The Attributes of God (Part 1)

Rocky Wyatt | September 24, 2017



"In one of his letters to Erasmus, Luther said, 'Your thoughts of God are too human.' "

Pink



Psalm 50:21

These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.

Job 11:7-9

Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth



When we turn our thoughts to God's eternity, His immateriality, His omnipresence, His almightiness, our minds are overwhelmed... But the incomprehensibility of the divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful strivings to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His word Pink



Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity



C.H. Spurgeon

Men imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather that actuated by principle. They suppose that His omnipotence is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's 'free will' and reduce him to a 'machine.' They lower the all-efficacious atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere 'remedy,' which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed to; and they enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an 'offer' of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.



Pink

The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form 'gods' out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a 'god' out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A 'god' whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt.



Classification of the Attributes of God

Theologians, both medieval and Reformed, have rather uniformly drawn up their lists of divine attributes and then have classified them under either natural and moral, absolute and relative, original and derived, active and inactive, intransitive and transitive, or—and these are the most common classifications—incommunicable and communicable attributes.



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Classification of the Attributes of God

The incommunicable attributes emphasize the absolute distinctness of God, his transcendent greatness and exalted nature. Such attributes have little or no analogy in God's creatures. The communicable attributes find some reflection or analogy in human beings created in God's image. They indicate the immanence of God in relation to creatures. Yet all the attributes are God's attributes; the distinction between God and man, between Creator and creature, is always basic.



Tyndale Bible Dictionary

Incommunicable Attributes

God's incomprehensibility is sometimes included in lists of his attributes. It seems preferable to regard it as a description of human inability to understand God fully. Incomprehensibility is therefore not an attribute, although it is a given in every discussion of God.

Tyndale Bible Dictionary.



Psalm 139:6

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Psalm 145:3

Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:28

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.



Isaiah 55:8-9

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.



Romans 11:33–36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.



Unity

God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.

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This attribute stresses both the oneness and the unicity of God, the fact that He is numerically one and that as such He is unique. It implies that there is but one Divine Being, that from the nature of the case there can be but one, and that all other beings exist of and through and unto Him.



Unity

1 Kings 8:60

so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else.

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

Mark 12:29

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;



John 17:3

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy.

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This attribute of God is sometimes called his selfexistence or his aseity (from the Latin words a 'se' which mean 'from himself').



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John 5:26

For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;

Acts 17:24-25

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;



Exodus 3:14

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'

Job 41:11

Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.

Psalm 50:10-12

For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains.



God's being is also something totally unique. It is not just that God does not need the creation for anything; God could not need the creation for anything. The difference between the creature and the Creator is an immensely vast difference, for God exists in a fundamentally different order of being. It is not just that we exist and God has always existed; it is also that God necessarily exists in an infinitely better, stronger, more excellent way...



...The difference between God's being and ours is more than the difference between the sun and a candle, more than the difference between the ocean and a raindrop, more than the difference between the arctic ice cap and a snowflake, more than the difference between the universe and the room we are sitting in: God's being is qualitatively different. No limitation or imperfection in creation should be projected onto our thought of God. He is the Creator; all else is creaturely. All else can pass away in an instant; he necessarily exists forever.



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God's Immutability ...expresses his changelessness and his faithfulness to himself, to his decrees, promises, and works. He remains forever the same true God who undergoes no change from within or from anything outside himself.

Tyndale Bible Dictionary



It is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises. In virtue of this attribute He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. Even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But in God, as the absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.



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Psalm 102:25-27

Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.

James 1:17

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.



Hebrews 6:17

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,

Psalm 33:11

The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.



Malachi 3:6

For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

Hebrews 13:8–9

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.



Immutability: God's Purposes are Fulfilled

Matthew 25:34

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.



and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;



Immutability: God's Purposes are Fulfilled

Ephesians 3:11

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

2 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.

1 Peter 1:20

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.



Immutability: God is Unchanging in His Promises

Numbers 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 it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

1 Samuel 15:29

Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.



Immutability: God is Unchanging in His Promises

Isaiah 46:9-11

Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.



The divine immutability should not be understood as implying immobility, as if there were no movement in God. It is even customary in theology to speak of God as actus purus, a God who is always in action. The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their life with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His Being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises. The purpose to create was eternal with Him, and there was no change in Him when this purpose was realized by a single eternal act of His will...



...The incarnation brought no change in the Being or perfections of God, nor in His purpose, for it was His eternal good pleasure to send the Son of His love into the world. And if Scripture speaks of His repenting, changing His intention, and altering His relation to sinners when they repent, we should remember that this is only an anthropopathic way of speaking. In reality the change is not in God, but in man and in man's relations to God.



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Genesis 6:6-7

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

1 Samuel 15:10-11

Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.



Jonah 3:10

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.



Exodus 32:9-14

The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people...



... "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' " So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.



God's Immutability Challenged

First, where, upon a superficial reading, the biblical text seems to suggest that God did in fact alter his course of action away from a previously declared course of action, one should understand that his "new course" is only his settled, immutably certain response—in keeping with the principles of conduct respecting himself which he himself enunciates in Jeremiah 18:7-10—to a change in the human response to his holy laws:



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God's Immutability Challenged

Jeremiah 18:7–10

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. "Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.



1. God always acts the same way toward moral evil and the same way toward moral good. In his every reaction to men's responses to him, the immutable moral fixity of his character is evident. If men and women alter their relations to him, he will always respond in a manner consistent with his immutably holy character. This being true, God does not deem it necessary to attach to every promise he makes or to every prediction of judgment he issues the conditions for human weal or woe. They are always to be understood as in force, though they may be unstated. They are always operative so that whatever men do, God responds accordingly. And if the biblical interpreter does not realize this—that these conditions are operative even though unstated—he may conclude that God has broken a promise or has failed to carry out a predicted judgment



2. God being not only the God of infinite holiness but also the God of infinite goodness and compassion, we should not be surprised to read that, in reaction to the evil of those who refuse to obey him, he could be grieved that he had made them. In fact it would be strange if we did not hear him say that their sin and evil were a source of great grief to him. God himself declared, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek. 33:11). Just as, because of his holiness, God cannot look upon man's sin with acceptance (Hab. 1:13), so also, because of his compassion, he cannot look upon the sinner's doom with pleasure (Ezek. 33:11). The creature's obedience always brings him joy; the creature's sin always grieves him, even to the point that he can declare that he regrets that he made those who disched him



3. With regard to God's threat to destroy Israel and to "begin anew" with Moses, while God's anger against Israel was in no sense feigned, he knew that his threat to destroy Israel and to make Moses into a great nation was in no danger of ever being actualized. His words to Moses, "Leave me alone that ...," indicate that from God's perspective Moses stood before him as Israel's mediator. And God knew, because he had made Moses and had decretally determined to give him his "mediator" character, that Moses would certainly intercede on Israel's behalf and that he himself in response to Moses' mediation would set aside his "threat" toward Israel for Moses' sake. By allowing his response to Israel's sin to turn upon Moses' mediation—as just one instance of biblical mediation (see also, for example, Gen. 18:22–33; 19:29; Exod. 17:9–13; Job 1:4–5; Ezek. 22:30)— God intended to teach that he always relates himself to men salvifically through a mediator...



...When Moses made his appeal on Israel's behalf to God's own covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Exod. 32:13) and, in order to "make atonement" for Israel's sin, declared that if God did not forgive Israel he wanted God to blot him out of the book which he had written (Exod. 32:30–32), he by his mediation was signifying the central redemptive principle of salvation through mediation, and in so doing Moses' mediation became by divine design an Old Testament type of Christ's mediatorial work. So what many assert is an example of the mutability of God's purpose is in actuality a remarkable example of God's fixed purpose to relate himself to sinful men on the basis of the intercession of an appointed Mediator.



4. To those who would respond by asking why God, if he is a God of compassion, made men in the first place if he knew beforehand (not to mention decreed) that some of them would insult him and cause him grief, resulting in his own eternal hostility toward them and in their eternal hurt, I say that before they find fault with God's wisdom and love vis à vis the world that actually exists, they must be able to show that another world in which evil could not come to actuality would be richer in moral and spiritual values, would better accomplish his same ends, and would more accord with the entire range of his divine attributes. In light of the ultimate end God has wisely determined to accomplish, namely, the glorification of his beloved Son as the "Firstborn" among many brothers (Rom. 8:29) and thereby to glorify himself, it appears impossible that any such imagined world could meet these criteria and thus justify itself.



Immutability and Impassibility

This attribute, if true, would mean that God does not have passions or emotions, but is "impassible," not subject to passions.

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Whenever divine impassibility is interpreted to mean that God is impervious to human pain or incapable of empathizing with human grief it must be roundly denounced and rejected. When the Confession of Faith declares that God is "without ... passions" it should be understood to mean that God has no bodily passions such as hunger or the human drive for sexual fulfillment. As A. A. Hodge writes: "we deny that the properties of matter, such as bodily parts and passions, belong to him."



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Immutability and Impassibility: Anthropopathy

Anthropopathy attributes human feelings or passions to God. If the Bible attributes any human passion or feeling to God, that, strictly understood, conflicts with His absolute perfection, it is speaking anthropopathetically. We should see the use of this figure as a divine condescension that explains God's motives and actions in terms we can understand.

Dictionary of Theological Terms, Alan Cairns, p. 30



Immutability and Impassibility

Isaiah 62:5

For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you.

Psalm 78:40

How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And grieved Him in the desert!



"Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."



The Importance of God's Immutability

But if we stop for a moment to imagine what it would be like if God could change, the importance of this doctrine becomes more clear. For example, if God could change (in his being, perfections, purposes, or promises), then any change would be either for the better or for the worse. But if God changed for the better, then he was not the best possible being when we first trusted him. And how could we be sure that he is the best possible being now? But if God could change for the worse (in his very being), then what kind of God might he become? Might he become, for instance, a little bit evil rather than wholly good? And if he could become a little bit evil, then how do we know he could not change to become largely evil or wholly evil?



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God's Eternity: Transcendence Over Time

God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.

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He has no beginning or end; he does not undergo growth, development, or maturation. He existed before the creation of the world; he dwells now in eternity; he will continue as the eternal God even when history ends.



Tyndale Bible Dictionary

Genesis 21:33

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

Deuteronomy 33:27

The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms; And He drove out the enemy from before you, And said, 'Destroy!'

Psalm 48:14

For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.



1 Timothy 1:17

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

John 8:58

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born,

I am."

Psalm 29:10

The LORD sat as King at the flood; Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.



God Sees All Time Equally Vividly

Psalm 90:4

For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.

2 Peter 3:8-9

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.



God Sees Events in Time and Acts in Time

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Acts 17:30-31

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.



Immensity and Omnipresence: Transcendence Over Space

It may be defined as that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being. It has a negative and a positive side, denying all limitations of space to the Divine Being, and asserting that God is above space and fills every part of it with His whole Being.

Berkhof



Immensity and Omnipresence: Transcendence Over Space

In a certain sense the terms "immensity" and "omnipresence," as applied to God, denote the same thing, and can therefore be regarded as synonymous.

Yet there is a point of difference that should be carefully noted. "Immensity" points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while "omnipresence" denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being. The former emphasizes the transcendence, and the latter, the immanence of God.



Berkhof

Immensity and Omnipresence:

1 Kings 8:27

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

Jeremiah 23:23-24

Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.



Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the

Immensity and Omnipresence: God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

While it seems necessary for us to say that God's whole being is present in every part of space, or at every point in space, it is also necessary to say that God cannot be contained by any space no matter how large.

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Immensity and Omnipresence: God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

We should guard against thinking that God extends infinitely far in all directions so that he himself exists in a sort of infinite, unending space. Nor should we think that God is somehow a "bigger space" or bigger area surrounding the space of the universe as we know it. All of these ideas continue to think of God's being in spatial terms, as if he were simply an extremely large being. Instead, we should try to avoid thinking of God in terms of size or spatial dimensions. God is a being who exists without size or dimensions in space...



Immensity and Omnipresence:

God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

...In fact, before God created the universe, there was no matter or material so there was no space either. Yet God still existed. Where was God? He was not in a place that we could call a "where," for there was no "where" or space. But God still was! This fact makes us realize that God relates to space in a far different way than we do or than any created thing does. He exists as a kind of being that is far different and far greater than we can imagine.



Grudem

Immensity and Omnipresence: God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

The fact of God's omnipresence precludes taking the biblical depictions of God's "ascending" and "descending" and "comings" and "goings" literally. God, being everywhere present, does not literally "come" or "go" to or from specific places. Where such language is employed (for example, Gen. 11:5; Isa. 64:1–2), it must be recognized for what it is—metaphorical language indicating or invoking a special manifestation of God's working either in grace or judgment. Furthermore, since all that we say about God's nature per se is equally true of each of the persons of the Godhead, this conclusion has major implications with regard to the meaning of both the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit's "coming" into the world at Pentecost



Immensity and Omnipresence: God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

...Being omnipresent himself, God the Son did not literally "come" into the world in the sense that he came to a place where he was not before. The event of the Incarnation should not be interpreted to mean that God the Son literally "left heaven" and "came into the world" and "confined" himself to the earthly body of Jesus. This would mean that he in some way divested himself of his omnipresence. It intends rather to convey the fact that the Son of God uniquely manifested himself to the world and to men in and by human flach



Immensity and Omnipresence:

God Does not have Spatial Dimensions

...It intends to affirm that God the Son, through the instrumentality of the virginal conception, took into union with himself our human nature in such a real and vital sense that we properly declare that Jesus of Nazareth was God manifest in the flesh. But we do not for a moment intend to suggest that the Son of God somehow divested himself of his omnipresence when he became a man.



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Romans 11:33–36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.

Amen.



The Attributes of God

"In one of his letters to Erasmus, Luther said, 'Your thoughts of God are too human.'"



Pink