Matthew 6:8)
- He knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30)
- He knows when we sit, when we rise, and what we think (Psalm 139:1-2)
- He knows words we will say before we speak them (Psalm 139:4)
- He knows the days of our lives before we are born (Psalm 139:16)
- He knows every possible future (1 Samuel 23:11-13)

God's Wisdom: Wisdom the divine attribute of sound judgment, signifying that God always wills the greatest goals and the best means to achieve those goals for his own glory and his people's blessing.

- He is called "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27).
- "With him are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13).
- "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Psalm 104:24).

God's wisdom is seen in Christ and the cross. Christ is "the wisdom of God" to those who are called (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30), even though the cross is "foolishness" to those who reject it and think themselves to be wise in this world (1 Corinthians 1:18-20). This is a reflection of God's wise plan: "*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. . . . God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise . . . so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*" —1 Corinthians 1:21, 27, 29.

God's Foreknowledge: God's foreknowledge is an essential aspect of God's omniscience, indicating His ability to know events before they occur. This is seen in his knowing of people before they were born, knowing outcomes of events before they would happen, and declaring the future through prophecy.

- Jeremiah 1:5 *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*
- Isaiah 46:10 *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"*

God's Will: Because of God's attributes of his omniscience, God declares his will over all of humanity. God's will refers to His desires, intentions, and plans for creation, which are informed by His perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future. His omniscience allows Him to have a complete understanding of what is best for His creation, enabling Him to discern what should occur in accordance with His divine purposes.

- Revelation 4:11 *"You created all things, and by your will they existed and were created"*
- Matthew 6:10 *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*
- Ephesians 5:17 *"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."*
- Psalm 143:10 *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."*

Scripture frequently indicates God's will as the final or most ultimate reason for everything that happens. Paul refers to God as the one "who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). There are aspects of God's will in which God exercises sovereign control over and other aspects that God offers free will over. We must hold these two in tension yet without contradiction.

Attributes of God's Greatness: God's Omnipotence (All Powerful)

In exploring God's Omnipotence, we will also explore attributes related to his omnipotence: God's power in creation, God's Sovereignty, God's Miracles and God's Salvation

God is Omnipotent: The word omnipotence is derived from two Latin words, omni, "all," and potens, "powerful," and means "all-powerful." It refers to the all-encompassing power and authority of God. It asserts that God possesses unlimited and absolute power over all things. There are no limits on God's power to do what he decides to do.

A favorite Hebrew name describing God's omnipotence is 'El Shaddai' or 'God Almighty'. Genesis 17:1 - *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.'"*

God's Power in Creation: God's omnipotence is evident in the act of creation itself. The Bible portrays God as the ultimate creator of the universe, bringing everything into existence from nothingness by His sheer will and power (Genesis 1:1). His ability to create ex nihilo (out of nothing) underscores His omnipotence, demonstrating that He is not bound by pre-existing materials or conditions.

Jeremiah 32:17 - *"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."*

Part of God's power in creation is that because he is creator, he has the power to sustain creation. He brought everything into existence by His word (Genesis 1:1), and by His power, all things continue to exist and function (Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3). As the sovereign Creator, He has the right to govern His creation as He sees fit.

God's Sovereignty: God's sovereignty is a divine attribute that emphasizes God's supreme authority, control, and reign over all creation. It affirms that God is the ultimate ruler and sustainer of the universe, governing everything according to His will and purposes.

God's sovereignty is seen in scriptures through:

1. **Supreme Authority:** God's sovereignty establishes Him as the highest authority in existence. He is depicted as the King of kings and Lord of lords, with absolute power and dominion over all (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 19:16). Nothing and no one can rival His authority or thwart His plans.
2. **Divine Providence:** God's sovereignty extends to His providential care and guidance over His creation. He orchestrates events and circumstances according to His will, working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Even seemingly random occurrences are subject to His sovereign purposes.
3. **Human Freedom and Responsibility:** Despite His sovereign control, God respects human freedom and holds individuals accountable for their choices. While God's sovereignty encompasses His foreknowledge and overarching plan, it does not negate human responsibility (Joshua 24:15, Romans 14:12). Humans make genuine choices that have real consequences, yet God's sovereignty ensures that His purposes are ultimately fulfilled.

God's Miracles: Miracles are manifestations of God's omnipotence, where He intervenes in the natural order to accomplish extraordinary feats that defy human explanation or logic.

Throughout the Bible, we see numerous accounts of God performing miracles, such as parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21), raising the dead (John 11:43-44), and healing the sick (Matthew 8:16).

These miracles serve as testimonies to God's power and serve various purposes, including affirming His identity, demonstrating His compassion, and validating His messengers.

God's Salvation: God's omnipotence is also evident in His ability to save and redeem humanity from sin and spiritual bondage. Through Jesus Christ, God accomplished the ultimate act of salvation by reconciling sinful humanity to Himself (John 3:16-17).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead showcases God's supreme power over death and His ability to bring about new life and spiritual transformation (Romans 6:4).

Conclusion: Is there anything God cannot do?

Even though God is omnipotent, there are some things that God cannot do. First of all, God's nature cannot change (immutable), God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Also, God cannot do anything that denies his own character. For example, Scripture tells us that God can't lie:

- In Titus 1:2 he is called (literally) "the unlying God" or the "God who never lies."
- The author of Hebrews says that in God's oath and promise "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrew 6:18, Grudem's translation).
- 2 Timothy 2:13 says of Christ, "He cannot deny himself."

Additionally, James says, "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). Thus, God cannot change, lie, sin, deny himself, or be tempted with evil. He cannot cease to exist, or cease to be God, or act in a way inconsistent with any of his attributes.

While God is omnipotent, His omnipotence does not extend to actions that contradict His nature or violate His moral perfection. Therefore, while God's power is limitless, there are inherent limitations to what He can do based on His own nature and character.