

## What Does the Bible Teach About the Nature of God?

(Thursday Indepth Bible Class of the Trilacoochee church of Christ;  
Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction: Ex. 15:11; Psalm 113

A. "Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is the name of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is ... what he in his deep heart understands God to be. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes a Church. Always the most revealing thing about a Church is her knowledge of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man." (A. W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, p. 4)

B. The attributes of God may be classified under two main categories:

1. His infinite powers, in two groups:
  - a. Non-communicable and eternally unique to God alone
  - b. Non-communicable to humankind in this life, but conferred after the Judgment
2. His personality attributes, communicable to humankind and given at Creation
  - a. Those nobler, higher characteristics, behaviors, and emotions of humankind are reflections of having been created in God's image. We will have them in full measure in heaven.

C. His personality attributes were given to humankind in the Creation.

1. Gen. 1:26-27; Ecc. 7:29; Acts 17:26-29

2. "In God's Image" (Imago Dei) - "A Bible term, applied only to humankind, which describes the similarities between God and humanity. Genesis 1:27 does not mean that God is in human form, but rather, that humans are in the image of God in their moral (free moral agents), spiritual (eternal souls), and intellectual (ability to reason) nature. Humans mirror God's divinity in their ability to consciously use the unique qualities they have been given, and which make them different than all other creatures: rational thinking, complete self-awareness, creative freedom, the ability to fulfill our purpose for being, and the power to transcend and control our condition." (<http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason>)

C. His Divine attributes will that be shared with His children at the Judgment.

1. 1John 3:1-3; 2Peter 1:4; Phil. 3:21; 1Cor. 15:49-54

### I. COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF REVEALED ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

A. Aseity - Means God is so independent that He does not need humans or their help in order to be; He is fully independent - Acts 17:25

B. Beauty - Attribute of God whereby He is the sum of all desirable qualities.

1. Psalm 27:4 - God's beauty focuses on the positive that He possesses all desirable qualities - Psalm 73:25
  3. We enjoy beauty in the world because it reflects God's beauty: music, art, nature, etc.
- C. Blessedness - God is joyful in Himself and in all of His character.
1. Joyful in Himself - 1Tim. 6:15
  2. "Blessed" from makarios means "supremely blest; fortunate, well off; blessed, happy, happier." (Strong's G3107)
  3. God is perfectly happy and has fullness of joy in Himself.
  4. Gen. 1:31; Isa. 62:5
- D. Freedom - That attribute of God whereby He does whatever He purposes
1. Psalm 115:3; Dan. 4:35
  2. Nothing in all of the heavens and earth can hinder God from performing His will.
  3. While God is free to do whatever He chooses, He is always and infinitely trustworthy.
  4. However, God cannot do anything that would be opposed to His own character or He would cease to be God. Therefore, God's freedom and power is qualified by His other attributes.
    - a. E.g. God can't lie (Titus 1:2); God can't deny Himself (2Tim. 2:13); God can't be tempted by evil (James 1:13).
- E. Glory - The Divinely generated brightness that surrounds God's revelation of Himself. It emanates as an expression of His greatness and character; the appropriate outward expression of His own excellence.
1. Psalm 104:1-2; Luke 2:9; Matt. 17:2; Rev. 21:23
  2. "Though we do not now find ourselves surrounded by a visible light, there is a brightness, a splendor, or a beauty about the manner of life of a person who deeply loves God, and it is often evident to those around such a person. In the life to come, such brightness will be intensified, so that as we reign with Christ, it seems that we also will receive an outward appearance that is appropriate to that reign and to our status as image bearers of God and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Grudem 221)
  3. Prov. 4:18; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 13:43; 1Cor. 15:43
- F. Grace - The state of forgiveness given by God because He desires man to have it, not because of anything he has done to earn it; the condescension or benevolence shown by God toward the human race.
1. It is a spontaneous gift from God to man, generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved that takes the form of divine favor, love and clemency - Rom. 3:23-26
- G. Holiness - He is completely separate from sin and wholly incorruptible.
1. The refrain of "Holy, holy, holy" in Isa. 6:3 & Rev. 4:8 manifests that only one Divine characteristic in scripture is elevated to the third degree; the Bible never says that God is love, love, love.
- H. Immanence - Refers to God being in the world. It is contrasted with His transcendence - Psalm 114:5-8

1. God cannot manifest Himself in this world, or universe, or in the presence of man, because if God should appear in this world in the fullness of His glory and power, it would destroy this world.
- I. Immutability - God cannot change - James 1:17; Heb. 6:17-18
- J. Impassibility - The doctrine of the impassibility of God is controversial. It refers to the inability of God to suffer.
  1. More accurately would be represented as God's power to determine what He will permit to affect Him.
  2. Psalm 138:6; Isa. 57:15
- K. Impeccability - Closely related to God's holiness; means He cannot sin.
  1. James 1:13
- L. In-corporeality - Refers to God being a Spirit - John 4:24
  1. Ex. 20:4 - It is not possible to represent spirit with flesh.
- M. Incomprehensibility - It is not possible for man in this world to know God in His fullness - Isa. 55:8-9
  1. "In so far as God reveals Himself in His attributes, we also have some knowledge of His Divine Being, though even so our knowledge is subject to human limitations." (Louis Berkhof)
- N. Infinite - Includes His eternity and vastness
  1. Isa. 40:8, 12-15, 25-26, 28; 1Kings 8:27
  2. Infinity permeates all other attributes of God: His love is infinite, His power is infinite, etc.
- O. Invisibility - God's total essence, all of His spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by man, yet God still shows Himself through visible, created things.
  1. John 1:18, 6:46; 1Tim. 1:17, 6:16
  2. God shows Himself through visible, created things.
  3. Gen. 18:1-33, 32:28-30; Ex. 13:21, 24:9-11; Isa 6:1; Col 1:15; John 14:9
- P. Jealousy - God's jealousy is "zeal to protect a love relationship or to avenge it when broken, thus making it an aspect of His covenant love for his own people." (J. I. Packer) - Ex. 20:5-6
- Q. Knowledge - God fully knows Himself.
  1. Job 37:16; 1John 3:20; Isa. 40:13-14
  2. 1Cor. 2:10-11 - This is amazing since God's own being is infinite.
  3. God knows all things that exist and all things that happen.
    - a. Heb. 4:13; Isa. 46:9-10; Matt. 6:8, 10:30
  4. God knows all things could happen but do not actually happen.
    - a. 1Sam. 23:11-13; Matt. 11:21
    - b. To say that God knows everything is to say that every bit of knowledge is fully present in His consciousness. His knowledge never changes or grows. Therefore, God can never learn anything new, because for Him there will never be anything new or unforeseen.
    - c. "Could God at any time or in any manner receive into His mind knowledge that He did not possess and had not possessed from eternity, He would be imperfect and less than Himself." (Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, 55)

d. What a comfort it is to be aware that God knows every detail possible to be known about us and loves us still.

R. Love (as the Original Source) - God's defining characteristic from the perspective of humankind.

1. 1John 4:16 - "God is Love."
2. God is the Original Source of love; no one taught Him to love or showed Him how or why to love; He loved first - John 17:24; Rom. 5:8
3. "From God's other known attributes we may learn much about His love.

We can know, for instance, that because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity; because He is immense, His love is an incomprehensibly vast, bottomless, shoreless sea before which we kneel in joyful silence and from which the loftiest eloquence retreats confused and abashed. It is a strange and beautiful eccentricity of the free God that He has allowed His heart to be emotionally identified with men. Self-sufficient as He is, He wants our love and will not be satisfied till He gets it. Free as He is, He has let His heart be bound to us forever." (A. W. Tozer, 98, 100)

S. Mercy - The act of God by which He withholds what humankind deserves.

1. Dan. 9:9; 2Cor. 1:3; Neh. 9:17
2. Grace and mercy relative to sin are strictly Divine prerogatives.
3. Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15-16

4. "If we could remember that the Divine mercy is not a temporary mood but an attribute of God's eternal being, we would no longer fear that it will someday cease to be. Mercy never began to be, but from eternity was; so it will never ease to be. It will never be more since it is itself infinite; and it will never be less because the infinite cannot suffer diminution. Nothing that has occurred or will occur in heaven or earth or hell can change the tender mercies of our God. Forever His mercy stands, a boundless, overwhelming immensity of divine pity and compassion." (A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, 63)

T. Omni-benevolence - Goodness; refers to God being all good to all. His goodness encompasses His grace, love, mercy and patience.

1. Ex. 34:6-7; Matt. 5:43-48

U. Omnipotence - God is all powerful.

1. "His Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to his power." (C. S. Lewis)
2. Matt. 22:29-32; Job 1:9

V. Omnipresence - God is present everywhere at all times.

1. Psalm 139:8, 121:4; Job 26:6

W. Omniscience - God is all knowing - Jude 25; Psalm 147:4-5

X. Oneness - There is only one God as three Divine persons or hypostases (beings that are in the condition of Deity): the Father (Jehovah), the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.

1. The Three Persons are distinct, yet are one in condition, essence, and nature. A nature is what one is, while a person is who one is.
2. Heb. 1:1-3; John 15:26

Y. Patience - God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time.

1. Num. 14:18; Jonah 4:2; Rom. 2:4

Z. Peace (Order) - In His actions, God is separate from all confusion and chaos.

1. 1Cor. 14:33; Rom. 15:33; 2Thes. 3:16

AA. Perfection (completeness) - God completely possesses all excellent qualities and lacks no part of any qualities that would be desirable for Him.

1. Matt. 5:48; Psalm 18:30

2. "God's... perfection is the sum and substance of all the... (noble - prb) attributes... Accordingly, when we speak of God's perfection, we do not refer exclusively to His moral excellence, whether 'goodness or holiness,' but we mean that God is the sum-total of all excellences, the One (for) whom no greater, higher, better can exist either in thought or in reality. In other words, God answers fully to the idea of God." (Bavinck 246)

BB. Providence - Refers to God's activity in the world and His sustainment of the universe.

1. General providence refers to God's continuous upholding of the existence and natural order of the universe - Gen. 8:22
2. Special providence refers to God's intervention in the lives of people, especially the righteous - Psalm 37:23-28; 1Sam. 2:9

CC. Sovereignty - There is no one greater than God.

1. Psalm 71:19; Jer. 16:20-21; John 17:3; 1Cor. 15:27

DD. Transcendence (Beyond this world) - God is outside space and time, and therefore eternal and unable to be changed by forces within the universe.

1. It is closely related to His immutability - 2Peter 3:8

EE. Veracity - God never lies.

1. Titus 1:2; Num. 23:19; Psalm 12:6; Prov. 30:5-6; John 17:17
2. 2Sam. 7:18-24 - This foreshadows the Kingdom of God today.

FF. Will - God's will is the final reason for everything that happens.

1. Eph. 1:11; Rev. 4:11; Dan. 4:28-37
2. Necessary Will is everything that God must will according to his own nature. He cannot choose to be different than who He is - Ex. 3:14
3. Free Will is everything that God decided to will but had no necessity to will according to His nature - creation, redemption, revelation of Himself
4. Secret Will - includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs the universe and determines everything that will happen
  - a. Deut. 29:29; Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23
5. Revealed Will - God's declared will concerning what we should do or what God commands us to do.
  - a. Matt. 7:21; Eph. 5:17

GG. Wisdom - "Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. Wisdom is, in fact, the practical side of moral goodness. As such, it is found in its fullness only in God. He alone is naturally and entirely and invariable wise." (J. I. Packer) - Rom. 11:33

1. Apprehending the wisdom of God requires will and work.

2. James 1:5, 3:13, 17; Psalm 19:7, 111:10

HH. Wrath - "Wrath is the personal manifestation of God's holy, moral character in judgment against sin. Wrath is neither an impersonal process nor is it irrational and fitful like anger. It is in no way vindictive or malicious. It is holy indignation - God's anger directed against sin" (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1986 ed., p.1108). Wrath (or anger) ascribed to man can be dangerous when it has no cause, is taken to excess, or held for an extended period of time (Matt. 5:22; Col. 3:8; Eph. 4:26). But when wrath is ascribed to God it is sinless and a true example of righteous indignation. "God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). God's wrath is a demonstration of His holy love. If God is not a God of wrath, His love is no more than frail, worthless sentimentality; the concept of mercy is meaningless; and the Cross was a cruel and unnecessary experience for his Son." (Nelson, *ibid*, p.1108)

1. Has it occurred to us yet that these are only the revealed attributes of God? He has revealed only those things that He wants us to know in this world, that is, the things we are capable of apprehending in this realm. In view of His infinite Greatness, it necessarily follows that there is much about Himself that He has chosen to reserve until He is fully revealed in all of His Glory in Heaven.

## **II. CHARACTERISTICS GOD HAS RESERVED FOR HIMSELF VERSUS THE CHARACTERISTICS HE HAS AND WILL SHARE WITH HUMANKIND**

A. Job 11:7-9

B. Characteristics Unique to God the Father

- Aseity
- Holiness
- Omni-benevolence
- Omnipotence
- Omnipresence
- Omniscience
- Oneness
- Providence
- Sovereignty
- Grace
- Mercy
- Infinity

C. Characteristics Conferred to the Children of God at the Judgment

- Knowledge (of Himself)
- Invisibility
- Immanence
- Transcendence
- Immutability
- Impassibility
- Impeccability
- Non-corporeality
- Incomprehensibility

#### D. Characteristics Conferred in Part to Humankind at Creation or Salvation

- Jealousy (Divinely approved)
- Love
- Veracity
- Wrath (Divinely approved)
- Wisdom
- Will
- Freedom
- Perfection (completeness)
- Blessedness
- Beauty
- Glory
- Patience
- Peace (Order)

### III. COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD SHARED WITH HUMANKIND ON A LIMITED BASIS

- A. God's incommunicable attributes, those attributes that God does not share with others: sovereignty, independence, unchangeableness, timelessness, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omni-benevolence.
  1. These are attributes of God's nature that can never and in no sense be shared with humanity. These attributes define and characterize God's God-ness in a way that makes Him unique and singular.
- B. God's communicable attributes, those attributes that God does share with others. In other words, God shares to some extent these attributes with us.
  1. Communicable attributes are those aspects of God's character that we have in common with God, but not in the same measure as God.
  2. Even in those attributes that God chooses to share with humanity, we must remember that God is always infinitely characterized by those attributes that saved humanity only shares in a finite sense. God cannot give us any of His attributes in this world in a perfect, fulfilled manner.
  3. A. A. Hodge in Outlines of Theology: "God is infinite in his relation to space and time; we are finite in our relation to both. But he is no less infinite as to his knowledge, will, goodness, and righteousness in all their modes, and we are finite in all these respects. All God's attributes known to us, or conceivable by us, are communicable, inasmuch as they have their analogy in us, but they are all alike incommunicable, inasmuch as they are all infinite."
- C. Why would God share attributes with us?
  1. This is one of the most loving acts God can do, because by sharing Himself with humanity, He gives of the greatest good to humanity.
- D. How does God share attributes with us? How does man manifest the communicable Divine attributes?
  1. In Creation - Gen. 1:26-27; Ecc. 7:29
    - a. Man is born an eternal spirit - John 5:28-29
    - b. Man is born a free moral agent - Joshua 24:15

- c. Man is born with the capacity to reason - Rom. 12:3
- d. Man is born with the ability to design and create - Ecc. 2:4-9
- e. Man is born with the capacity for goodness - Ecc. 7:29
- f. Man is born with the capacity to develop all good qualities within the limits of existence in this world - Gal. 5:22-23
- 2. In salvation - 2Peter 1:3-4
  - a. Man is born into Christ as a pure being - Acts 22:16
  - b. Man is born into Christ with the power to partake in the Divine Nature in all of its manifestations in a limited world - 2Peter 1:3-4
  - c. Born into Christ with power to enter heaven - John 3:16, 1:12
- 3. In the word - 1John 2:3-5
  - a. Man transforms into the image of God as much as is possible in this world - 2Cor. 3:18
  - b. Man transcends flesh to live and walk in the spirit - Rom. 8:1-5
- 4. In the Judgment - 1John 3:1-3
  - a. Man is transformed into the actual nature and form of Christ; he achieves his fulfilled design intended by God - Eph. 1:3-6

#### Conclusion:

A. This world is a temporary proving ground for humankind. God gave us our nature; part of that nature is the power to choose our course of life in this world and our eternal destination in the world to come. God did not give that power to any other created thing, living or inanimate, in this world. God did not give the power to become His children to anyone except humankind, not even angels and beings of power. Man is uniquely created in the image of God.

B. "The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him completely, and to worship Him acceptably. And when the man's laboring conscience tells him that he has done none of these things, the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear. The gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind, give beauty for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. But unless the weight of the burden is felt, the gospel can mean nothing to the man; and until he sees a vision of God high and lifted up, he will feel no woe and no burden." (A. W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, 5)