

**“Bible Doctrine”: Wayne Grudem**  
**4. The Character of God: “Incommunicable” Attributes**  
**Notes: Pastor Keith McMinn**

**I. Explanation and Scriptural Basis**

**A. The Existence of God**

- All people have an inner sense of God.
- We believe the evidence that is found in Scripture and in nature.

**1. Humanity’s inner sense of God**

- *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21)*
- *The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” (Psalm 14:1)*
- Some people deny this inner sense of God.

**2. Believing the evidence in Scripture and nature**

- *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)*
- Grudem states, “Whenever we meet another human being we should (if our minds are thinking correctly) realize that such an incredibly intricate, skillful, communicative living creature could only have been created by an infinite, all wise Creator.” (Grudem, p. 74)
- Everything in Scripture and nature points to the existence of God. Grudem says we believe an overwhelming amount of reliable evidence from God’s words. (Grudem, p. 75)

**B. The Knowability of God**

**1. We can never fully understand God.**

- We are finite and God is infinite as we can never fully understand God.
- **Incomprehensible-** Unable to be fully understood.
- “It is not only true that we can never fully understand God: it is also true that we can never fully understand any single thing about God.” (Grudem, 75)
  - **His Greatness-** *Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:3)*
  - **His Understanding-** *Great is our Lord and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. (Psalm 147:5)*

- **His Knowledge-** *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:6)*
  
- **His Riches, Wisdom, Judgements and Ways-** *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33)*

## 2. Yet we can know God truly.

- We can know things about God even though we cannot know Him fully.
  
- *Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)*
  
- *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*

## Chapter Review Questions

1. How do we know that God exists?
2. True/False: It is possible to fully understand God.
3. We can never \_\_\_\_\_ any of God's \_\_\_\_\_ completely or \_\_\_\_\_.

## C. Introduction to the Study of God's Character: God's Attributes

1. **Incommunicable Attributes-** Those attributes that God does not share or "communicate" to others.
  - **Eternity-** God has existed from all eternity, but we have not.
  - **Unchangeableness-** God does not change, but we do.
  - **Omnipresence-** God is everywhere present, but we are present only in only one place at a time.
  
2. **Communicable Attributes-** Those that God shares or "communicates" with us.
  - **Love-** God is love, and we are able to love as well.
  - **Knowledge-** God has knowledge, and we are able to have knowledge as well.
  - **Mercy-** God is merciful, and we are able to be merciful too.
  - **Justice-** God is just, and we too are able to be just.

So it is with all the attributes that are normally called communicable attributes: God does indeed share them with us *to some degree*, but it must be said that none of these attributes is completely communicable. It is better to say that those attributes that we call communicable are those that are *more shared* with us.

On the other hand, those attributes we call incommunicable are better defined by saying that they are attributes of God that are *less shared* by us. (Grudem, p.78)

### **Chapter Review Questions**

4. Define *communicable* and *incommunicable* as they relate to God's attributes. Give examples of each.
5. Explain how some of God's attributes can be both communicable and incommunicable (e.g., wisdom).

### **D. The Incommunicable Attributes of God**

1. **Independence-** God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation glorify him and bring him joy. This attribute is also referred to as "self-existence."

- *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17: 24-25)*
- *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)*
- The difference between creator and creature is vast like a candle compared to the sun.

2. **Unchangeableness-** God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, promises; yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations. This is also referred to as God's immutability.

#### **a. Evidence in Scripture**

- *Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. (Psalm 102:25-27)*
- *For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6)*
- God existed before the heavens and earth were made, and he will exist long after they have been destroyed. God causes the universe to change, but in contrast to this change he is "the same." (Grudem, p.80)

#### **b. Does God sometimes change his mind?**

- God responds differently to different situations.
- *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)*

**c. The question of God's impassibility**

- Nothing and No one compels God to do Nothing. He Feels/Acts/Thinks/etc completely INDEPENDENT. God is Free to Do All His Holy Will- Kevin Hass

**d. God is both infinite and personal**

**e. The importance of God's unchangeableness**

- If we stop for a moment to imagine what it would be like if God could change, the importance of this doctrine becomes clearer. (Grudem, p. 83)

**3. Eternity-** God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vivid, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.

**a. God is timeless in his own being.**

- *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)*
- *Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable. (Job 36:26)*
- *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)*

**b. God sees all time equally vividly.**

- *For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. (Psalm 90:4)*
- *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:8)*
- *He can remember all the detailed events of a thousand years at least as clearly as we can remember the events of yesterday. (Grudem, p.84)*
- *For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.' (Isaiah 46:9-10)*

**c. God sees events in time and acts in time.**

4. **Omnipresence**- 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.

- *Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.* (Deuteronomy 10:14)

**a. God is present everywhere.**

- There is nowhere in the entire universe, on land or sea, in heaven or in hell, where one can flee from God's presence. (Grudem, p.87)

**b. God does not have spatial dimensions.**

- God cannot be contained by any space.

- "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! (I Kings 8:27)

**c. God can be present to punish, to sustain, or to bless.**

- In summary, God is present in every part of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.

5. **Unity**- God is not divided into parts yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.

### Chapter Review Questions

6. Match each attribute with its corresponding definition.

a. Independence      b. Unchangeableness      c. Eternity      d. Omnipresence

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation glorify him and bring him joy.

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

7. Read Genesis 1. What can we learn about God and his character from just this first chapter of Scripture?

8. Without looking at any references, list as many attributes/characteristics of God that you can think of that are addressed in Scripture. After making your list, use a Bible search engine online to find references for each attribute.

9. Pick one of God's incommunicable attributes and look it up in a Bible dictionary. In what ways did your understanding of the attribute change or deepen after reading the definition?

10. Are you experiencing your inner awareness of God growing stronger and more distinct? Pray and ask God to help you increasingly know his existence is real and tangible in your life.
11. How might knowing the incommunicable attributes of God help you relate to him in prayer?
12. Which attribute of God are you especially grateful for after reading this chapter? Write a prayer thanking God for this aspect of his character.