

# ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

## SEEING GOD RIGHTLY

What is God like? Who is he? How can we know him? When we begin to ask these questions, we must come to the realization that we can only know who God is by how he has revealed himself. If God chooses not to reveal something about his works, everything we conjure up is speculation.

In Deuteronomy 29:29, Moses explains it this way: *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* There are “secret things” that God has not revealed to us, and he has the right to keep them from us. But there are things that God has shown us and given to us that we may know him rightly. So before we can move forward and grasp at an idea of God’s attributes, we must come to him humbly, knowing that there may be many questions we have that he has chosen not to reveal to us right now.

## INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

When we look at the attributes of God, it is helpful to break this down into two categories: incommunicable and communicable attributes. This means there are attributes that as humans we do not share with him (incommunicable) and there are attributes that we do share (communicable). As a holy God, there are things that he only possesses. And yet, since we as human beings are made in the image of God, there are echoes of his attributes in our lives that we share with him. Let’s begin with those attributes that are incommunicable.

### ASEITY

**Definition:** God is never in need of anything outside of himself. He doesn’t need us. Everything he does is because of who he is, not because he lacks anything. Rather, we need him. All that God does towards us, he does because of what we need, not because he needs. He is never forced into anything by anyone or anything outside of himself.

[Acts 17:24-25; Job 41:11; Psalm 90:2; Exodus 3:14]

“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.”

- **Wayne Grudem, ‘Systematic Theology’ (p. 160)**

## SIMPLICITY

**Definition:** God is not in a constant state of trying to “juggle” his attributes (good vs. sovereign; merciful vs. just; etc.). All of his glorious attributes are essential to himself. They are not something he “does” or “aspires” to. Rather, they are simply who he is.

“God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times... We must remember that God’s whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely loving, entirely merciful, entirely just, and so forth. Every attribute of God that we find in Scripture is true of all of God’s being, and we therefore can say that every attribute of God also qualifies every other attribute.”

- *Wayne Grudem, ‘Systematic Theology’ (p. 177-9)*

“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation’.”

- *Exodus 34:6-7*

## IMMUTABILITY

**Definition:** God will never change. His purposes and being remains constant from eternity to eternity.

[Psalm 102:25-27; James 1:17; Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 46:9-11]

“God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.”

- *Wayne Grudem, ‘Systematic Theology’ (p. 163)*

## SOVEREIGNTY

**Definition:** God is in complete control. You can rest in this truth. No matter what you are going through, he is not unaware and he is not helpless.

[Isaiah 46:10; Psalm 115:3; 135:6; Ephesians 1:11]

“The sovereignty of God may be defined as the exercise of his supremacy. Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, he is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as he pleases, only as he pleases, always as he pleases. None can thwart him, none can hinder him.”

- *A.W. Pink, ‘The Attributes of God’ (p. 32)*

## OMNIPRESENCE

**Definition:** He is present everywhere. There is nowhere in the universe where he is not present.

[Deuteronomy 10:14; 31:6; Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Proverbs 15:3; Colossians 1:17]

“God is present in all places; we should not think of him, however, as filling spaces, for he has no physical dimensions. It is as pure spirit that he pervades all things, in a relationship of immanence that is more than we body-bound creatures can understand.”

- **J.I. Packer, ‘Concise Theology’ (p. 35)**

## OMNIPOTENCE

**Definition:** He is all-powerful. He has the power to do anything that he wills to do.

[Romans 8:2; 15:19; Job 42:2]

“Omnipotence means in practice the power to do everything that in his rational and moral perfection (i.e., his wisdom and goodness) God wills to do.”

- **J.I. Packer, ‘Concise Theology’ (p. 36)**

## OMNISCIENCE

**Definition:** He knows all things, whether past, present, or future.

[John 14:26 ; 1 John 1:5 ; 3:20; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Hebrews 4:13; Isaiah 46:9-10; Psalm 139:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11]

“God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act.”

- **Wayne Grudem, ‘Systematic Theology’ (p. 190)**

# COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

Now these are those attributes which are communicable, or that we share as human beings in some degree. This doesn't mean that we have these like God has these. Rather, we share a glimpse of these attributes in our own person.

## HOLY

**Definition:** There is no one like our God. His perfections are complete. Everything he is, is perfect. We come to him in awe and reverence and fear. He is not "just another being."

[1 Samuel 2:2; 6:20 Exodus 15:11; Revelation 4:8; Psalm 105:3; 145:17; Hebrews 7:26; Hosea 11:9; Malachi 2:11; Jeremiah 23:9; Isaiah 5:16]

"Scripture offers a two-fold picture of divine holiness. On the one hand, God is holy in that he is distinct of separate from everything else. Some call this aspect of divine holiness majesty-holiness... The second sense in which God is separate or set apart from everything is in his moral purity and perfection."

- *John Feinberg, 'No One Like Him' (p. 340,2)*

## WISE

**Definition:** "Wisdom is the power to see, the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it." - *J.I. Packer, 'Knowing God' (p. 90)*

[Romans 11:33;16:27; Psalm 104:24; 1 Corinthians 1:24,30]

## TRUE

**Definition:** "He knows the truth and only speaks the truth. Hence, his promises are reliable and he is dependable and faithful." - *John Feinberg, 'No One Like Him' (p. 370)*

[John 17:3,17; 1 John 5:7,20]

## LOVE

**Definition:** "God's love means that God eternally gives of himself to others." - *Wayne Grudem, 'Systematic Theology' (p. 198)*

[1 John 4:8; Ephesians 3:14-19; Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 3:16; 17:24; Romans 5:8]

## FAITHFUL

**Definition:** "God's faithfulness means that God will always do what he has said and fulfill what he has promised." - *Wayne Grudem, 'Systematic Theology' (p. 195)*

[Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28; Hebrews 6:18]

## RIGHTEOUS

**Definition:** “In addition to God’s other moral perfections, we can see his moral purity through his righteousness. As righteous, he has established a moral order for the universe, and he treats all creatures fairly.” - *John Feinberg, ‘No One Like Him’ (p. 345)*

[Romans 3:26; Jeremiah 9:23-24]

## JUST

**Definition:** “Justice embodies the idea of moral equity... Justice, when used of God, is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more; and when God acts justly he is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion, but simply acting like himself in a given situation.” - *J.I. Packer, ‘Knowing God’ (p. 87)*

[Deuteronomy 32:4; Genesis 18:25; Psalm 19:8; Isaiah 45:19]

## MERCIFUL

**Definition:** “The mercy of God has its spring in the divine goodness. The first issue of God’s goodness is his benignity or bounty, by which he gives liberally to his creatures and creatures; thus has he given being and life to all things. The second issue of God’s goodness is his mercy, which denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus ‘mercy’ presupposes sin.” - *A.W. Pink, ‘The Attributes of God’ (p. 72)*

[2 Samuel 24:14; Matthew 9:27; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Hebrews 4:16]

## GRACIOUS

**Definition:** “As for the concept of grace, it is best understood as unmerited favor. That means that something good happens to you even though you have done nothing to merit or earn it. Scripture portrays God as a God of abounding grace. It is important to understand that God owes no one any grace... If God or anyone else were obligated to give grace, it would no longer be grace - blessing would simply be a matter of justice. The very matter of grace, however, is that it is never owed or earned. When we understand this fact about grace, we see how good and loving our God is to grant us grace.” - *John Feinberg, ‘No One Like Him’ (p. 354)*

[Exodus 33:19; Psalm 119:132; 1 Peter 5:10; Romans 3:23-24]

## GOOD

**Definition:** “The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.” - *Wayne Grudem, ‘Systematic Theology’ (p. 197)*

[Luke 18:19; Psalm 34:8; 100:5]