

# The Attributes and Work of God

## 1.2: What We Know about God – Divine Mysteries

*“As we’ve seen, God has overcome the vast distance between himself and humanity. He has made it possible for us to know about him through his general and special revelation. At the same time, our knowledge of God is deeply affected by divine mysteries. There are many things that God has not revealed about himself.”*

*Excerpt From “The Attributes and Work of God” by Richard Pratt Jr.*

### 1.2.0 Divine Mysteries

- A. The innumerable undisclosed truths about God that limit our understanding of God.
  - 1. **Romans 11:33** *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*
    - a. There are some things about God we don’t know, that he has not revealed...and that’s OK.
  - 2. *“There is nothing about God’s mysteriousness that is a problem for us in any ultimate way. The mystery of God doesn’t mean he can’t be accessed. It doesn’t mean he doesn’t love us and that we can’t feel his love. We know him, not exhaustively, but we know him truly. We don’t comprehend him, but we know him surely enough to say that we know God and not just some vague philosophical principle.”* William Edgar
  - 3. *“There is infinitely more in God than we have any idea of; and what we do know, we know imperfectly.”* Charles Hodge. Two observations:
    - a. Because God himself is infinite, there are infinitely more mysteries than we can ever imagine.
    - b. There’s not a single thing about God that we understand fully.
  - 4. *“But if God is truly the infinite God, then my poor little mind, and even the best theological minds that have ever lived, will not be able to comprehend him in his fullness. By definition, if I could comprehend him, I would be as great as he is. Our God is not a little God. I cannot get all of him into my mind or into a book. We are grateful that he has provided for our salvation and that he has revealed enough of himself that we can come to some understanding of him and can live rightly in fellowship with him and can think rightly about him, though not exhaustively.”* Gareth Cockerill

### 1.2.1 Limitations of Our Understanding

- A. Man has severely limited information about God.
  - 1. God has revealed what is necessary and essential to know that there is a God (general revelation, creation), and for salvation and life in Christ (special revelation, His Word), but man remains limited in his understanding of God.
    - a. **1 Corinthians 13:12** *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*
  - 2. There are many questions that can’t be answered or fully understood.
    - a. Why does God allow evil?
    - b. How can we discern God’s purpose in current events?
    - c. Why do disasters and tragic events occur?
      - ➔ We should not stray into speculation. It is OK to admit, “I don’t know”.
      - ➔ If God has not revealed why, then we can’t know why.
  - 3. We should never be frustrated by the fact that our knowledge of God is limited.
    - a. Better to consider our limited understanding of God as a blessing!
      - (1) Divine mysteries compel us to remain humble, having childlike trust in God, even when we don’t understand Him or His ways.
- B. Man is only able to offer limited explanations of God’s divine revelations.
  - 1. We are right to insist that God’s divine revelation doesn’t contradict itself. There are many logical connections we can see among God’s revelations, but whether we admit it or not, divine

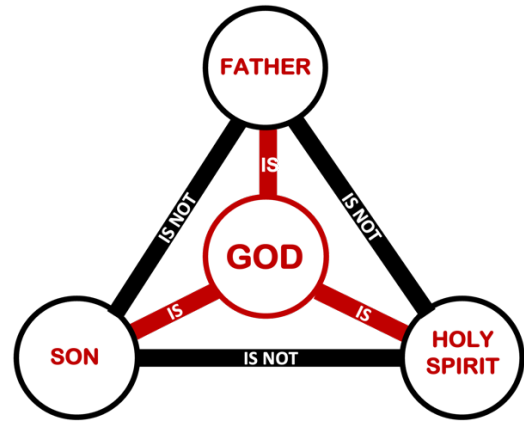
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mysteries limit our ability to explain the logical coherence of much of what God has revealed about himself. Examples:

a. The Trinity – God is one (essence) and three (persons)

- (1) Although the doctrine of the Trinity contains no logical fallacies or inconsistencies, there are still many mysteries that God hasn't revealed about his triune existence.
- (2) *Matthew 28:19; Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*
- (3) *Mark 1:10-11; <sup>10</sup> Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; <sup>11</sup> and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*



b. Jesus was both fully God (Divine) and fully man

- (1) Jesus in his humanity was tempted, but according to His divinity he could not sin. Yet, Jesus as a true human truly experienced temptation in the same way Adam did: he was able to be tempted and he was able to resist temptation.
- (2) Jesus experienced a physical birth as a person, yet he was divinely conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit.

c. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility

- (1) Logically consistent, equally true, without conflict, living in perfect tension with each other.
    - a. Man is morally responsible, though he is also subject to God's divine sovereignty.
    - b. Man is subject to God's divine sovereignty, though he is also morally responsible.
2. Is it worthwhile to explain as much as we can about the logical coherence of what God has revealed about himself? **Yes!**
- a. However, the ability to demonstrate logical coherence isn't the final standard of truth.
  - b. The final standard of truth is God's revelation. If God has revealed it, it's true, whether or not it can be satisfactorily explained by imperfect man.

### 1.2.2 Temporary Divine Mysteries

- A. Truths about God that are hidden from man for a period of time, but are then revealed at some later point in history.
1. Christ
    - a. *Ephesians 1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him.*
    - b. *Ephesians 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.*
    - c. *Ephesians 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,*

➔ In these verses, Paul refers to the mystery of God's eternal purpose in Christ. He explains that this mystery was kept hidden until the time of the New Testament apostles and prophets.

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2. Elijah / John the Baptist
  - a. **Malachi 4:5** *Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.*
  - b. **Matthew 17:10-13** <sup>10</sup> *And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"* <sup>11</sup> *And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things;* <sup>12</sup> *but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."* <sup>13</sup> *Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.*
3. God has yet to reveal every temporary divine mystery.
  - a. **1 Corinthians 13:12** *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*
4. Every temporary divine mystery will be revealed when Christ returns in Glory.
5. The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is by the New revealed.

### 1.2.3 Permanent Divine Mysteries

- A. Truths about God that man will never grasp because these truths are beyond human comprehension.
  1. The "incomprehensibility" of God.
    - a. **Isaiah 55:8** *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.*
      - (1) God reminding Israel that there were permanent mysteries that were simply beyond their comprehension (and ours).
- B. We need to remember that, while God has revealed himself in both general and special revelation, He has also kept both temporary and permanent mysteries hidden from man. We are creatures whose understanding of God is always severely limited.
- C. *"When the Scriptures refer to God as mysterious, we have to make sure that we don't misunderstand the word mystery. When I think of things in this world as mysterious, I think that they have some dark secret that they will surprise me with at some point. That's not the case here. By mysterious we mean that God is incomprehensible. We mean that he has a life that is beyond our imagining. We mean that there is something about him that we cannot grasp entirely, and I quite like that. It means that he is beyond my creaturely life. He's greater than I could ever think. The technical theological word we use for this is transcendence. God is transcendent. He is beyond our scope of thinking—and that is why he is worthy of worship. That is why he is great. That is why we adore him."* Gary M. Burge

### 1.2.4 Summary

- A. Although there are permanent divine mysteries that will never be revealed, there will never be any conflict with that which has been revealed.
- B. Because God is infinite and man is finite, in spite of anything God does not reveal to man:
  1. Man will continually be learning more and more about God forever.
  2. Man, being perfected in glory, will never get bored learning about God.
  3. The chief end of man will be fulfilled...to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.