

A Summary of the Attributes of God

There are many human schemes for categorising the divine attributes e.g.

- *absolute* and *relative*;
- *natural* and *moral*;
- *metaphysical, intellectual, ethical, existential* and *relational*.
- *negative attributes* (e.g. infinity) and *positive attributes* (e.g. goodness);
- *personal attributes* (e.g. truth) and *constitutional attributes* (e.g. eternity);
- *attributes of greatness* (e.g. spirituality) and *attributes of goodness* (e.g. holiness).

These are ideas of men and their variety shows the difficulty in fathoming the greatness of God's being. Since scripture attempts no classification of God's attributes, we should just stick to what the Bible says he is like and leave it there, although it is clear that some are closely related to others (such as life, independence, self-existence and self-sufficiency or righteousness and justice).

However, it is vital to understand that all the aspects of God's nature govern each other, they are not isolated characteristics. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines God as spirit who is '*infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being*'. His wisdom is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, his power is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, his holiness is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, his justice is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, his goodness and truth are infinite, eternal and unchangeable. But then everything God does is holy, so his love is a holy love; his wisdom is a holy wisdom. Then again God is truth so God's justice is true justice, his grace is true grace, and his mercy is true mercy. All the attributes comport with the others. Any portrayal of an attribute so that it contradicts another cannot be correct. For instance, God's mercy must accord with his justice, so that those who receive mercy are only those who have satisfied God's justice against sinners in the punishment of a penal substitute - Jesus the saviour and redeemer.

Finally, remember that every member of the Trinity is all of these things, not just the Father.

Eternity

God is not subject to time. (Gen 21:33; Ex 15:18; Ps 90:2)

Faithfulness

God keeps his promises; he is absolutely trustworthy. His words will not fail. (Ex 34:6; Num 23:19; Ps 89:2; 1 Thess 5:24)

Freedom

God is independent from his creatures. (Ps 115:3)

Goodness (see 'Love')

God is good, his character shows 'benevolence, love, mercy and grace', [AA Hodge]. (Gen 19:16; Exod 33:19, 34:6-7; Ps 145:9; Rm 2:4, 5:8)

Grace

God gives those he loves undeserved favour; he meets all their needs despite their unworthiness. (Exod 34:6; Eph 1:5-8, 2:8-9; Titus 2:11)

Holiness

God is righteous, perfect and separate from all evil. (1 Pt 1:16; Lev 11:44) He is unique and above creation, being absolutely pure and incorruptible. He cannot sin or tolerate sin. (Ex 15:11; Lev 11:44; Deut 32:4; Ps 5:4; Habb 1:13; Jm 1:13)

Immanence

The counterpart of transcendence. God is present in the lives of his people and active in creation. God indwells creation. (Acts 17:27-28; Job 27:3, 33:4; Ps 104:29-30; Matt 5:45)

Immutability (Constancy)

God does not change in his being. Since everything he does is perfect, his nature and decisions (decrees, purpose) cannot change. (Ex 3:15; Num 23:19; Ps 102:27; Mal 3:6; Jam 1:17)

Impassibility

God cannot be acted upon or affected by created beings. No created being can inflict pain, suffering or distress upon God. (It does not mean that God is impassive and has no feelings.) The suffering of the cross, and the grief that God can have is by his own deliberate decision, and is not something imposed by others on him. (E.g. Isa 53)

Infinity (see 'Eternity' and 'Life')

What is self-existent must be unlimited. God is without termination and finitude. He is unlimited by time, space, knowledge and power. (1 Kg 8:27; Ps 145:3; Acts 17:24)

Justice (a form of 'Wisdom' and connected to 'Omniscience')

God is righteous and just; he does not show partiality (favouritism). God administers his law perfectly. God demands righteousness of his creatures. (Gen 18:23-32; Deut 32:4; Acts 10:34-35; Rm 2:11, 3:26)

Life: self-existence, 'aseity', independence, self-sufficiency

God has underived life in himself and is the source of all life. He needs no support from others. (Gen 1:1; Exod 3:14; Jer 10:10; Jn 5:26)

Long-suffering

God's patient persistence with men, despite their rebellion. He restrains from immediate judgment according to his plan. (Ps 86:15; Rm 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pt 3:20)

Love

God's eternal giving of his heart to his elect. (1 Jn 4:8-10, 16)

Benevolence - unselfish, loving disposition, God's care towards those loved; loving concern for their welfare. (Benevolence is seeking the good of others, not yourself.) (Jn 3:16; Deut 7:7-8; Rm 5:8)

Complacency - approval of good in someone, (e.g. God's delight in Jesus). (Jn 10:17)

Mercy

God is tenderhearted, showing compassion and pity towards those he loves who are in need. (Exod 3:7,17; Ps 103:13; Matt 9:36).

Omnipresence (Ubiquity, see 'Immensity')

God is present everywhere. (Ps 139:7-12; Jer 23:24) Perhaps it is better to say that everywhere is in God. (Acts 17:28) However, since God is a Spirit, he is not affected by spatial considerations (is unlimited by space), therefore, it really means that God knows and controls everything. (Gen 23:15; Deut 4:39; Jos 2:11)

Omniscience

God knows everything. (Gen 18:18; Ex 3:19; Ps 139:1-4, 147:4-5; Matt 11:21)

Omnipotence

God is all-powerful. God is sovereign. (Gen 1:1; Ex 15:7; Matt 19:26; Rev 19:6)

Perfection

God is moral perfection, as seen in his: love, faithfulness, grace, mercy, long-suffering, wisdom and goodness. (Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31; Job 36:4, 37:16; Ps 18:30, 19:7)

Personality

God is a person, an individual being with a name, self-consciousness, will, emotion and mind. As a person, he interacts and communes with other people. (Gen 3; Ex 3:14)

Purposefulness

God has a plan and purpose for mankind and governs everything according to it. All things are subject to this overriding plan but without violation to free human agency. (Isa 14:24-27, 46:10-11; Rm 8:28-30, 9:11; Eph 1:9, 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9)

Righteousness

God's holiness applied to relationships. God's will is right, he only does what is good. (Ps 19:7-9; Jer 9:24a; Gen 18:25)

Spirituality

God is a spirit; he is not composed of matter or limited by it. (Gen 1:2; Jn 4:24; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:15-16)

Simplicity (self-integration, unity)

God is an in-complex, indivisible, unique spirit. God is wholly involved in all that he is and does. God is one; there is only one true God. (Deut 4:35, 6:4; Ex 20:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Jn 1:18, 4:24; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:15-16)

Sovereignty

God is the supreme authority, the Supreme Being. He acts according to his good pleasure. He does what he wishes, in the way he wishes, to achieve his goal. (Gen 2:4; Ps 103:22; Acts 17:24; Rm 14:11; Eph 1; Phil 2:10-11; Heb 1:10; Rev 1:8)

Truth

God is consistent in himself. There is no contradiction in him (Jn 14:6; 17:3). God is trustworthy and speaks the truth (1 Sam 15:29; Jn 17:17,19; Heb 6:18; Titus 1:2). The Lord is truth; he is the true God. (Jer 10:10; Jn 17:3)

Transcendence, immensity (see 'Immanence')

God is uniquely other to everything in creation, separate from creation but filling it. He transcends all spatial limitations so that the entire essence of God is every moment present in every part of space. (Ecc 5:2; Isa 6:1)

Wisdom

God is all wise. 'God realises the best designs by the best possible means' [David Allen Reed] (1 Sam 2:3; Ps 104:24, 147:5; Prov 3:19; Isa 28:29)

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