THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Belief Topic: God's Attributes Spring 2024

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. This session focuses upon on God's attributes.

What is the Big Idea?

God exists and can also be known. While both the created order and Scripture testify to God's existence, only Scripture explains in specific detail God's nature and character. The Bible is replete with descriptions of God's attributes.

Theologians have often divided God's attributes in various ways. One common approach distinguishes between God's **incommunicable** and **communicable** attributes. Incommunicable attributes are those attributes that are not shared (communicated) with humans. Communicable attributes are shared with humans, though God possesses them perfectly and to the infinite degree. Another common approach is to discuss God's **moral** and **nonmoral** attributes.

What do the Scriptures Say?

God is **eternal**. He created time. Thus, He has no beginning or end, does not exist in successive moments of time, and sees all of time equally. Yet, God chooses to act within time. (Exod 3:13–14; Psa 90:2, 4; Acts 17:30–31; Gal 4:4–5; 2 Pet 3:8)

God is **independent** of His creation and is the only fully autonomous being in the universe. God is not aloof, but He is also not dependent upon anything or anyone external to Himself. (Acts 17:24–25; Psa 50:10–12)

God is **impassible**. He is eternally unchanging in His being, character, purposes, and promises. However, God has emotions and He responds to His creatures, though always in a way consistent with His unchanging nature. (Mal 3:6; James 1:17)



God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful). God is sovereign, meaning He is totally in control of all things. However, His sovereignty is consistent with His design for His human creatures and the rest of the created order. (Matt 19:26; Eph 3:20)

God is **omniscient** (all-knowing). He knows all that can be known, both actual and possible, in one simple and eternal act. His omniscience and omnipotence are closely related and are realized in His divine plan for all creation. (Job 37:16; Isa 46:9–10; Matt 11:21; 1 John 3:20)

God is **omnipresent** (all-present). He is everywhere, all the time, all at once. However, God is uniquely present among his covenant people, though this looks different at various times throughout redemptive history. (Exod. 25:22; Psa 139:7–10; 1 Kings 8:27; Rev. 21:3)

God is **wise**. He always chooses what is best, and acts in the best ways possible at all times, consistent with His character. (Job 12:13; Psa 104:24; Rom 11:33)

God is **true**. He is both true in Himself and the final standard of truth. All His words and actions are truthful because of His perfect character. (Num 23:19; Deut 32:4)

God is **good**. He is both good in Himself and is the final standard of goodness. All His words and actions are good because of His perfect character. (Psa 34:8; 106:1; 119:68; Luke 18:19)

God is **love**. He always loves perfectly, and His divine love is the standard by which all lesser loves are measured. (Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:8)

God is **merciful** and **gracious**. Mercy is God's goodness to those who are hurting and in need. Grace is God's goodness to those who deserve only judgment. (Exod 34:6; 2 Cor 1:3; Heb 4:16; James 5:11)

God is **holy**. His character is perfect, He is fully separated from sin, and He always does all things for His own glory. (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:14–16)

God is **righteous** or **just**. He is the source of all righteousness, He always acts justly, and He is the final standard of what is right. (Deut 32:4; Rom 3:25b–26)

God is **wrathful**. He hates sin, He is set against sin, and He is justly angry toward sinners. God's wrath is not such much an attribute in and of itself as it is the negative application of His fundamental holiness and righteousness. (Exod 32:9–10; John 3:36; Rom 1:18)

What Has the Church Said?

Through most of church history, very few Christians questioned God's attributes. The one exception is God's impassibility, which has sometimes been questioned for pastoral reasons: how can an unchanging God identify with humans in our suffering? Those who hold to the traditional view agree that God's unchangeableness must be defined in such a way that it leaves room for Him to genuinely respond to His creatures.

Since the Enlightenment, almost all God's attributes have been called into question. Process Theology denies God is independent of His creation but argues (like many early pagans) that God is part of creation and vice versa. Open Theists challenge God's unchangeableness and omniscience, arguing that God doesn't have exhaustive knowledge of the future and thus learns things as time goes on. Theological liberals question God's omnipotence, in part because they can't believe God could be really sovereign and yet the world be filled with as much as evil as it is. Liberals also redefine God's holiness, righteousness, and love, at least in part so that they can also reject His wrath.

What Should We Believe?

God's divine being is the source of all His attributes, He possesses each of them eternally and perfectly, and all His attributes are perfectly integrated. Many evangelical theologians argue that God's central moral attributes are His holy love, which reflect His character and are expressed through His other moral attributes.

The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) and the confessional statement of The Gospel Coalition are two helpful summaries of God's attributes.

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

How Should We Then Live?

God's attributes are central to Christian worship

Growing in knowledge of God's attributes is an important part of Christian discipleship

God's attributes are a reminder of the importance of apologetics, especially to build evangelistic bridges with unbelievers

Recommended Resources

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper & Row, 1961).

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 50th anniversary ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2023).

John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Crossway, 2001).

D. A. Carson, The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God (Crossway, 1996).

R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God, 2nd ed. (Tyndale, 2000).