

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper, Session 12, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 3

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson and his teaching on theology proper or God. This is session 12, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 3.

Let us pray. Gracious Father, we thank you that you have seen fit to reveal yourself to us in your word. Give us understanding, open hearts, willing spirits, mouths filled with thanksgiving and praise for who you are and who you are to us by covenant and oath and the blood of your son, in whose name we pray, amen.

We're studying God's attributes, specifically his incommunicable ones, that is his unique ones that have little parallel in us.

God is omniscient or all-knowing, the omniscience of God. By all-knowing or omniscient, we mean that God is limitless in knowledge and understanding. He knows all things.

Omniscience is essentially God's infinity interrelated with his knowledge. The psalmist praises God because his understanding is infinite. Psalm 147:5. The Hallel Psalms conclude the Psalter.

There's a doxology at the end of each of the books of the Psalms, but the last five or six psalms are themselves a doxology, if you will, an extended doxology, closing the fifth book of the Psalter. Psalm 147 is filled with God's attributes. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, verse 12.

Praise your God, O Zion, for he strengthens the bars of your gates. He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders.

He fills you with the finest of the wheat. He sends out his command to the earth. His word runs swiftly.

And even earlier, praise the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God, for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars. He gives to all of them their names.

Great is our Lord, Psalm 147:5, and abundant in power. His understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the humble.

He casts the wicked to the ground. Isaiah says there is no limit to God's understanding, Isaiah 40 and verse 28. Why do you say, O Jacob, verse 27 of Isaiah 40, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not grow faint or weary. His understanding is unsearchable, and I prefer ESV. God's knowledge of his creation is comprehensive, for he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens, Job 28:24. His perfect knowledge, Job 30:7, 16, includes observing from heaven all human beings and their works.

Psalm 33:13 through 15. That is a magnificent psalm. The Lord looks down from heaven.

He sees all the children of men. From where he sits enthroned, he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth. He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

The king is not saved by his great army. A warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might, it cannot be rescued.

Images of God. I try to include biblical, theological pictures of God, not especially those that don't use the words that we're investigating. For example, these images do not contain the word omniscience, but they show God's having all knowledge.

Images of God that pertain to his being all-knowing, including the first and the last. He's the first and the last, Isaiah 44:6 and 7. Bookkeeper, Psalm 139:16. He doesn't use the word, but he has the concept. And Potter, Isaiah 29:15 and 16.

According to the Bible, God knows the past, the present, and the future. In Isaiah, God asserts his deity over against idols when he affirms his ability to predict future events. Isaiah 46:9 and 10.

Remember what happened long ago. For I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and no one is like me.

I declare the end from the beginning and from long ago what is not yet done, saying my plan will take place and I will do all my will. This is often set in the context of God's mocking the idols' inability to know and do what God knows and does. Isaiah 42.

I am the Lord, verse 8. Isaiah 42:8. I am the Lord, that is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Isaiah 44. Isaiah 44:6 and 7. Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts.

I am the first and I am the last. Besides me there is no God who is like me. Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and set it before me since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid.

Have I not told you from of old and declared it, that you are my witnesses? That verse is used by the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses as proof of their being the only people of God. Oh, if they knew how to study the Bible in its literary and historical context. Is there a God beside me? There is no rock.

I know not any. All who fashioned idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know that they may be put to shame.

Who fashions a God or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble. Let them stand forth.

They shall be terrified. They shall be put to shame together. God is glorifying his name as the great God, Yahweh, who knows all things, who has all power, who can predict the future and bring it to pass by his providence, and in the context he's blasting the idols and their makers and their worshippers.

The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over with coals. He fashions it with hammers and works with it, works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry and his strength fails.

He drinks no water, and it's faint. The carpenter stretches a line. He marks it out with a pencil.

He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man with the beauty of a man to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest.

He plants a cedar and re-nourishes it. Then, it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself.

He kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also, he makes a god and worships it. He makes an idol and falls down before it.

Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half, he eats meat. He roasts it and is satisfied.

Also, he warms himself and says, aha, I am warm. I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol and falls down to it and worships it.

He prays to it and says, deliver me, for you are my god. They know not nor do they discern for he has shut their eyes so they cannot see and their hearts so they cannot understand. No one considers nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, half of it I burned in the fire.

I also baked bread on its coals. I roasted meat and have eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes. A deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, is there not a lie in my right hand? By contrast, remember these things, O Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant.

I formed you. You are my servant. O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.

I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist. Return to me for I have redeemed you. Isaiah 44 is an extensive reading that shows not only that God knows all but that his knowledge is to be seen in contrast to the ignorance of the idols and the spiritual poverty of their makers and worshippers.

God is the omniscient lawgiver and judge and no creature is hidden from him but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account, Hebrews 4:16. In context, God knew the unbelief and the disobedience of the Israelites in the wilderness and he knows what is lurking in the hearts of the professed Hebrew Christians to whom the Lord has written Hebrews and they should be careful and look into their hearts to make sure there is not unbelief or disobedience lurking there that will manifest itself in departing from the living God through Christ to a return to Judaism which was once the only true religion of God but now in rejecting Jesus, it is a false religion. God's eyes are, "everywhere, observing the wicked and the good" Proverbs 15:3. He does not merely observe external actions, quote, for the Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought, 1 Chronicles 28:9. This is bad news for sinners for the heart is more deceitful than anything else and incurable. The heart that the Lord examines and tests, Jeremiah 17:9 and 10.

The heart is deceitful and wicked above all things. Who can know it? Next verse, I, the Lord, test the hearts. He's not saying it's unknowable; he's saying it's unknowable

for evil human beings who rationalize and deceive themselves, but the Lord knows our hearts for everything is open and naked before him, Hebrews 4:13. But it can also be transformative for God's people, God's all-knowingness. It's bad news for sinners, but it can be transformative good news for his people as God's complete knowledge of our hearts, thoughts, sight, and actions may lead us to repentance, Psalm 51:4. A great psalm of confession, for I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me.

The historical, the psalm title speaks of David's great sins of adultery and murder. Against you, you only have I sinned. No, he sinned against Uriah.

He had him killed. He sinned against Bathsheba, taking her when she was another man's wife. But the Lord doesn't. David is not denying that he sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba.

He's acknowledging that ultimately all sin is sin against God. Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight and the senses and now I confess so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. God's knowledge of our very hearts, thoughts, words, and deeds may lead us to repentance.

Remembering God's infinite knowledge can also reassure us he sees, he hears, he knows, he cares, and he acts for his people. Exodus 3:7 through 10 is a great example. The Israelites had languished in slavery for generations and then we read, I have surely seen, Lord speaking, the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

I know their sufferings, and I've come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey to the place of the Canaanites and the other peoples and now behold the cry of the people of Israel has come to me and I've also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them. Come, Moses; I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. Scripture teaches that there are hidden things, Daniel 2:22, that belong to the all-knowing Lord alone, some of which he reveals that we may know him and do his will, Deuteronomy 29:29. Most importantly, this includes God's hidden wisdom in a mystery made known through his apostles in the gospel.

This wisdom, unknown apart from the revelation, concerns the crucified Christ, 1 Corinthians chapter 2. As Paul contemplates the marvel of God's gracious dealings with Jews and Gentiles, he exclaims, oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord, he's quoting Isaiah 40, or who has been his counselor, Romans 11:33 and 34. Once again, we can see some of these

attributes of God evidenced in the incarnate Christ. Jesus is also depicted with infinite knowledge for, quote, in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Colossians 2:3. Like us, his first disciples are sometimes slow to learn, but both Peter, John 21:17, and his fellows, John 16:29 and 30, confess Christ's omniscience.

Those verses may not be on the tip of our tongues, so let us look at them. John 16:29 and 30. The disciples long for a day when Jesus will speak in straightforward speech without parables, without dark sayings, and they exclaim in John 16:29, ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech.

Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you came from God. Peter, John 21.

Peter has asked about the Lord's dealings with Jesus, dealings with John. Could Peter be a little jealous? Maybe so. In any case, Jesus puts him in his place.

Peter had denied Christ three times. Jesus brings Peter through a difficult repentance, causing him to confess three times, corresponding to his three denials. Simon, son of John, John 21:15, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

Feed my lamb, Jesus says. Second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter said, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said, tend my sheep.

He said to him a third time. And that's what grieves Peter, not a shift in Greek verbs. But the third time reminds Peter of three times saying, I don't know that man.

I don't know Jesus of Nazareth. Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? He said to him, Lord, you know everything. There's the confession.

You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. So here again, we see an attribute of God ascribed to the Son of God incarnate.

God's omniscience comforts us. For he knows the details of our lives. Luke 12:7. He knows the hairs on our heads and so forth.

He knows what we need before we even ask him. Matthew 6:8. Our God is not only all-powerful and all-knowing. He is everywhere present.

He is also eternal. By eternal, we mean that the living and true God is the Lord of time. He is infinite in relationship to time.

Indeed, God exists before time. Time itself has a beginning, but God does not. Time was created by God along with the rest of the cosmos.

God is both beyond time and voluntarily enters into it to relate to us who live in it. Both Testaments ascribe this attribute to God. Moses, the author of one psalm, says in Psalm 90, and I'm going to read it again because it is so beautiful, and it is the most important proof passage pertaining to God's eternity.

From everlasting to everlasting. A prayer of Moses, the man of God. Psalm title.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You return man to dust and say, return, O children of man, for a thousand years in your sight, or as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that's renewed in the morning. In the morning, it flourishes and is renewed.

In the evening, it fades and withers, for we're brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath, we are dismayed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end like a sigh.

The years of our life are not eternal, are 70, or even by reason of strength, 80. Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us in light of your eternity and the shortness of our days, to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? Have pity on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord, our God, be upon us and establish the work of our hands.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. Paul bursts forth in praise in 1 Timothy 1:17, as we saw. Now the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honored and glorious forever and ever.

Amen. To the king eternal. Revelation recounts, quote, I am the Alpha and the Omega.

Revelation 1:8, says the Lord God, the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. Images of God that pertain to his being eternal include the first and the last, which we have read previously from Isaiah 44:6, and 7. I am the first, I am the last. The meaning is that I am the first; there's none before me.

I am the last, there's none after me. In other words, I am eternal. Scripture teaches that God is Lord over time and stands outside of it.

He is not trapped in time, but he controls it. Psalm 90, verse 4, 2 Peter 3:8, a thousand years in your sight are like a day. Yet desiring to relate to us as his time-bound creatures, God also enters into time so that he experiences before and after relationships with respect to creation.

Genesis 1:1 for creation is not eternal. Creation did not always exist. God is eternal, his creation isn't.

So, the God who stands outside of time and who creates time also relates to time because he experienced reality, I guess it would just be the Holy Trinity, before creation, he created, and then he experienced reality post-creation. We're not making him a temporal God, we're not reducing him to a deity trapped in time. We're saying he's Lord over time and yet he chooses to truly relate to time.

God also plans our salvation in eternity past, so-called, but accomplishes it and applies it in space and time. Salvation is historical. God planned to save in eternity, but he didn't save in eternity; he saved in time and space by giving the Israelites a sacrificial system.

The first six chapters of Leviticus making a way for his people to enjoy the forgiveness of sins, especially Leviticus 16, the day of atonement, and all that look forward to God's working in history in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was born a baby, grew up, lived a sinless life, died in a place of sinners, was raised again on the third day, returned to the Father, and so forth, and who will come again. Salvation is historical, for God saves in history and thus in time. The Son of God was not always incarnate but became a man at a point in time.

Thus, the pre-incarnate word, or logos, light, or phos, son, or uios, experienced the incarnation in time. And we'll never be the same again because the incarnation is permanent, as Hebrews demonstrates for us. There's a man at God's right hand, never a mere man, but the God-man.

Jesus lives in time, dies on the cross in time, rises from the dead in time, ascends in time, reigns in time, and will return in time. The Spirit is also with us in time, convicting us, drawing us, and uniting us to Christ at our conversions, which occur, you guessed it, in time. So, God relates to time.

A comparison to God's relationship to space may help. God is both transcendent and imminent with respect to space. That is, he's both beyond space and present at each point in it.

We can say he is also both transcendent and imminent, so to speak, with respect to time. As its creator, he is transcendent in terms of time. He stands outside of time and is not trapped within it.

But he also is imminent with respect to time. He truly relates to it in loving and saving us. Evangelicals debate whether this means that God is timeless or that he is everlasting.

That is the terminology the philosophers of religion use and the theologians who listen to the philosophers. The timeless view holds that God lives endlessly outside of time in the eternal present. The everlasting view holds that God exists endlessly, backward and forward, through all time.

The former says he is timelessly infinite, and the latter says that he is temporally infinite. For brief discussion, see Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God and Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God*, pages 73 to 83. For the defense of divine timelessness, see Paul Helm, *Eternal God, A Study of God Without Time*, second edition.

Helm is distinctly in the minority. For the defense of the everlasting view, see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, pages 375 to 436. I'll make no official commitments here.

Give me rather the comparison to God's transcendence and eminence with respect to space, and that God is lord of time and not trapped in it, yet genuinely relates to it, and I'm a happy camper, and I'm willing to listen to the debates before Moses affirms God's eternity. I want to repeat, as its creator, God stands outside of time and is not trapped within it. He is not a temporal being, but he also is imminent with respect to time.

He truly relates to it in loving and saving us and keeping us. Before Moses affirms God's eternity, he says, Lord, you have been our refuge in every generation, Psalm 90, in verse 1. Though our lives are transient and beset by sin, Psalm 90, verses 3 to 11, God is our keeper and protector. Therefore, Moses later prays in verse 12 of the same Psalm 90, teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts, verse 12.

Although even youths grow weary, the everlasting God does not, but gives strength to the faint, Isaiah 40:28 to 30. There are a few passages that are just so foundational to the attributes of God. That is one of them.

The Lord is the everlasting God, Isaiah says, to those Israelites who doubt his care for them, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

In fact, the all-powerful God who sits above the circle of the earth, who names the stars, knows that human beings are weak, and he empowers his people. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength. Even youths grow faint and weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.

I have heard of ultra-marathoners who run hundreds of miles in a week, preparing for gigantic races, but they don't run races of a thousand or ten thousand miles. It's impossible. No, even marvelously trained athletes cannot run forever.

Even youths shall faint and grow weary, and young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.

They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. The almighty, transcendent God who sits above the circle of the earth, and in whose sight its human inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Isaiah 40 says, is the same God who holds the lambs in his arms, who is gentle with those who are with young, lest they miscarry.

He's transcendent, and he's imminent. He's all-powerful. He's eternal, and he uses his qualities.

He puts his perfections to work, empowering his people who grow weary, no matter what condition or age they are in. We face the future with confidence in the eternal God, Romans 16:26, who simultaneously dwells, inhabits eternity, and dwells within us. What lies ahead of us is a study of God's immutability, of his changelessness, and then a quality often neglected under the incommunicable attributes is the greatness of God.

So, in our next lecture, we'll do those, and we'll begin the list of communicable attributes of God. Our God is personal, sovereign, wise, truthful, faithful, holy, righteous or just, loving, gracious, merciful, good, and it means generous, patient or long-suffering, and glorious. Lord willing, we'll do that as we continue our study of theology proper.

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