

Things That God Cannot Do!

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This study is about things that God cannot do!

My purpose is to give a perspective on a few things that will at first appear to be contradictory.

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, a young virgin, that she would have a son who would be that Holy One, and would be called the Son of God, she was assured that it would happen just as the angel had said, although Mary was astonished.

“For with God nothing will be impossible.” Luke 1:37

As a testimony to Mary’s faith and submission to God she answered:

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

“For with God nothing will be impossible.”

But there are some things that God cannot do.

Perhaps it should be stated there are some things that God will not do!

How many things can you think of that God cannot do?

God cannot:

- Deny Himself;
- Lie;
- Repent;
- Change;
- Forget mercy;
- Not punish sin;
- Know another god.

God cannot: Deny Himself

2 Tim 2:11-13

¹¹ *This is* a faithful saying:

For if we died with *Him*,
We shall also live with *Him*.

¹² If we endure,
We shall also reign with *Him*.

If we deny *Him*,
He also will deny us.

¹³ If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.

God cannot: Lie

Heb 6:13-18

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, "*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*" ¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, ¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*.

Titus 1:1-4

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, ³ but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

God cannot: Repent

Num 23:19

"God *is* not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

God cannot: Change

Malachi 3:6

"For I *am* the LORD, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

God cannot: Forget mercy

There are no less than 282 references in the Bible to God's everlasting mercy. Psalm 136 ends each of its 26 verses with the same phrase.

Psalm 136:1

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

God cannot: Not punish sin

Rom 4:5-8

⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered;*
⁸ *Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.*"

Rom 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God cannot: Know another god.

Isa 44:8

Do not fear, nor be afraid;
Have I not told you from that time, and declared *it*?
You *are* My witnesses.
Is there a God besides Me?
Indeed *there is* no other Rock;
I know not *one*."

**How do we understand these clear statements of Scripture that are apparently absolute in their meaning when the angel said:
“For with God nothing will be impossible.”**

**We need to consider the attributes of God.
An attribute is a quality or character of a being.**

This outline is based on:

God the Father, God the Son

Volume 1: *GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The Attributes of God’s Absolute Personality

The Scripture assumes the existence of God. A person must believe that ‘God is.’

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

God can be known but not fully, or exhaustively.

God reveals Himself so that we may worship Him in truth.

a. How important is it to worship in truth?

John 4:19-24

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

b. Does the truth really matter as long as a person is sincere?

Acts 17:22-23

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

We will discuss *attributes* of God and *names* of God.

c. What is an 'attribute?' An attribute is a characteristic of God that he has revealed to us in the Bible.

[Holiness, Justice, Love, Merciful, Wrath, et al.]

Attributes are perfections of God.

Names of God are very similar to attributes except they bring us closer to God.

***Jehovah* or *Yahweh* is I AM.**

***Shaddai* is the Almighty.**

And there are many more names of God.

Take the shoes off your feet; you are on holy ground.

It is most important that we understand that God is not made up of all of these 'parts' or attributes. There are no divisions in God and His attributes never are in conflict. For example, to say that God is love is not contradicted by saying that God is wrath. Both love and wrath are moral attributes of God.

God is a person.

This study is designed to look at the attributes of God that belong to His personality.

d. Is it possible for God to change?

If God could change it would have to be for better or for worse else it would not be change. If God could change for the better then He is not God now. If He could change for the worse He would stop being God.

e. What does the *immutability* of God mean?

Psalm 90:1-2

Lord, You have been our dwelling place* in all generations.

² Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God.

Psalm 102:25-27

²⁵ Of old You laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but You will endure;
Yes, they will all grow old like a garment;
Like a cloak You will change them,
And they will be changed.

²⁷ But You *are* the same,
And Your years will have no end.

One of God's great names is Jehovah or I AM.

That means God is always the same.

God is not I WAS or I WILL BE; God is I AM!

We have already looked at James 1:17 and Hebrews 13:8

f. How then, do you explain the references in the Bible where it clearly says that God repented? To repent is to change.

Gen 6:1-8

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ² that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.

³ And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." ⁴ There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown.

⁵ Then the LORD* saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

Jonah and Nineveh.

Jonah 3:1-4

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey *in extent*. ⁴And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

God never changes in His character or being but His dealings with people change. Do we worship God today in the same manner as the Jews of the Old Testament?

The Bible uses language of accommodation in which what is written is at times from the perspective of man. In Jonah what we observe is from man's perspective. It appeared that God changed His mind about destroying Nineveh in 40 days. A careful study of the Book of Jonah will show that Jonah knew all along that God would spare Nineveh. That's why Jonah tried to run away and not preach to Nineveh.

- g. Have you heard of "Openness Theology" or "Process Theology?"
- h. What is the *omnipresence* of God? [Omni=all + presence]

God is Spirit so physical parts do not limit Him.

Omnipresence means that all of God is everywhere all the time.

"God is not somewhere because God is everywhere." Charles Alexander

We must be careful to make the distinction between the omnipresence of God and pantheism. Pantheism says that everything is God. The Bible says that God is and that God created everything. Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139:7-12

- i. What is the *omniscience* of God? [Omni=all + science=knowledge]

"Did it ever occur to you that nothing ever occurred to God?" Mike Dowling

God knows everything in perfect way. Psalm 147:4-5; Proverbs 15:3; Matthew 10:29-30; Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrews 4:13; Acts 15:18

J. I. Packer in “Knowing God” gives the illustration of the difference between man’s knowledge and God’s knowledge. Imagine that you are watching a parade go by. You see it coming and watch it as it goes by until it passes. Now imagine that you were on a high balcony and could see the entire parade at one time.

j. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

In our world today knowledge is doubling every 18 months. The amount of information accumulated in computers can be considered knowledge. But wisdom is the correct application of knowledge and I don’t believe the world in general is getting any wiser.

“Wisdom is seeing things as they really are.”

“Good judgment comes from experience; experience comes from poor judgment.”

Wisdom and knowledge are not the same.
Some of the least educated people have the most wisdom.

Lloyd-Jones says that in knowledge you have the mind acting apart from the will, whereas where wisdom is concerned you have the mind acting in subservience to the will. So wisdom is the correct application of knowledge.

The Bible emphasizes the wisdom of God.
God applies His knowledge, which is infinite.

You see the wisdom of God in creation in its design and harmony.

But the greatest manifestation of the wisdom of God is seen in redemption.
1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

k. What is the *omnipotence* of God? [Omni=all + power]

The omnipotence of God means that He brings everything to pass that He wills.

Ephesians 1:11

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

The will of God is sovereign. In other words it is not determined by anything but God Himself. The will of God is the expression of His Lordship; His absolute being.

God's will is never arbitrary.

God's will is always in perfect harmony with His attributes.

God's will is thought of as *decretive* and *prescriptive*. His decretive will is what He declares that He will do. His prescriptive will is what He prescribes for us to do.

The sovereign will and power of God is seen in creation, in salvation, and in providence. Ephesians 1:19-20; Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28

l. What is the *blessedness* of God?

The Bible speaks of the absolute perfection of God. There is nothing better, higher, or greater than God. 1 Timothy 1:11 God delights and rejoices in Himself. God is perfectly and absolutely self-sufficient. Acts 17:25

m. What is the *glory* of God? Glory is the way the Bible describes the greatness, the splendor, and the majesty of God. The glory of God is seen in Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

The word GLORY, Greek: *doxa*, primarily an opinion, and hence the honor resulting from the quality of that opinion. (The O.T. word for glory in Hebrew is *kabod*, from a verb that means weight, to honor.)

We have looked at **The Attributes of God's Absolute Personality.**

The next study will take up the moral attributes of God.

“Unless we are at this moment more anxious than ever before to fall at His feet, to yield ourselves utterly and unreservedly to Him, realizing that the greatest privilege that has ever come to us is to worship Him and to commune with Him we have spent our time in vain.”

God the Father, God the Son, *GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Volume 1, page 68

The Moral Attributes of God

When we considered **The Attributes of God's Absolute Personality**, we were discussing attributes that may only be applied to God. For example, only God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. No other person may be correctly said to have these attributes.

The **Moral Attributes of God** are said to be *communicable* attributes of God. To some degree these attributes may be found in men and women.

a. What would you say is the chief attribute of God? Leviticus 11:44

While the attributes of God are never in conflict it appears from the Scripture that *holiness* is the chief attribute of God. Holiness is separation from sin. God is entirely separated from sin and holy.

Every instance recorded in the Bible where a man comes into the presence of God that man is overwhelmed with a sense of the holiness of God and the man's sinfulness. Read the accounts of Moses, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Peter and Paul, et al.

The High Priest wore a turban when he stood before the people that had a plate of pure gold and engraved with "HOLINESS TO THE LORD." Exodus 28:36-38

b. What was the purpose of the law? Roman 3:20

All aspects of the law {moral, ceremonial, civil} were to create in the minds of the people that God is holy and God's people are a separate people.

The sacrificial system, dietary laws, forbidding marriage to idolaters, etc. were all in some way related to the holiness of God and the separation of His people.

c. Where is the holiness of God most powerfully seen?
2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:32

When Jesus, the Christ, was made to be sin {placed in the rank and order of sinners}, even though He was personally sinless, God did not spare His own Son. God is holy and sin must be punished. Sin is not only forgiven it is punished.

d. How should we approach God and how should we use His name?
Hebrews 12:28; Exodus 20:7

When someone says; "Dear God," or "Oh my God" is he or she blaspheming His name?

- e. What was the problem in 2 Samuel 6?
- f. God's holiness and the fact of our sin demand atonement.
How could God be accused of not being just? Romans 3:21-26

The next moral attribute of God is the *righteousness* or the *justice* of God.

- g. What is righteousness or justice?

It is God's holiness manifested in His dealings with us.
- h. What God does is "right." Why?
- i. The *wrath* of God is due to His hatred of sin and flows from His justice.
How does someone come to be under the wrath of God?
Romans 3:23; John 3:36; Ephesians 2:3
- j. What happens when a person emphasizes the *goodness* or the *love* of God before they consider His holiness and righteousness?
- k. How is God's goodness manifested? Matthew 5:45
- l. What is the difference between God's goodness and His *grace*?
Ephesians 1 & 2; Titus 3:1-8
- m. May we make a distinction between grace and *mercy*?

Someone said that **Grace** has to do with Guilt and **Mercy** has to do with **Misery**.

- n. How is the *longsuffering* of God seen? Romans 2:4

God's *faithfulness* is closely related to His righteousness and justice.

- o. What does God's faithfulness mean? Isaiah 55:11
God can be trusted to do what He says.
1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 John 1:9

While it is necessary to deal with the attributes of God as separate qualities for intellectual understanding, we must remember not to put one attribute against another. God's love is a holy love and is therefore not in conflict with His wrath against sin.