

The Attributes of God

Introduction

Gregory of Nazianzus wrote this about God: "Holding everything together in Himself, He possesses being, neither beginning nor ending. He is like a kind of boundless and limitless sea of being, surpassing all thought and time and nature."

i The Uniqueness of God

God is unique.

He is self-existent. He exists just because He is God (Genesis 1:1, Exodus 3:14). He is the one who is, who has life and existence in and of Himself. He is totally independent.

He alone is the creator (Revelation 4:11). All our creativity channels things already created. God's creativity creates everything out of nothing.

He is absolutely free. He is the only being in the universe who is free to do whatever He wants any old time (Psalm 115:3, Daniel 4:35).

God is therefore in a different category from everyone and everything else. He is unique, different, other.

ii Attributes of God

To help us to understand God, we can think about the attributes of God. These are characteristics such as His: independence, unchangeableness, eternity, omnipresence, unity, existence as a spirit, invisibility, omniscience, wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, love, patience, holiness, peace, righteousness, justice, jealousy, wrath, freedom, omnipotence, perfection and glory. Some attributes are communicable: we too can show them as His people. Some attributes are incommunicable: God alone can show them.

Here are two examples.

α' God's goodness, a communicable attribute

God is sheer, unfathomable goodness. Goodness characterises all He is and all He does (Psalm 119:68). He is morally good; and He does good in that He is kind to us. He is good in and of Himself. He is infinitely good. He is eternally good.

Therefore there is goodness in the world (James 1:17). He promises only good to His people (Romans 8:28-29). We see goodness exemplified perfectly in Jesus.

We should co-operate with the Holy Spirit who want us produce His fruit of goodness in us.

β' God's omnipresence, an incommunicable attribute

God is present everywhere. That can never be true of us.

God is spirit (John 4:24). He can exist in a setting where there is no space and in a setting where there is space. He transcends space. He more than fills the universe (Jeremiah 23:23-24, I Kings 8:27).

In terms of how this relates to the incarnation, Cyril of Alexandria wrote: "For although visible and a child in swaddling clothes, and even in the bosom of His virgin mother, he filled all creation as God, and was a fellow-ruler with Him who begat Him, for the Godhead is without quantity and dimension, and cannot have limits."

Conclusion

All of this should cause us to worship God. He is off the scale in literally every way. He is totally other. Nevertheless, we should pray that we will get to know Him and to enjoy Him better and better. And we should seek Him if we do not know Him at all.