

## BOOK REVIEWS

Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2019. 283 pp. Paperback. \$16.99.

Writing a book on the doctrine of God proves daunting enough, but writing a book on the doctrine of God that proves accessible to the broadest possible audience may have seemed impossible until this welcome volume by Matthew Barrett. Clear, concise, and engaging, this book presents the classical attributes of God in a refreshingly approachable and eminently presentable form. I chose this book as the primary text for my course on the Doctrine of God at Leavell College, and students found the book informative, exciting, and even enriching to their devotional life.

Barrett begins each of his twelve chapters with a question that people tend to ask regarding God's character, including, "Does God Depend on You? *Aseity*," "Does God Have Emotions? *Impassibility*," and "Is God Bound by Space?" *Omnipresence*. Such questions immediately engage readers with relevant implications of God's being for everyday life, significantly stressing that who God is affects who we are as his creatures. I found Chapter 2, titled "Can We Think God's Thoughts after Him? *How the Creature Should (and Should Not) Talk about the Creator*," very beneficial, as it addresses the significance of the Creator-creature distinction. This chapter showcases Barrett's ability to explain heady theological distinctions—like *res significata* vs. *modus significandi*, communicable vs. incommunicable attributes, and cataphatic vs. apophatic theology—with careful yet penetrable precision, offering readers the ability to become readily conversant with otherwise abstruse theological terms.

As the title suggests, Barrett portrays a God much larger than humans can create or control. For contemporary readers, chapters 5 and 7 on God's simplicity and impassibility are the most challenging. As a firm proponent of God's not having parts, Barrett weaves the attributes of God together to try to demonstrate how each of God's attributes carries implications for all the other attributes. For instance, Barrett states that God's infinity must relate to all of his other attributes since "the *infinite* nature of God cannot be stressed enough. Without it, the other perfections would make little sense" (46).

Another strength of Barrett's book is reflected in its firm connectedness to Scripture. Not content simply to spout off theological or philosophical formulations, much of Barrett's chapters delve into exegesis of biblical passages and can often read like a deft sermon. For instance, Chapter 3 illuminates Ephesians 1:19–20, revealing the vastness of God's infinity. Similarly, Chapter 10 delves into Daniel 4, showcasing God's unparalleled omnipotence, omniscience, and omniscience, compelling us to recognize

His supreme power and wisdom. Barrett's consistent reference to Scripture allows the book to remain firmly rooted in biblical revelation rather than human speculation. As Barrett affirms, "If *we know* anything about God, it is because he has chosen to make it known; revelation is a gift. In that light, our task cannot be speculation" (27).

Given its conversance with Scripture, one finds it odd that chapter 5 on simplicity includes so few biblical references. While Barrett mentions Deuteronomy 6:4 and James 1:17, it would seem unlikely that the original audiences of either of these verses would grasp that God has no parts from statements like "the Lord is one" or that God does not change like shifting shadows. Perhaps this chapter could benefit from a more robust biblical discussion.

Another puzzling choice that may not prove as helpful as intended is Barrett's fireman analogy to explain God's impassibility. Barrett likens God to a fireman who is so "acutely aware . . . of the danger, as well as the suffering and turmoil by those within, that he refuses to be moved by emotional outbursts or be overcome by panic. Instead, he runs into the house in order to rescue your brother or sister, while other onlookers uncontrollably weep" (120–21). Barrett argues that "in that moment we do *not* want someone who changes emotionally or suffers emotional change. We desperately need someone who is impassible; only he or she is able to save others from that burning house" (120). While the fireman proves a powerful image to advance Barrett's point, he overstates his case here by creating a false dichotomy; he seems to assume as if emotions only cripple while emotionlessness only strengthens. This assumption, however, may overlook the empowering effect emotions can have on those who perform acts of bravery, emotions that previous generations may have termed righteous "affections" as opposed to sinful "passions."

Despite the two concerns voiced above, Barrett's book succeeds as one of the most (if not the most) accessible and clear treatments of God's attributes in writing today. I heartily recommend this book to anyone from high school and older who wants to learn about and engage with the undomesticated God of the Bible.

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