

- I. Session 83: The Omnipotence of God Part 3: What God cannot do
- a. Purpose: In this session we shall look first at what God cannot do and secondly resolve the potential tension and problems with the omnipotence of God so that we would draw implications for our lives from the truth that God is omnipotent.
 - b. Reminder of our previous working definitions of the omnipotence of God:
 - i. Looking at the root of the word omnipotence: “The word omnipotence is derived from two Latin words, *omni*, “all,” and *potens*, “powerful,” and means “all-powerful.”¹
 - ii. Wayne Grudem: “God’s omnipotence means that God is able to do all his holy will.”²
 - iii. John Frame: “The term omnipotence is not in Scripture, but the term is appropriate to refer to two biblical ideas, closely related to one another: God can do anything He pleases...Nothing is too hard for God.”³
 - iv. John Feinberg: “God is able to do everything Scripture shows him doing.”⁴
 - c. What are things that God cannot do?
 - i. God cannot lie
 1. “*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?*” (Numbers 23:19)
 - a. In the context these are the inspired Word of God that the God of the Bible made the false prophet Balaam spoke to Balak, king of Moab (v.5)
 - b. Here we see that God is stated as one who is not like man.
 - c. In what ways is God not like man? “*That He should lie.*”
 2. “*Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.*” (1 Samuel 15:29)
 - a. In the context these are the words that Samuel the Prophet spoke to King Saul (v.28)
 - b. These words were spoken after the Lord has rejected Saul as king since Saul disobeyed the Lord by being impatient and went ahead to give his own sacrifice to God (v.22-23)
 - c. The verse mentioned here states clearly that “*the Glory of Israel will not lie.*”
 - d. The reason why Samuel said this to Saul was to make it certain to Saul that he was going to be judged and his kingdom given to another: “*The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you*” (v.28)
 3. “*in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,*” (Titus 1:2)

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 216.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 216.

³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 515-16.

⁴ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 289.

- a. In the context these are the words written by the Apostle Paul to Titus who was involved with ministry.
 - b. Here it is directly stated concerning God as one *“who cannot lie”*
 - c. For Paul the fact that God cannot lie is a foundation for the *“hope of eternal life”*
 - d. This is because the *“hope of eternal life”* was *“promised long ages ago,”* and God will fulfill it since He will not lie.
4. *“so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.”* (Hebrews 6:18)
- a. Here the verse states *“it is impossible for God to lie”*
 - b. This truth is a source of encouragement for believers: *“we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us”*
- ii. God cannot even be tempted: *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil...”* (James 1:13a)
1. James the brother of Jesus wrote these words.
 2. Here it is stated that *“God cannot be tempted by evil”*
 3. The reason why this truth was stated is to show that God is far away from evil; He not only is not evil, He is not even tempted with evil.
 4. Thus, since God is not evil, James’ point stands that *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”*
- iii. God cannot tempt others to sin: *“and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”* (James 1:13b)
1. This verse presupposes that God is good and unable to do evil.
 2. The verse has earlier stated that God cannot be tempted by evil as we have just seen above.
 3. Now we see the truth that God *“Himself does not tempt anyone.”*
- iv. God cannot deny Himself: *“for He cannot deny Himself.”* (2 Timothy 2:13b)
1. Here in the context this is Paul writing to Timothy to encourage Him with ministry in which Paul passed along trustworthy statements (v.11)
 2. Verse is clear that God cannot deny Himself being God.
 3. That is, God cannot cease being God.
- v. God cannot deny His own attributes: *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”* (2 Timothy 2:13a)
1. Just above we saw that God cannot deny Himself.
 2. The fact that God cannot deny Himself is the foundation for God’s attributes being His attributes.
 3. In this instance, Paul mentioned that *“If we are faithless”* yet *“He remains faithful.”*

4. God's attribute of faithfulness rest not on our response to Him but on what He is unable to do: Deny Himself as God.
 5. Since God cannot deny Himself we can expect the same with other attributes of God being the attributes of God too, and not just the attribute of faithfulness.
- vi. God cannot be contradictory
1. From all the above thus far we have seen that the opposite of God's attributes are denied being the case with God.
 - a. God is moral, therefore God does not lie.
 - b. God is Holy, therefore untemptable.
 - c. God is good, therefore He does not tempt others.
 - d. God must be God, therefore He cannot deny Himself.
 - e. God's attributes are His attributes, therefore what is contrary to His attributes are not who He is.
 2. We can extrapolate from them that God cannot be contradictory.
 3. Furthermore, God cannot be contradictory since that would make talking about God meaningless.
 - a. For instance it would be meaningless to say:
 - i. God cannot exist and not exist.
 - ii. God cannot be all powerful and not all powerful.
 - b. Every time anyone say "God is X," it already assume that "God is not a denial of X."
- d. Potential problems resolved
- i. Problem #1: Does that mean that mean that God cannot be all powerful if there are things God cannot do?
 1. Remember the definition of Omnipotence is not that God can do anything and everything, but rather Omnipotence is about God being all powerful. To make the observation that God cannot do things that is contrary to Him being all powerful or strong is not a dilemma.
 2. John Frame makes a good point: "Not every 'inability' is a lack of power; indeed some inabilities are marks of extraordinary power. Imagine a baseball player who hits a home run whenever he comes to the plate. Someone might say of him, 'He can't hit singles or doubles.' That sounds like weakness, until you look at the broader context."⁵
 3. Thus, if we see that "God cannot do X" and X is something is something that weakens God, these sorts of claims that "God cannot do X" is not a denial of God's omnipotence but rather is coherent with God's omnipotence.
 - ii. Problem #2: But doesn't the fact that the Bible says God cannot do certain things is a contradiction with passages that talks about God being able to do all things such as: "*And He was saying, 'Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will'*" (Mark 14:36)?

⁵ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 519.

1. If you are aware of Calvinism, you would be aware that in the argument that in the Greek “all” does not always mean “all” in the same sense we understand it in English of including everything with no exceptions.
2. For example:
 - a. *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12)*
 - b. *“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.” (1 Corinthians 10:23)*
3. In the verse cited above clearly this does not mean that there are not things that are unlawful.
4. Rather the best way to understand “all” here is the sense of “all” meaning every sort, every kind, etc.
5. Thus we do not see these verses being a denial that there are somethings God can’t do.
6. It is best to interpret all here to mean that in every sphere there are things that God can do that is right and powerful, but that does not mean in every sphere He has to do things that weakens the strength of His essence, or against His desire and will, etc.
- iii. Problem #3: Can God make a rock so powerful He cannot lift it?
 1. This is a favorite issue brought up in philosophy.⁶
 2. Remember that God by definition is all powerful and more powerful than His creatures or creation.
 3. Which means such a rock cannot be made by God.
 4. However it is not because God is weak that is preventing God from making such a rock; it is instead because God is all powerful that is a “preventer.”⁷
 5. To think this question pose a problem of God’s power is as nonsensical as thinking that God’s powerful means He must be not all powerful, or if God can weaken Himself by making Himself by nature not God, etc.
- iv. After evaluating these potential problems we see the wisdom to John Feinberg’s definition of Omnipotence: “God is able to do everything Scripture shows him doing.”⁸
- e. Implication
 - i. Have you trusted in God and His promises knowing that He cannot lie?

⁶ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 520.

⁷ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 521.

⁸ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 289.