

DTP – Second Year – GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

THEOLOGY PROPER II – THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Exod 34:5-8

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed,

"The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.

1A. DEFINITION OF "ATTRIBUTE":

1B. Generally: "an attribute is whatever He has in any way revealed as being true of Himself." Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, pg. 20.

2B. Specifically: "...the perfections which are predicated of the Divine Being in Scripture, or are visibly exercised by Him in His works of creation, providence, and redemption." Berkhof, Sys. Theo., pg. 52

3B. Conceptually: "If an attribute is something true of God, it is also something that we can conceive as being true of Him. God, being infinite, must possess attributes about which we can know nothing. An attribute, as we can know it, is a mental concept, an intellectual response to God's self-revelation. It is an answer to a question, the reply God makes to our interrogation concerning Himself." Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, pg. 21

CONCLUSION: *God has so revealed Himself that it is possible for us to perceive certain properties of His nature.*

2A. RELATIONSHIP TO THE 'BEING OF GOD.':

1B. The question: *Are the attributes/perfections of God simply describing what God does and how He functions, or do they define the Being who is acting?*

2B. The answer: "According to Scripture, God's attributes are not outside of God but are predicated of Him. God is holy, God is love... They define who it is who speaks and acts. The nature of the tree, Jesus emphasized, determines the fruit it bears. What God is determines what God says and does." Lewis and Demarest, Integrative Theology, pg. 196

3B. Illustrated:

GOD'S BEING IS NOT A COLLECTION OF ATTRIBUTES ADDED TOGETHER

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES ARE NOT ADDITIONS TO HIS REAL BEING

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES ARE GOD HIMSELF

Illustrations by Wayne Grudem, Sys. Theo., pg. 179

3A. RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER

1B. They are never conflicting:

“Nor are the attributes separate from each other within the divine being so that they could conflict with each other. The attributes all equally qualify the entirety of the divine being and each other. God is love, and God is holy. Preserving the simplicity of God's being, then, God's love is always holy love, and God's holiness is always loving holiness.” Lewis and Demarest, Int. Theo., pg. 197

2B. They are equal:

“It follows that arguments for the superiority of one attribute over another are futile. Every attribute is equally essential in the divine Being. One characteristic may be more important for our specific purposes at a particular time, but cannot be more essential than another in an uncompounded, unextended, simple, being.” Ibid. pg. 197

4A. THE QUESTION OF CLASSIFICATION

1B. The question defined: “When we come to talk about the character of God, we realize that we cannot say everything the Bible teaches us about God's character at once. We need some way to decide which aspect of God's character to discuss first, which aspect to discuss second, and so forth. In other words, we need some way to categorize the attributes of God.” Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pg. 156.

2B. It's importance: “There is the possibility that we would adopt a misleading order of attributes or that we would emphasize some attributes so much that others would not be presented properly.” Ibid.

1C. Conclusion: *A warped view of God has devastating effects upon the individual and the church!*

1C. Affirmed: “It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.” Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, pg. 10

3B. We will follow the classic formula of *incommunicable / communicable* categorization.

5A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

1B. For the individual Christian: “A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.” Ibid., pg. 10

2B. For the church: “...the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that compose the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.”
Ibid., pg. 9

1C. Confirmed: 2 Cor. 3:18

2C. Applied: Col. 3:1-4

3B. NOTE:

Re: Sanctification

Re: Counseling

4B. Relative to idolatry: “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.” Ibid., pg. 12.

5B. Conclusion: *One of the greatest needs of the contemporary evangelical church is a high view of God! A denial of a high view of God has led to many of the errors of our contemporary scene. This effects everything!!*

6A. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

1B. Asserted: John 4:24

2B. Corroborated:

1C. By Biblical names and pronouns

2C. By affirmations and illustrations:

1D. God is self-conscious: Exodus 3:14

2D. He is alive and active: e.g.:

1E. Deuteronomy 5:26; 11:7

2E. Joshua 3:10

3E. Nehemiah 9:5ff

4E. Psalms 103-107

5E. John 5:17

6E. 1 Timothy 4:10

3D. He is intelligent:

1E. 1 Sam. 2:3

2E. Job 38:1ff.

3E. Romans 11:33

4D. He is emotional:

1E. Deuteronomy 5:9

2E. Psalms 103:13; 145:8-9

3E. Romans 1:18

5D. He is purposive:

1E. Isa. 14:26-27

2E. Eph. 1:11; 3:11

6D. He is self-determined:

1E. Job 23:13

2E. Psalms 115:3

3E. Daniel 4:35

4E. Romans 9:18

7A. HIS TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

1B. Immanence:

1C. Defined: "God's presence and activity within the creation and human history."
Erickson, Concise Dict., pg. 81

2C. Evidence in nature:

1E. Job 34:14-15

2E. Col. 1:17

3C. Evidence in Human Nature

1E. Gen. 2:7

2E. Acts 17:24-28

4C. Evidence in human history:

1E. Jer. 27:5-8

2E. Rom. 13:1-2

5C. Explanation: “What is emphasized in these passages is that God is active within the regular patterns of nature. He is the God of nature, of natural law. Even what are ordinarily considered natural events should be seen as God’s doing,... God is present everywhere, not just in the spectacular or unusual occurrences. He is at work within human individuals and thus within human institutions and movements.” Erickson, Christian Theo., pg. 303

6C. Implications: *We should not focus on the extra-ordinary at the expense of His immanence. The work of a trained physician is a channel of God’s activity just as a miraculous healing in response to prayer. This is the error in some Charismatic circles.*

2B. Transcendence:

1C. Defined: “God’s otherness or separateness from the creation and the human race.” Erickson, Concise Dict., pg. 169

2C. Evidence:

1D. Ps. 113:5-6

2D. Isa. 55:8-9

3D. Isa. 57:15

4D. Jn. 8:23 (concerning God the Son)

3C. Implications:

1D. There is something higher than man. “Man is not the highest good in the universe, or the highest measure of truth and value. Good, truth, and value are not determined by the shifting flux of this world and human opinion. There is something which gives value to man from above. The value of man is not that he is the highest product of the evolutionary process thus far, but that the supreme eternal being has made man in His own image. It is not man’s estimation of himself, but the judgment of the holy God that gives man value.” Erickson, Christian Theo., p. 317

2D. “God can never be completely captured in human concepts. This means that all of our doctrinal ideas, helpful and basically correct though they may be, cannot fully exhaust God’s nature. He is not limited to our understanding of Him. Nor can our forms of worship or styles of church architecture give full expression to what God is. There is no way in which we humans can adequately represent or approach God.” Ibid.

HOWEVER:

3D. “Our salvation is not our achievement. Fellowship with God is not attained by our making our way up to God. That is impossible. We are not able to raise ourselves to God’s level by fulfilling His standards for us. Even if we were able to do so, it still would not be our accomplishment. The very fact that we know what He expects of us is a matter of His self-revelation, not our discovery. Even apart from the additional problem of sin, then, fellowship with God would be strictly a matter of His gift to us.” Ibid.

POINT:

4D. “There will always be a difference between God and man. The gap between us is not merely a moral and spiritual disparity which originated with the fall. It is metaphysical, stemming from creation. Even when redeemed and glorified, we will still be renewed human beings. We will never become God. He will always be God and we will always be humans, so that there will always be a transcendence. Salvation consists in God’s restoring us to what He intended us to be, not elevating us to what He is.” Ibid., pp 317-18

5D. “Reverence is appropriate in our relationship with God. Some worship, rightfully stressing the joy and confidence that the believer has in relationship to a loving heavenly Father, goes beyond that point to an excessive familiarity treating him as an equal, or worse yet, as a servant. If we have grasped the fact of the divine transcendence, however, this will not happen. While there are room and need for enthusiasm of expression, and perhaps even an exuberance, that should never lead to a loss of respect. There will always be a sense of awe and wonder, of what Rudolf Otto called the mysterium tremendum. Although there are love and trust and openness between us and God, we are not equals. He is the almighty, sovereign Lord. We are His servants and followers. This means that we will submit our wills to God; we will not try to make His will conform to ours.” Ibid., p 318

6D. “We will look for genuinely transcendent working by God. Thus we will not expect that only those things which can be accomplished by natural means will come to pass. While we will use every available technique of modern learning to accomplish God’s ends, we will never cease to be dependent upon His working. We will not neglect prayer for His guidance or for His special intervention. Thus, for example, Christian counseling will not differ from other types of counseling (naturalistic or humanistic) only in that it is preceded by brief prayer. There will be the anticipation that God will, in response to faith and prayer, work in ways that could not be predicted or produced solely on the basis of natural factors.” Ibid.

8A. INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

1B. Self-existence

1C. Exodus 3:14

2C. Psalm 36:9

3C. John 5:26

2B. Infinite

1C. Eternal

1D. Gen. 21:33

2D. Ps 90:1-2; 102:12

3D. 1 Tim. 1:17

2C. Omnipresent (cf. Immensity)

1D. 1Kings 8:27 (cf. V. 30)

2D. Ps. 139:7-10

3D. Jer. 23:23-24

4D. Acts 17:27

3C. Omniscient

1D. Ps. 33:13-15; 139:1-6

2D. Matt. 6:8

3D. Rom. 11:33

4D. Hebrews 4:13

4C. Omnipotent (qualified by the totality of His Being)

1D. Ex. 6:3

2D. Is. 40:28

3D. Dan. 3:17

4D. Matt. 19:26

5D. Rev. 11:17

3B. Immutable (most of these statements are made relative to God's covenant fidelity)

1C. Num. 23:19

2C. Ps. 33:11

3C. Mal. 3:6

4C. 2 Tim. 2:13

5C. Titus 1:2

6C. Heb. 6:18

4B. Incomprehensible

1C. Job 11:7-9

2C. Rom. 11:33-36

9A. COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

1B. Perfection

1C. Job 37:16

2C. Ps. 18:30

3C. Matt. 5:48

2B. Holiness

1C. Lev. 11:44; 19:2

2C. Ps. 89:35; 99

3C. Isa. 6:3; 57:15

4C. Matt. 6:9

5C. 1 Pet. 1:15-16

3B. Justice (righteousness)

1C. Ezra 9:15

2C. Dan. 9:14

3C. John 17:25

4C. Rom. 1:17; 3:21ff

4B. Grace

1C. Merciful Love

1D. Deu. 4:31

2D. Neh. 9:17, 19, 27

3D. Ps. 52:8

4D. Isa. 49:15

5D. Jer. 31:3

6D. Jn. 3:16

2C. Gracious beneficence

1D. Ps. 25:8

2D. Hos. 3:5

3D. Matt. 19:17

3C. Restraint

1D. Num. 14:18

2D. Neh. 9:17

3D. Ps. 86:15; 103:8

4D. Rom. 2:4

5D. 1 Pet. 3:20

5B. Fidelity (Trueness, Steadfastness, Reliability)

1C. Ex. 34:6

2C. 2 Sam. 2:6

3C. Jn. 1:17

4C. 1 Cor. 1:9

5C. 1 Thess. 1:9

6C. Heb. 10:23

7C. 1 Jn. 1:9