

## How different God is

Perhaps more correctly we should say how different we are from God. After all he was here first and we are his creatures rather than the other way around. The aspects of God's character that we do not share are sometimes referred to as the *incommunicable* attributes of God. However in some ways even the incommunicable attributes of God's are reflected to a degree by each of us. For instance we know that God is unchangeable, whereas we change. There are some aspects of our characters that remain largely unchanged, our identities, many of our personality traits and our long term goals stay the same over many years. Looking at another attribute; God is eternal and though we have not always existed, we will live with him for all eternity in heaven.

In the Bible, a person's name is frequently a description of their character. Likewise the names of God in the Bible, of which there are many, reflect some aspect of his character. The Bible also uses many other expressions that we can understand also to describe some part of the character of God. There are names and expressions that are taken from the creation around us (for example a lion, an eagle or the sun), there are some that are taken from human experience (for example a bridegroom, remembering or anger) and there are those metaphorically about the human body when the Bible speaks about God's face, hands, foot and so on. All of these serve to remind us that all of creation reveals something about God to us.

The first way in which God is different to us is that he is *independent*. God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything. This attribute of God is sometimes called his self-existence or his *aseity* (taken from the Latin words *a se*, meaning "from himself"). The Bible teaches that God does not need any part of creation to exist or for any other reason. He is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. Paul, speaking to the men in Athens, says,

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. **Acts 17<sup>24</sup> & <sup>25</sup>**.

Nobody has ever contributed anything to God that did not first come from God. It has sometimes, wrongly been thought that God created mankind because he was in some ways lonely and needed fellowship. However, there is perfect fellowship within the Trinity and God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in such perfect unity that the thought that God needs anything outside of this to sustain himself is totally alien from what is taught in the Bible (**John 17<sup>5, 24</sup>**).

Even though God is totally independent, we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy. We may be tempted to think that we have no significance in the eyes of God if he needs nothing, yet God has determined that we would be meaningful to him - this is the definitive definition of significance. God speaks of us like this, "every one who is called by my name, who I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (**Isaiah 43<sup>7</sup>**). Although God did not have to make us, he freely chose to do so in order that we would glorify him (**Ephesians 1<sup>11</sup> & <sup>12</sup>** and **Revelation 4<sup>11</sup>**).

Another attribute of God's character that is incommunicable is *unchangeableness*, which is sometimes known as his *immutability*. God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes and promises. James reminds his readers that all good gifts come from God "with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (**James 1<sup>17</sup>**). Likewise the psalmist says, "You are the same and your years have no end"

(**Psalm 102<sup>27</sup>**). God himself when referring to his own qualities of patience, long-suffering and mercy, declares, “For I the Lord do not change” (**Malachi 3<sup>6</sup>**).

God does not change but he does act and feel emotions as well as responding to different situations. For example in the book of Jonah we see God responding to changing circumstances. “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil that he said that he would do to them; and he did not do it.” (**Jonah 3<sup>10</sup>**)

God has no beginning and no end. He has no succession of moments in his own being and he sees all time equally vividly. God is infinite and unlimited; time does not limit God in any way because he is *eternal*. This attribute is related to God's unchangeableness in that time does not change God. God never learns anything that is new to him, nor does he forget anything. He knows all things in our past, present and future and knows that all equally vividly. God is timeless in his own being. He always was and he always will be (**Psalm 90<sup>2</sup>**).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega”, says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” **Revelation 1<sup>8</sup>**

Even though God stands apart from time and sees all of history at once, it is evident from the Bible and from our own experience that he sees events and acts within time. The whole Bible is a record of how God acts in time and how he intervenes in the affairs of mankind to bring salvation to them. He created time and uses it for his own purposes.

Just as God is unlimited in respect of time, he is also unlimited with respect to space. He is everywhere at once or *omnipresent* (the Latin word *omni* means “all”). God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being.

Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord, Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. **Jeremiah 23<sup>23&24</sup>**

Though God is fully present everywhere, he chooses to reveal himself in different ways and for different reasons, for instance he may be present to sustain, to bless or to judge. He may be in a “still small voice” or in his terrifying glory.