

ADVANCED BIBLICAL COURSE



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B | I | B | L | I | C | A | L C | O | U | R | S | E
Divine Attributes of God

INTRODUCTION

Can God be defined? That is a question often posed by Theologians. However, no creature, much less man knows all that is proper of God; and therefore, no creature can give an exhaustive statement of all that God is. To define, is simply to separate or distinguish, so that the thing defined may be discriminated from all other things.

Probably the best definition of God ever penned by man, is that given in the ‘Westminster Catechism’ “God is a Spirit, Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable, in His Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness and Truth.” This is a true definition; for it states the class of being to which God is to be referred. He is Spirit; and He is distinguished from all other spirits in that He is Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable in His Being and Perfections.

I BEING OF GOD

‘Being of God’ is here meant that which has a real, substantive existence. It is equivalent to substance, or essence. It is opposed to what is merely thought, and to a mere force or power. God, therefore, is in His nature a substance, or essence, which is Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable; the common subject of all Divine Perfections, and the common agent of all Divine Acts. If, therefore a Divine Essence, Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangeable exists, this Essence existed before and independent of the world. It follows also that the Essence of God is distinct from the world.

II DIVINE ATTRIBUTES (DEFINITION)

To the Divine Essence, which in itself is Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable, belong certain absolutes shown to us in our nature and in God’s word. These absolutes are called Divine Attributes. The Attributes, although broken down into different names, must be considered in close relationship. In attempting to explain God’s nature to the Attributes as well as the relationship of the Attributes themselves, there are two extremes to be avoided. First, God is not a composite

being, composed of different elements. Secondly, we must not fuse the Attributes, making them all mean the same thing. Which is the same as denying them altogether.

III DIVINE ATTRIBUTES (CLASSIFICATION)

There have been many different attempts classifying the Attributes, without any single one seemingly being superior.

A. ATTRIBUTES

- ◆ Some preclude the necessity of classification at all. This as described above is not acceptable
- ◆ Others arrange them according to the way in which we arrive at the knowledge of them.

CAUSATION	NEGATION	EMINENCE
God being the first cause of all things.	Denying God limits and imperfections.	Exalting to an infinite degree without limit.

- This however gives rise to only two classes: -
 Positive and negative or/
 Immanent and transient or/
 Communicable and incommunicable or
 Absolute and relative

- ◆ A third principle is that derived from our own nature: i.e. classification on the ground of personality.

ESSENCE (SOUL)	INTELLECT	WILL

- ◆ Miley (Systematic Theology) – on the other hand classifies the attributes as such. With some notable omission which he claims are not Attributes per sê but rather tributes pertaining to God.

DIVINE OMNISCIENCE	DIVINE SENSIBILITY	DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE
DIVINE WISDOM	HOLINESS RIGHTEOUSNESS	PERSONAL WILL
	JUSTICE	DIVINE WALL
	LOVE	
	MERCY	
	TRUTH	

B. NON ATTRIBUTES

◆ **TRUE TO GOD BUT NOT ATTRIBUTES**

ETERNITY	UNITY
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◆ **PERFECTION OF ATTRIBUTES**

IMMUTABILITY	OMNIPRESENCE
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◆ **GOD AS SUBJECT**

SPIRITUALITY

- ◆ The writer of the book “In Understanding Be Men,” expands on the natural and moral attributes.

NATURAL	MORAL
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- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Infinity
Spirit Personality
Eternity & Immutability
Omnipresence
Omniscience
Omnipotence | Goodness
Holiness
Righteousness |
|---|---------------------------------------|

- ◆ Charles Finney (Systematic Theology) in his book uses the classifications as such: -

KNOWLEDGE	SENSIBILITY	WILL
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but does not attempt to discuss the Attributes of God, but rather truths, laws, and government.

- ◆ Hodge in his book ‘Systematic Theology’ expands on the ‘Westminster Catechism’ to structure the Attributes as such.

GOD IS SPIRIT		
INFINITE	ETERNAL	IMMUTABLE

IN HIS BEING	
INTELLIGENCE OMNISCIENCE	WILL

NAMELY	NAMELY
KNOWLEDGE	POWER OMNIPOTENCE
WISDOM	HOLINESS
	JUSTICE
	GOODNESS
	TRUTH

IV DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

So without preferring any of the above classifications, I think it's worth elaborating on each 'Attribute'.

IV NATURAL ATTRIBUTES

◆ INFINITY

God fills heaven and earth; He is exalted above all we can know or think. He is infinite in His Being and Perfections. What this means is that no limitation can be assigned to God's essence.

Because we exist in space and time, it is impossible to experience any alternative. So to start with we can only describe what infinity is not. I.e. it is not limited to space, or possible duration, this suggests a negative stance – true. We cannot, indeed, form a conception or mental image of an infinite object, but the word, infinity nevertheless expresses a positive judgment of the mind. I will further expand on infinity under the subject, “Omnipresence and Eternity.”

◆ SPIRIT PERSONALITY

If God be a Spirit, it follows of necessity that He is a Person, a self-conscious, intelligent, voluntary agent. It follows that God is a simple being. Nothing can either be added to, or taken from God. We must not limit the name “Personality” to what we understand on a physical level. A simple definition of personality is “an individual substance which thinks and feels, and has the power of self determination. This definition manifest in the Spirit realm is God's Spirit personality.

◆ ETERNITY

The infinitude of God relative to space is His omnipresence; relative to duration it is His eternity. With God there is no distinction between the present, past, and the future. But all things are equally and always present to Him. With Him duration is an eternal now.

◆ OMNIPRESENCE

God's omnipresence is the infinitude of His being, viewed in relation to His creatures. He is equally present with all His creatures at all times and in all places. God is not absent from any portion of space, not more present in one portion than in another. God's omnipresence is not only to be understood as a mere presence in knowledge and power but in His divine essence.

◆ **IMMUTABLE**

The immutability of God is closely connected with His immensity and eternity. God is absolutely immutable in His essence and attributes. He can neither increase nor decrease. He is subject to no process of development, or of self-evolution. He can never be wiser and holier, or more righteous or more merciful than He ever has been and ever must be.

◆ **OMNISCIENCE (KNOWLEDGE)**

By knowledge is meant the intellectual apprehension of truth. Being the cause of all things, God knows everything by knowing Himself, all things possible, by the knowledge of His power and all the things actual, by the knowledge of His own purposes. As far as man’s freewill is concerned God’s knowledge does not affect this in any way. Our freewill is limited to time and space. Whilst God’s knowledge relates to His other attributes, which is revealed in eternity. God’s foreknowledge relates to God’s omnipresence, and to the fact that God exists out of time and space.

◆ **(WILL)**

A sub category under which many philosophers and theologians will group.

POWER OF SELF DETERMINATION
EFFICIENCY/OMNIPOTENCE
ALL MORAL ATTRIBUTES

Turretin says – the object of the intellect, is the truth. The object of the will, is the good. God, as a Spirit is a voluntary agent. From the beginning to the end the Bible speaks of the will of God, of His decrees, purposes, counsels and commands.

◆ **OMNIPOTENCE**

It is by removing all the limitations of power, as it exists in us, that we fully grasp the idea of the omnipotence of God. God can do whatever He wills. We, beyond very narrow limits, must use means to accomplish our ends. With God means are unnecessary. He wills, and it is done. He by a volition created the heavens and the earth. This is the highest conceivable idea of power and this is clearly presented in scriptures.

IV MORAL ATTRIBUTES

HOLINESS

Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil, and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection, freedom from impurity is the primary idea of the Word. Infinite purity, even more than infinite knowledge or infinite power, is the object of reverence.

JUSTICE

In theology, justice is often distinguished as moral excellence or rectitude of conduct. God is a righteous ruler, all His laws are holy, just and good. In His moral government He faithfully adheres to those laws. He is impartial and uniform in their execution.

GOODNESS

Goodness in the Scriptural sense of the term includes: benevolence, love, mercy and grace: -

- ◆ Benevolence means the disposition to promote happiness, all sensitive creatures are it's objects.
- ◆ Love includes complacency, desire, and delight and has rational beings for it's objects.
- ◆ Mercy is kindness exercised towards the miserable and includes pity, compassion, forbearance and gentleness.
- ◆ Grace is love exercised towards the love a Holy God to sinners is the most mysterious attribute of the Divine Nature.

TRUTH

The primary meaning of the Greek word is openness: what is not concealed. But in the Hebrew, and therefore in the Bible, the primary idea of truth is, that which sustains, which does not fail, or disappointed our expectations.

The truth therefore is: -

- ◆ That which is real, as opposed to that which is fictitious or imaginary.
- ◆ That which completely comes up to it's idea, or to what it purports to be.
- ◆ That in which the reality exactly corresponds to the manifestation.
- ◆ That which can be depended upon, which does not fail, or change, or disappoint.

The truth of God therefore is the foundation of all religion.

CONCLUSION

SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty is not a property of the Divine Nature of God, but a prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being.

If God be a Spirit, and therefore a person infinite, eternal and immutable in His being and perfections, the creator and preserver of the Universe, He is of right its absolute sovereign.

Infinite wisdom, goodness and power, with the right of possession, which belongs to God in all His creatures, are the immutable foundation of His dominion.

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