

God's Otherness

Holiness is God's overarching attribute. All of His other attributes originate from His Holiness. God's holiness is the rock from which all His other attributes pour forth. Our problem is, we have become so familiar with God that we have lost sight of His Holiness. We talk of His Love, His Grace, His Mercy, His Peace but we don't sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" like the Church of old. All of the teachings about God being our Father, about Jesus being our brother, about the Holy Spirit intimately living within us has resulted in our thinking of God as just another member of our family.

While much of this is good, even Biblical, we can go too far...and we have. We take for granted that He will always be there, in the same way we assume our parents are. We get angry with Him and scream at Him because we know He will let it slide, which is the way we might treat our spouse, children or siblings. I have heard from many Christians that, "It's OK to yell at God. He already knows how you feel. You're just being honest." These Christians epitomize our ignorance of His holiness. If we had even the slightest hint of understanding the holiness of God, we would never do these things.

Others try to grasp God's holiness by comparing it to something they know. Too many people think of God as someone who happens to be better than the greatest person. We need to recall the quote from Tozer: understanding God's holiness is not "thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered."

Here is the proper way to think about Him: There is an essential difference between God and us.

We cannot make up for this by simply thinking bigger. God is something else. He is an "other." He is other than anything we have experienced or known. Not different, but other. I may be different from you in many ways, maybe even in every way. Yet I am not an "other" and neither are you. We are still the same, just different. Not with God. He might be the same as us in many ways and yet He is still an "other."

Sam Storms reminds us, "The holiness of God only secondarily refers to His moral purity, His righteousness of character. It primarily points to His infinite otherness. To say that God is holy is to say that He is transcendently separate. Holiness is not one attribute among many. It

is not like grace or power or knowledge or wrath. Everything about God is holy. Each attribute partakes of divine holiness.”

*“To whom would you liken Me
And make Me equal and compare Me,
That we would be alike? – Isaiah 46:5*

*“Remember the former things long past,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like Me, - Isaiah 45:9*

*“These things you have done and I kept silence;
You thought that I was just like you;
I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes. – Psalm 50:21*

EXERCISE 1

Q1: God's Holiness is not only about His M _____ P _____, but especially about His S _____.

Q2: To be Holy is to be set apart. God's separateness is not simply that He is set apart but that He is "O _____".

Q3: Holiness is God's overarching A _____. Every other A _____ is connected to and subservient to His Holiness.

Take the best person in the world. Remove all his/her flaws. Add in a collection of the best aspects of every other person ever. You still aren't close to having someone like God. Multiply that person by one hundred, one thousand, one billion, and God is still miles above. God is someone unlike anyone in Creation. He alone is God.

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Knowledge of the Possible

God is not only knowledgeable of the things that exist, but He also knows about all nonexistent things. Many possible creatures have not been created. Many possible situations have not occurred. God knows about every one of them.

That may seem like a lot to know! It is for finite humans such as we are, but for God, it is what He is. We can understand God's knowledge of all things that exist. However, when it comes to His knowledge of all things that are possible and yet have never or will never exist, our minds cannot comprehend this. Isn't our God awesome?! It is comforting to know that we have a God who is beyond our comprehension. Personally, I wouldn't want to worship a god whom I could fully understand. I recognize that God is too great for me ever to fully wrap my mind around.

Since we are discussing things that are possible but never existed, it is foolishness to think we can know all aspects of these things. We are entering into a place of philosophy rather than concrete truths. Yet it is important for us to take this trip if we are to grasp a little of the extent of God's Omniscience. We can never enter into the mind of God to understand the things of God. Only His Spirit can do this (1 Corinthians 2:11). Even so, we will attempt to make some logical deductions based on our current knowledge of God. While we cannot know the extent of all possible things, for the sake of discussion, I will break these things down into two categories: things and actions.

Regarding the things that don't exist, God knows each one. Recognizing that God knows what is best, He has created all things towards that end. God could have created things differently, but He knew that making humans with three arms would not be best. He could have made an animal that followed humans around and did everything they were asked, but God knew that would not be best. He could have created a creature that had seven eyes and could hear all frequencies of the sound spectrum but He knew that would not be best.

Regarding actions that have never occurred, God knows each one. He knows what didn't happen when you fell and almost hit your head. He knows what didn't happen when David first saw Bathsheba on the roof. He knows what didn't happen when America was deciding whether to break away from the British Empire. God knows each action that could have occurred but didn't.

Our logic tells us that if God knows what is best, then He will make that happen. If any of these nonexistent things would have made things better, He would have created them. If any of these nonexistent actions would have made things better, He would have enabled them. He has not because He knows where these would lead and that they would not lead to a better place but to a worse one. Therefore, in His Omniscience, He has seen them, analyzed their impact and determined that they would be worse for eternity than had He allowed them to exist.

If God does not know about every possible thing or action, then there is a chance that something could have made things better. This would mean that God did not know this and is therefore not Omniscient. If there was something God could have allowed to exist that would have made eternity better or brought Himself more glory and didn't, it means that He did not have enough knowledge to make the proper decisions regarding Eternity and His Glory. Instead of saying God is Omniscient, we would have to say that He is the most knowledgeable of all that exists. That is very different from Omniscient and it lowers Him from God to simply superior.

If God is to be Omniscient, He must know about all possible things, even if they never existed or never will exist.

EXERCISE 2

Q1: God knows about things that are N _____ as well as things that exist.

Q2: T _____ and A _____ are two categories of the Possible of which we can know God has complete knowledge.

Q3: God would have created something that currently doesn't exist if He knew that it would make things for the B _____ in eternity or brought Him more G _____.

Q4: For God to be O _____, He must know everything that is P _____.

CHAPTER EXERCISE

*He determines the number of the stars
and calls them each by name.*

*Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit. – Psalm 147:4-5*

God has determined the number of stars that exist. He knows each one intimately, meaning He knows every aspect of each one – their size, their weight, the number of atoms, the cracks on their surfaces, the time of their creation and every other detail. His knowledge is infinite.

Memorize Psalm 147:4-5

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Therefore, God cannot learn since He is Omniscient and already knows everything. God cannot become better since He is already Perfect. God cannot become weak since He is Omnipotent. God cannot do evil since He is Good. God cannot break His promises since He is Faithful. God cannot go against His Word since He is True. This concept is true for every attribute of God.

Omnipotence cannot mean the ability to do illogical things. When we describe God's Omnipotence, we say, "He is all-powerful", "He can do anything", and "Nothing is impossible". Yet when we say these things, we are talking about His ability to do things that are rational and logical. Omnipotence cannot mean the ability to do something irrational or illogical. It would remove all significance from the word. In order for the word Omnipotence to have meaning, it must mean something real. The ability to do anything logical and rational, regardless of how unlikely or difficult, is the proper understanding of Omnipotent.

Examples of Things God Cannot Do

God Cannot Deny Himself

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. – 2 Timothy 2:13

Even if God wanted to go against Himself and do something that would be opposed to what He is, He cannot do it. It is like trying to place similar poles of a magnet together. They repel each other. No matter how hard you might try, you cannot force those two poles to merge. God must be what He is.

Therefore, since God is faithful, He will always be faithful. If love is due, He will give love. If justice is due, He will dispense it. God is what He is. Nothing we can do will change Him. Therefore, God cannot deny Himself. He cannot be something He is not. He will not do something that goes against what He is. This does not make Him less than Omnipotent.

God Cannot Lie

in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago – Titus 1:2

so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. – Hebrews 6:18

Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). God is Truth (John 3:33). Deception is evil but God is Good. God has commanded us not to provide false witness for it would be immoral. God is the decider of what is moral for He Himself is Moral. It is impossible and illogical for God to lie. It is something Satan and the demons do. It is something that human beings do. Lying is possible for immoral beings. However, lying goes against God's attributes of being Truth and being Moral. God cannot do something that is against His attributes, what He is. To imply that God is not omnipotent because He cannot lie is to misunderstand what Omnipotence is.

God Cannot Tempt

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. – James 1:13

The Goodness of God does not allow Him to be tempted by evil. It repulses God to see evil. It in no way seduces Him or causes Him to stumble. Nor will He use evil to cause us to stumble. God tests us in order that we might become stronger. He allows tribulation so we might become more faithful. Yet, He never tempts us, for evil is outside God's ability. He does allow temptation to come to us but He also promises a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13) and a deliverance (Matthew 6:13). Temptation is outside of the character of God.

To say God is less than Omnipotent because He cannot tempt or be tempted, would be a twisting of the term to make it mean something it does not mean. Omnipotence is not changed because God cannot do something that is against His nature.

God Cannot Sin

And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." – Isaiah 6:3

God is Holy. By definition, this means there is no sin in Him. He is incapable of sin. It is against His attributes. God is Holy, Good and Just. Sin is opposed to these. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to sin.

God hates sin. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists several of the sins God hates: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, murder of the innocent, hearts that devise wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness, and one who spreads strife among brothers.