

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 4 – The Communicable Attributes of God

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Question 8)

II. A Review: Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes

A way of thinking about God’s attributes is by dividing them into “incommunicable” and “communicable” attributes.

“Incommunicable” means attributes that are not *communicated* or shared with people. We covered this last time.

“Communicable” means attributes that are *communicated* or shared with people. That’s what we’ll cover today.

III. The Spirituality of God

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

As spirit, he has no body or form. In the marvelous words of the Westminster Divines,

“There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory” (WCF 2.1).

Communicable: We can “worship him...in spirit,” because there is a non-physical side to us. And this spirit/soul is brought to life in Christ (Eph 2:5) and united with Christ (Rom 6:3–4).

IV. Intellectual Attributes

A. The Knowledge of God

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (Isa 40:12)

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. (Isa 40:26)

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? (Isa 40:27)

Communicable: For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge (2 Pet 1:5); And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

B. The Wisdom of God

God's "wisdom" is his perfection in knowing and choosing the best means to accomplish his purposes in a way that brings him the most glory:

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!....For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33, 36).

It is his wisdom that is behind all his works:

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24).

Communicable: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Prov 9:10)

C. The Truthfulness of God

God's "truthfulness" is both the perfection of his being fully true without any trace of falsehood or deceit and also his being true in the sense of perfectly faithful.

Being opposed to any falsehood or deceit, we know

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Num 23:19).

Communicable: Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Eph 4:25)

V. Moral Attributes

A. The Goodness of God

God’s “goodness” is his perfection of being benevolent toward all things and especially his people. It is one of the dominant themes in our Bibles, seen within the first page as “God saw” that each act of his creation “was good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and the whole of it “was very good” (Gen 1:31). In the Psalms he is praised, because “You are good and do good” (Ps 119:68), and “The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made” (Ps 145:9).

Communicable: So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

B. The Love of God

Herman Bavinck: “The goodness of God appears as love when it not only conveys certain benefits but God himself.”⁷

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

This love first existed within the Trinity itself, for “the Father loves the Son” (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17); and the Son loves the Father (John 14:31). For this reason, the Father seeks the glory of the Son (Phil 2:9–11), and the Son seeks the glory of the Father (John 17:1), and the Spirit seeks the glory of the Son (John 16:14).

⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:215.

There was an endless giving and receiving of love between the Father, Son, and Spirit for untold ages before the first angel or person inhabited the creation.

But this love was extended to us as well even in eternity past:

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph 1:4-5)

And redeemed us:

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)

Communicable: 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:1-2)

C. The Holiness of God

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa 6:3)

Holy means “separateness,” set apart from all that is unholy and set apart *for God*.

Sinclair Ferguson brings out this means a radical *devotion* to God—a devotion first within God himself but also to be expressed in us.

Communicable: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:16)

VI. Attributes of Sovereignty

The Will of God

The will of God means what God determines and desires, what he chooses within himself.

Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. (Ps 135:6)

Here we can divide it into his DECRETIVE WILL and his PRECEPTIVE WILL (or his HIDDEN WILL and his REVEALED WILL).

Communicable: We are to do his will (Matt 7:21), but of course we are under his HIDDEN/DECRETIVE WILL also and cannot help but be and do according to this will.

VII. Attributes of Perfection

All the attributes of God discussed...are summed up in his perfection....In speaking of God's perfection here, we are not referring exclusively to his moral perfection (i.e., his goodness or holiness), but mean that God is the sum total of all his perfections, the One than whom no greater, higher, or better can exist either in thought or reality. In other words, God fully answers to the idea of God.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*⁸

"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deut 32:4)

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Ps 27:4)

Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah (Ps 24:10)

Communicable: You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:48)

VIII. And so we worship him...and trust him!

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; (1 Chr 16:29)

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they

⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:250.

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. (Isa 40:29-31)