

THE LORD OUR GOD: WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT HIM?

Biblical theologians use the term “attributes” to designate those essential elements which when thought of as inhering in God constitute our idea of God, and by virtue of which God is what He is; that which belongs to the Divine essence that together provide for us our concept of God.

1. THE ABSOLUTE ATTRIBUTES – those qualities that belong to God apart from His creative work. That is, these suggest that this is just who God is apart from all else!
 - A. Spirituality – that which belongs to the essence of God in terms of being self-subsisting. He is distinct from that which He has created. He is spirit, not body.
 - B. Infinity – the term that indicates there are no bounds or limits to the Divine Nature. He neither arrives nor departs. He neither became nor will become. He IS in the sense that He is totally independent of time and space.
 - C. Eternity – God stands superior to time, and in Him there can be no succession of events; this is in contrast to the temporal world. He is free from temporal distinctions of past and future.
 - D. Immensity – God stands superior to the world of space, and is therefore not an extension of space, but as Spirit He is above all spatial limitations.
 - E. Immutability – the term that indicates God is changeless in His essence, purpose, and consciousness. He can never be any different than what He is eternally.
 - F. Perfection – the attribute that brings to completion and harmonizes all the other perfections, including the impossibility of being less than absolutely perfect.

2. THE RELATIVE ATTRIBUTES – those qualities that arise out of the relation existing between the Creator and the created, and which of necessity indicate the necessity of the creature for their manifestation.
 - A. Omnipresence – the term that defines God as being always present at every point with and in His entire being. For the Christian He is not only a present help in time of need, but is an unerring restraining presence from sin. He knows not only every act performed and every word spoken, but also every thought and motive entertained and every feeling indulged.
 - B. Omnipotence – the term by which one defines that perfection of God by virtue of which He is able to do all that He pleases to do. Whatever is impossible to Him is not such because of a limitation of His power, but solely because His nature makes it so, in the same sense that His holiness is incompatible with sin.
 - C. Omniscience – the term used to affirm the belief that God has perfect and complete knowledge of all things relating to Himself and outside Himself. God has complete knowledge regarding not only all that exists, but also all that will happen under existent or nonexistent conditions. Absolutely nothing is excluded from the divine knowledge. God’s absolute knowledge influences nothing, nor changes the nature of human choices in any way. Therefore it is not influence or causation.
 - D. Wisdom – the divine attribute closely related to but separate from omniscience, in that it is dependent on omniscience. God’s knowledge is the apprehension of things as they are and wisdom is the adaptation of this knowledge to the ends determined by His perfect nature and will.
 - E. Goodness – the attribute of voluntary extension of divine grace to will the happiness of His creatures in imparting being and life and to communicate to them such gifts as they have capacity to receive and use. It is related to love, but love is limited to responsive persons or those capable of returning love, whereas goodness applies to the whole of creation.

3. THE MORAL ATTRIBUTES – the divine qualities that relate to God’s government over moral beings. Free and intelligent creatures having been created in His image possess the rational ability within the limits of finiteness to comprehend the natural attributes of God. But the Christian concept of God is occupied chiefly with the attributes of His moral nature. Because man is sinful, he lacks a personal basis for understanding God’s moral character, and is dependent on God to communicate this part of His nature to man. Thus it is necessary to exercise faith in God as a personal Being, having the moral character favoring the good and opposing the evil. While there is no agreement among theologians as to the number of attributes that should be included in an endeavor to set forth fully the moral nature of God, this brief study will group them under five key terms: His holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy, and love.

- A. Holiness – as applied to God in its broadest sense holiness means His separateness from, and independence of, everything not Himself. However, the more general significance of holiness as applied to God is separateness from evil, from sin and uncleanness in every form. His holiness is the fundamental attribute of His moral nature. It is God’s holiness that makes holiness obligatory upon all His moral creatures, and it is therefore accurate to state without any hesitation that God is fully justified in declaring in mandate form: “*You shall be holy because I am holy.*” (1 Peter 1:16 – quoted from Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)
- B. Righteousness – though closely related to and dependent upon holiness, when applied to the nature of God indicates that essential element in God’s nature found in the standard of right, and that His will and all His activities are in perfect accord with that standard. Righteousness in God is the expression of His holiness by which His treatment of all His creatures conforms to His purity. Therefore His mandate for holiness in His moral creatures is necessarily made possible by His righteousness out of which the provision for holiness has been made in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- C. Justice – the term that indicates the transitive holiness of God manifesting itself in the righteous distribution of rewards and punishment. Either merit or demerit attaches to every voluntary act of a free moral agent. Man is entitled to the consequences of his conduct whether it is reward for obedience or punishment for disobedience. Divine justice differs from human justice in that it is absolutely perfect.
- D. Mercy – the tender quality in God’s nature that leads Him to seek the highest good of those that oppose His will. It is His kindness extended toward those who through their rebellion against Him have rendered themselves unworthy. God bestows mercy by withholding the judgment deserved by the sinner. In this light it may seem that His mercy is in conflict with His justice. However, God’s justice and mercy are always exercised in perfect accord with His ultimate aim, namely, His own glory in the highest good of His moral creatures.
- E. Love – that perfection in God that moves Him to delight in His moral creatures and prompts Him to impart Himself to them in order to promote their highest good which is redemption through His grace. God’s essential nature being love, and understanding love as the unreserved impartation of self to another, there must be an object of His love. The Bible makes it plain that the object of God’s love is the heart of every naturally engendered offspring of Adam’s race. This is the essence of the Gospel; this is the message of God, to be declared throughout all the earth, that He loves and reaches out to all who will place their trust in Him.

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