

Lecture 16 – Divine Attributes

“Immortal. Invisible. God only wise. In light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days. Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.”

Walter Chalmers Smith, 1867

Key Terms

Compatibilism, *pantokrator*, attribute, person, spirit, sovereign, transcendent, holy, constant, all-powerful, eternal, all-knowing, just, good

Objectives

*Identify and describe the attributes of God.

*Consider the significance of these attributes for shaping our life and ministry.

Divine Attributes

I. Introduction

- A. Reasons for returning to a consideration of divine attributes
 1. The expectations of the Christian community
 2. The act of attributing certain powers to God is biblical
 3. Guards against constructing too narrow a view of God
- B. Should we classify God’s attributes?
 1. Communicable and incommunicable attributes
 2. Metaphysical and relational attributes
 3. More recent proposals

C. Philosophy

II. Summary of Divine Attributes

- A. God is a person.
 1. What is a person?
 2. Scriptural support
 - a. God has a name (Exodus 3:14).
 - b. God engages in activity and reciprocal relationships (Genesis 1:1; 3:8-9; Matthew 3:17).
 - c. God can be prayed to (Matthew 6:9).
 3. Implications
 - a. Our relationship with God is a personal-moral relationship.
 - b. We can pray to Him.
- B. God is a spirit.
 1. What’s a spirit? An incorporeal person
 2. Scriptural support (Deuteronomy 4:15-18; John 1:18; 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15-16)
 3. Implications
 - a. God is not limited by bodily or physical reality.
 - b. God is not susceptible to physical limitations of death.
 - c. Scripture uses anthropomorphisms to speak of God.
- C. God is sovereign over all things.
 1. Scriptural support (Exodus 3:14; Jeremiah 10:10; John 5:26; Hebrews 11:6; John 1:4)
 2. Implications
 - a. God does not derive His life from any other source (aseity).

- b. God has the right to command obedience from His creatures.
- D. God is transcendent.
 - 1. God is other than His creation.
 - 2. Misunderstandings of transcendence
 - a. God is not absent from His creation.
 - b. God can enter space.
 - 3. Implications
 - a. Pantheism is disallowed.
 - b. Idolatry is disallowed.
- E. God is holy.
 - 1. God is free from all moral impurity.
 - 2. Scriptural support (Leviticus 11:44; Psalm 99; 1 Peter 1:14-17; Revelation 4:8)
 - 3. God's moral perfection
 - a. God is truthful in His word (1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 119:151; Titus 1:2).
 - b. God is faithful in His ways (Deuteronomy 7:9; Joshua 21:43-35; Isaiah 49:14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 John 1:9).
 - c. God is righteous in His judgments (Psalm 147:17; Genesis 18:25; Romans 3:21-24).
- F. God is constant, faithful in His nature and character.
 - 1. Immutable
 - 2. Scriptural support (Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17)
- G. God is all-powerful.
 - 1. *El Shaddai* (Genesis 17; Jeremiah 32)
 - 2. Attributions of power to God (e.g., Job 42:2; Psalm 115:3)
 - 3. New Testament
 - a. *Pantokrator* (Παντοκρατορ)
 - b. Attributions of power to God (e.g., Matthew 19:26; Ephesians 1:19; Romans 8:38-39)
- H. God is eternal
 - 1. Description: God is infinite with respect to time.
 - 2. Scriptural support (Psalm 90:1-12; 102:11-12, 25-27; 93:2; Isaiah 40:27-31; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2 Peter 3:8)
 - 3. Discussion
 - a. Atemporal eternity (atemporalism)
 - b. Endless temporality (temporalism)
 - Arguments:
 - 1) Atemporalism makes it impossible for God to work in the world.
 - 2) The notion of a timeless person is incoherent.
 - 3) The idea of timelessness is not a biblical concept.
 - c. The atemporalist response to temporalism
 - d. A resolution to the problem
- I. God is all-knowing.
 - 1. God knows all things, and what He knows He knows accurately and exhaustively.
 - 2. Scriptural support
 - a. God's knowledge compared to that of humans (Isaiah 46:9-10; 55:9; Job 9:10)
 - b. God's intimate and absolute knowledge of us (Psalm 130:1-5; Job 28:24; 37:16; 1 John 3:20)
 - c. The extent of God's knowledge (Psalm 147:5; Job 28:24; 37:16; 1 John 3:20)
 - d. God's knowledge of the future (Isaiah 42:8-9; 46:9-10; Matthew 11:21-23;

26:21-25)

3. The thorny issue of foreknowledge

The Openness of God, Clark Pinnock et al

The Bible affirms both God's knowledge of the future and our responsibility for our actions (e.g., Psalm 115:3; Proverbs 16:9, 33; Daniel 4:33-35; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Ephesians 1:11; Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 13:21).

a. The nature of freedom

b. God and human freedom

Compatibilism (soft determinism)

God works in a number of ways to bring about His will by rendering certain that I and each individual will freely choose what He has already ordained.

J. God is just.

1. Scriptural support (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 145:17; Daniel 9:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Romans 3:21-24)

2. God does not sin.

3. Implications

a. God is the law-giver.

b. God is the judge.

c. God is concerned for the oppressed and down-trodden.

d. God's righteousness brings salvation.

K. God is good.

1. Scriptural support (Psalm 145:7-9, 14-16; Matthew 6:25-34; James 1:16-18)

2. Divine benevolence