

BASIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Part 3

A Summary of Ways that God is Different from Us

What is God like? The way to find out is to look into the Bible at the many characteristics (perfections, attributes) of God. These attributes are sometimes categorized as those that belong to God alone (incommunicable) and those which are shared with humans (communicable). This time we look at some of the former ones, those attributes that are possessed only by God.

The first attribute is God's Independence or Self-Existence. Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology defines this 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. - aseity* (from the Latin words *a se* which mean "from himself"). This attribute says that God has no needs and is not dependent on anything else for his existence. He is the ground of his own being and the only being that exists necessarily. Everything else depends on God for their existence.

We see this characteristic of God in Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;"

The next two attributes go together: Eternity and Omnipresence. They both show ways in which God is infinite and transcends the creation, in terms of time and space. Of God's eternity, Grudem says: *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.* Psalm 90:2 says "from everlasting to everlasting. Thou art God". God had no beginning and will have no end. He created time.

God also created space and all places are in his immediate presence. Omnipresence can be defined in this way: *"God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places."* Psalm 139:7 says "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?" and Jer. 23:24 tells us "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."

Another attribute that applies to God alone is immutability, God doesn't change (Mal 3:6). Heb. 13 says "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever" This truth about God is defined by Grudem as follows: *"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."*

Studying and meditating on God's attributes is very helpful and practical for Christians. Knowing that God is Self-existent, that he has always been and will always

be, that there is no place where he is not, and that he is consistently the same - all this brings great comfort to the child of God. We know God is faithful and we can rest in his awesome love and power (two other attributes we will discuss next time, as we look at the divine qualities that God shares with humans).

For your own further study of God's attributes, I'd suggest The Attributes of God by Arthur Pink
Knowledge of the Holy by A. W. Tozer, Knowing God by J. I. Packer, and Existence and Attributes of God by Stephen Charnock.