

Theology Proper
The Study of the Nature and Character of God
Part 1: God's Greatness

Introduction

1. Our topic for today is Theology Proper which is the study of the nature and character of God, and there are a few caveats before we get started:
 - a. This morning's study is not intended to be exhaustive due to time
 - b. Deciding what to cover is not easy; some things will get left out (even important ones)
 - c. Primarily referring to God the Father today, but because God is three-in-one (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), what we will discuss applies to all three
2. God's attributes describe who He is, what He is like, and what He does
3. There is no one way to categorize or group God's attributes; some examples are:
 - a. Communicable vs. Incommunicable: describes whether God's traits are found only in God or also in His Creation, specifically mankind
 - 1) Communicable: traits of God that are shared by mankind (ex. personality, love)
 - 2) Incommunicable: traits of God that are only found in Him and not shared by mankind (ex. omnipotence)
 - b. Transitive vs Intransitive (also called Relative vs. Absolute): describes whether God's traits require an object with which it relates or acts upon:
 - 1) Transitive or Relative: attributes that describe how God's relates to or acts upon His creation; think transitive verbs which can take a direct object, something upon which they are acting (ex. God's mercy and grace)
 - 2) Intransitive or Absolute: attributes that remain within God's very own nature and do not require an object; in other words, it's not acting upon something in His creation (ex. God being spirit)
 - c. Natural vs. Moral:
 - 1) Natural: ex. the three Omnis (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence)
 - 2) Moral: ex. holiness, love, mercy, faithfulness
 - d. Milliard Erickson groups them as God's Greatness and God's Goodness
4. I like Ericson's grouping so I will be using that this morning:
 - a. Today we will be looking at attributes that reflect God's greatness
 - b. Next week, we will be looking at attributes that reflect God's goodness

A. God is Spirit

1. God is spirit and has no material form; He's not made of matter (READ John 4:20-24):
 - a. However, this does not mean that God cannot be seen or that He doesn't have a physical appearance (e.g. heavenly hosts like angels and seraphim don't have a material form, but have a physical appearance)
 - b. We know this is true for several reasons:

- 1) We were made in His image/likeness and as we'll see in a few weeks those words are used almost exclusively in the OT to refer to physical resemblance (Genesis 1:26-27)
- 2) Jesus has seen Him (John 6:46): **"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father."**
- 3) Moses also got just a glimpse of God's image when God allowed him to see just His **"back"** (READ Exodus 33:18-23)—God also refers to **"My face"** (is this metaphor or does God actually have a face?)
- 4) And, once we get to heaven, we will also see Him:
 - a) Job said, **"Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I will see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!"** (Job 19:26-27)
 - b) David wrote, **"As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness"** (Psalm 17:15)
 - c) Jesus said, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"** (Matthew 5:8)
- c. However, until we get to heaven, we cannot see God:
 - 1) Until then, He is the **"invisible God"** to us (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17)
 - 2) In fact, no man, aside from Jesus, has ever fully seen Him (John 1:18)
 - 3) Moses probably came the closest, but God told him, **"You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"** (Exodus 33:20)
2. Why God being spirit is important to us:
 - a. Many of the other attributes we are going to talk about this morning are dependent upon it, for instance God's omnipresence
 - b. A second reason is that because He created us in His image, He made us spiritual beings as well:
 - 1) We are not just lumps of clay
 - 2) We don't just have a physical body; we are spiritual as well (1 Thessalonians 5:23): **"23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."**
 - 3) This is the reason why we don't just exist in this life, but can live eternally through Jesus Christ

B. God is Personal

1. One aspect of God being personal is that He is not some force or energy, but instead a rational being with a mind, will, emotions, personality, and intelligence:
 - a. This is why the Bible refers to God using personal pronouns like He, Him, His, and even Us (Genesis 1:26)
 - b. The Bible teaches that God is actually one God Who exists in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
 - 1) They are not three different manifestations of God (modalism), but rather three distinct persons Who exist simultaneously as God
 - 2) All three are equally God and co-eternal
- c. We see this throughout the Bible:

- 1) All three are mentioned having a part in Creation (READ Genesis 1: 1-2, 26; READ Colossians 1:16)
 - 2) God and the Spirit are mentioned directly throughout the OT, and Jesus even appears in pre-incarnate physical form through theophanies
 - 3) We see all three together when Jesus is baptized as the Holy Spirit descends upon Him and God the Father speaks from Heaven (READ Matthew 3:16-17)
- d. We even see all three involved in different aspects of our salvation:
- 1) All three are active in our redemption (READ Galatians 4:4-6)
 - 2) All three are active in our sealing (READ 2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
 - 3) All three are active in the bestowing of our spiritual gifts (READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7)
2. Another aspect of God being personal is that He interacts with us in a personal way:
- a. This, too, is something that is revealed in the very first few pages of the Bible with the creation of Adam and Eve: He interacts with them by talking to them, and even walking in the Garden (READ Genesis 3:8)
 - b. We see the same thing with His interaction with Cain, and then Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah and Hagar, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, and the Prophets in the OT, Mary and Joseph, the Apostles, Paul and others in the NT
 - c. Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as a deeply personal god Who not only knows us and cares for us, but desires to be known by us delights in it (READ Jeremiah 9:23-24)
 - d. The most profound example of this is what God does for believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17): **"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."**
3. Why is the fact that God is personal important to us?
- a. One reason comes down to the fact that He created us in His image which means that we have a mind, will, emotions, personality, and intelligence just as He does
 - b. Another reason is because if He were not personal, we could not know Him and that is the entire basis for our existence; we were created to both know and be known by our Creator

C. God is Alive

1. God is referred to repeatedly in the Bible (over 20 times) as **"the Living God"**
 - a. He often referred to Himself in this way to contrast Himself with the dead, lifeless, idols and fake gods of the world (READ Jeremiah 10:1-15)
 - b. It was ultimately God's way of declaring Himself to be the One, True God and Paul even references this when He reminded the Thessalonians that they had **"turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God"** (1 Thessalonians 1:9)
2. God is not only alive, but He has always been and will always be alive; In other words, He is eternal:
 - a. Unlike all other life, God had no beginning and will have no end
 - b. As the Psalmist wrote (Psalm 90:2): **"Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."**

- c. Deuteronomy 33:27 says, “**The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.**”
 - d. Job said, “**...the number of His years is unsearchable**” (Job 36:26)
3. Because God is alive, both physical and spiritual life originate and exist in Him:
- a. There would be no physical life had God not created and given life to all living things:
 - 1) Isaiah 42:5 (READ): “**Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it,**”
 - 2) There’s a wonderful word-picture used to describe this in Genesis 2:7 (READ): “**Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.**”
 - 3) Job used a similar word picture: “**For as long as life is in me, and the breath of God is in my nostrils**” (Job 27:3)
 - b. Likewise, there would be no eternal life if God were not alive:
 - 1) READ John 5:26-29
 - 2) The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, “**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent**” (John 17:3)
 - 3) Paul wrote, “**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Romans 6:23)
 - c. It’s pretty obvious why God being alive is important to us:
 - 1) For one, we wouldn’t exist if He weren’t alive!
 - 2) But it’s more than that; because God is alive, all life—physical and spiritual—exists and originates in Him, and because of this He has given us both
 - 3) Both our physical lives, and our spiritual/eternal lives, are possible because He is alive

D. God is Infinite

- 1. When referring to God as infinite, it is often described as God not only being unlimited but unlimitable (He has no limits and cannot be limited by anyone or anything)
- 2. This is generally described by what is referred to as the three Omnis of God:
 - a. God is omnipotent (all powerful; infinite in power):
 - 1) The very first thing the Bible reveals about God is that He is all powerful—we see this in Genesis 1 where He simply speaks things into existence
 - 2) Because He is omnipotent, He is sovereign which means that He is in complete and total control over His creation:
 - a) Psalm 135:6: “**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.**”
 - b) Job 42:2: “**I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.**”
 - c) In Daniel 4:35, Nebuchadnezzar declared, “**All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'**”

- 3) Why is God's omnipotence important to us? Our salvation is protected by it (READ 1 Peter 1:3-5): **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."**
- b. God is omnipresent (all present; infinite in presence):
- 1) One aspect of God's omnipresence is that He is not bound by space:
 - a) This is often described by talking about God's immanence (God is present everywhere within His creation) and His transcendence (God exists outside of time and space)
 - b) We see both of these in Jeremiah 23:23-24: **"Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? ²⁴ "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."**
 - c) What this means is that there is no place where God cannot be found; we see David express this in Psalm 139:7-12 (READ)
 - 2) Another aspect of God's omnipresence is that He is not bound by time:
 - a) He existed before time (eternity past), exists throughout time (present), and will exist after time (eternity future)
 - Psalm 90:2: **"Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."**
 - Psalm 93:2 says, **"Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting."**
 - b) This does not mean that God is not conscious of the passage of time; after all, He created it and works within it (e.g. the six days of creation, prophecies to be filled at future dates)
 - c) However, His perspective on time is different than ours (2 Peter 3:8): **"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."**
 - 3) This is important to us because it means that God is always present wherever we are; we can interact with Him, talk with Him, worship Him anywhere at any time; we don't need to come to "church" to be in His presence, or search for Him in some religious rite; He is right here with us at all times, anywhere we are
- c. God is omniscient (all knowing; infinite in knowledge and wisdom):
- 1) Some define omniscience as knowing everything about everything all the time, and that is certainly true of God; the Bible says, **"His understanding is infinite"** (Psalm 147:5)
 - 2) However, when speaking of God's omniscience, we have to think in terms of both knowledge or understanding (what He knows) and wisdom (how he exercises that knowledge)
 - 3) Paul addressed both of these in Romans 11:33 (READ): **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"**

- a) Notice the chiasmic structure with this verse: Paul associates God’s wisdom and knowledge with His judgments and His ways
 - b) God’s omniscience isn’t simply about His unlimited knowledge or understanding; the judgments He makes and the ways in which He acts toward us (His wisdom) are all in perfect alignment with His unlimited knowledge and understanding
 - c) This trait is at the heart of God’s justice: it’s why He can judge one person but forgive another, why He can condemn one and give mercy to the other, why He can send some to the Lake of Fire but others to Paradise
 - d) Proverbs 15:3 says, **“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.”**
 - e) Jeremiah 32:17-19 (READ): **“Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, 18 who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of hosts is His name; 19 great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds;”**
- 4) God’s omniscience is important to us for two reasons:
- a) One is that wisdom and knowledge come from God:
 - Proverbs 2:6-7: **“For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,”**
 - Daniel 2:20-21: **“20 Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.”**
 - This is especially true of us because in Jesus **“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Colossians 2:3)
 - b) A second reason that God’s omniscience is important to us is that it assures us that God’s judgment is righteous and fair:
 - The Bible declares, **“...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27)
 - Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:10, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”**
 - When that time comes, we can be assured that God will judge righteously, without bias or pretense, because He not only sees everything, but He knows what is in the heart of every man

E. God is Constant

1. The technical theological term for this is immutability; it means God does not change:
 - a. Malachi 3:6: **“For, I the LORD, do not change...”**
 - b. James wrote, **“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”** (James 1:17)

- c. The book of Hebrews declares that, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”** (Hebrews 13:8)
2. Two ways in which God is immutable:
 - a. He does not change quantitatively: meaning He does not increase or decrease in any of His attributes (e.g. does become more omnipotent, more loving, etc.)
 - b. He does not change qualitatively: meaning He does not change His mind, His purpose, or His ways
 3. One of the main reasons this is important to us is because it means the Lord is reliable; He can be trusted and taken at His Word; He does exactly what He says He will do:
 - a. Numbers 23:19 (READ): **“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?”**
 - b. God’s immutability is at the heart of Psalm 37 which is all about delighting oneself in the LORD and trusting Him to fulfill His promises; it’s why David was able to write in verses 4-5: **“Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.”** (Psalm 37:4-5)
 - c. In fact, our hope of salvation through Jesus Christ is contingent upon one thing: God’s immutability:
 - 1) He promised that all who call on Jesus’ name will be saved (READ Romans 10:9-10): **“...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”**
 - 2) This is precisely why Paul could confidently say at the end of his life, **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”** (2 Timothy 4:18)
 - 3) Because God is constant/immutable/unchanging, we can share Paul’s confidence and be assured that God will also bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom