

# The Attributes of God

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## Introduction

We have begun using the computer to print copies of my notes and distributing these to those in the church. Often I use the method of outlining where main topics are 1 A, 2A, ... The next level are 1B, 2B, ... A glance at the following outline should help.

Recently, we have had some dealings with cultists. It is soon apparent that they worship a different God than do we. In addition, it seems to me that the god of the arminian is not the God of the Bible. For this reason we had a series of lessons on the attributes of God.

We present you a brief outline for your study.

## An outline

### 1A. Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes

1 B Defined. Incommunicable attributes are those attributes which God **cannot** give to another. These literally make God unique. Communicably attributes are those which God **can** give to others.

2 B The incommunicable attributes are separate in every way from His creatures. Many cultists err on these points as do many professing Christians.

2A. Incommunicable Attributes -- Isa. 48:11 (compare Ps 50:21; Rom. 1 :23-24)

1 B Self-Existence or Independence. This means that God has the ground of His existence in Himself, and unlike man, does not depend on anything outside of Himself. -- Ps 33:11; 115:3; Isa. 40:18-26; Daniel 4:35; Jn. 5:26 (Heb. 13:8);

(For a list almost identical to the following see **Louis Berkhof**, Systematic Theology. See also **W. G. T. Shedd**, Dogmatic Theology.)

1 C. He is independent of all things and all things exist only through Him -- Ps. 94:8ff.; Isa. 40:18ff.; Acts 7:25.

2 C. He is independent in His thought -- Rom. 11:33-36; Ps. 33:11

3C. He is independent in His will -- Dan. 4:35; Rom. 9:19; Eph. 1:5; Rev. 4:11

4C. He is independent in His power -- Ps. 115:3

2B. Immutability -- God never changes in His Being, purposes or promises. This is in clear contrast to the creature who changes in many ways. It is proved in such scriptures as Num. 23:19; Ps. 33:11; 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17; Ja. 1:17; Heb. 1:11,12; Isa. 41:4

1 C. God not immobile -- cf. (compare with) Ex. 32:10-14; Jonah 3:10; Prov. 11: 20

2C. What of the 'repent' passages -- **Gen. 6:6**.

# The Attributes of God

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- D. God does not repent -- Nu. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29
- 2D. God accommodates His language to our limitations
- God's eyes, ears, hands, arm(s), feathers (figures of speech)
  - Ps. 78:65; Jer. 7:13

3D. God often changes His stated purpose in dealings with men.

- The revealed purpose might change -- e.g. commands
- The hidden purpose never changes -- e.g. decrees
- 3C. Man is mutable -- not dependable, see Ps. 146:3; Job 15:15

3B. Infinity (-) -- God has no limitations. This is proved in Job 11:7-11,(12!); Ps. 145:3. It is important that this does **not** mean that God can do what is illogical (in the deductive sense). God can not fail. God can not contradict Himself.

iC. Space --immensity, omnipresence

- 1 D. Immensity -- God transcends all space -- I Kings 8:27; II Chr. 2:6; Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:48,49; Ps 113:4-6
- 2D. Omnipresence -- God fills every part of space - Ps 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23,24; Acts 17:27,28

2C. Knowledge (omniscience)

- 1 D. God is omniscient -- Daniel 2:22; Ps 139: 2-4,6; Heb. 4:13
- 2D. All that is in our mind -- Ezek. 11:5; Isa. 65:24; Daniel 2:28 (prescience -- Isa. 42:9; 46:10; 48:3-8)
- 3D. What the wicked think -- Hos. 7:2; Ps 90:8 (note: Rom. 8:7)

3C. Time -- God is eternal: past, present, future

- 1 D. Duration -- Ps 90:2; 102:12
- 2D. Before the beginning -- Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1
- 3D. **I AM** -- Exodus 3:14; Jn. 8:58 -- the 'ever present' one
- 1 E. Yahweh (Jehovah, LORD) = He is; He will be
- 2E. Rev. 1:8; etc.
- 4D. Changeless in time -- **see immutability** (2A.2B above)
- 4C. Control

# The Attributes of God

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1 D. Supremacy -- cf. Ps 50:21

1 E. Absolute and universal -- I Chron.. 29: 11,12; II Chron. 20:6

2 E. Does what He pleases -- Job 23:13; Ps 115:3; Prov. 21:30

3 E. Over created and inanimate objects

- Red Sea divided -- Ex. 14
  - earth opened -- Num. 14
  - sun stood still -- Josh. 10
  - sun back 10 degree -- Isa. 38:8
  - iron on water -- II Kings 6:5-7
  - Ps. 135:6

4E. Over the wills of men -- Ex. 34:24; Prov. 21:1; (II Kings 22:19-23)

2D. Sovereignty -- This is the exercise of His supremacy

1 E. Defined -- This is the exercise of supremacy.

2E. Proved -- Is. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; Ps. 135:6; 115:3

3E. This is seen in God's dealings with the angels -

1 F. Some are unconditionally elected -- I Timothy 5:21

2 F. Some are permitted to fall -- II Peter 2:5. (God foresaw their fall and still permitted it in such a way that they were responsible for their own sin.)

4E. Man -- Rom. 9:-18

1 F. Adam was permitted to fall

2 F. Some are unconditionally chosen -- II Timothy 1:9; et al.

5 E. Some things are right simply because God commanded.

- Israelites *borrowed* -- Exodus 12:35; 3:22
- Israelites killed Canaanites -- e.g. Joshua 6:17

things in our lives (wife's submission)

3D. Omnipotent -- God is **all powerful**

1 E. God is such -- Ps 62:11; 18:13-15; Job 38:4-6

2E. The manifestation of His power

- creation -- Ps 89:11,12; 33:9; 150:1
- preservation -- Job 8:11; Ps. 36:6

# The Attributes of God

---

- judgment -- Ezekiel 22:14; Rom. 9:22; Ps 2:12

4D. Decrees -- Ps. 2:7; Eph. 3:11; At. 2:23; Eph. 1:9; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:11

5D. Foreknowledge

1 E. Some think that it only means that God knew who would believe -- but --  
Acts. 13:48; I Cor. 12:2,3 (2:14)

2 E. It is not a cause of election -- *it is election*

3 E. God knew people, **not facts about them**

1 F. some known -- Dt. 9:24; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Jn. 10:14;  
I Cor. 8:3; II Tim. 2:19; Gal. 4:9

2F. some not known (though clearly known about) -- Hos. 8:4; Matt. 7:23; Ps.  
101:4 ; Matt. 25:12

4E. Foreknown by God -- Rom. 8:29,30; 11:2; 1 Pt. 1:2

- = those elected
- given faith -- Eph. 2:8,9; Acts. 18:27

3A. Communicable Attributes

1 B. An important distinction

1C. Traditionally, the distinction between communicable and incommunicable is.

1 D. "The incommunicable attributes are those that belong to God exclusively, so that there is nothing resembling them in a created spirit. They admit of no degrees, but are Divine by their very nature. ... The communicable attributes are those which are possessed in a finite degree, more or less, by men and angels." (**W. G. T. Shedd**, Dogmatic Theology, vol. 1, pp.336-337)

Note: Shedd quotes from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "God is spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." (**ibid**, p.338) He calls the attributes of infinite, eternal and unchangeable those that are incommunicable and the others the communicable.

2D. "The most common distinction is that between *incommunicable and communicable* attributes. The former are those to which there is nothing analogous in the creature, as aseity, simplicity, immensity, etc.; the latter those to which the properties of the human spirit bear some analogy, as power, goodness, mercy, righteousness, etc. ... This distinction found no favor with the Lutherans, but has always been rather popular in Reformed circles, ... It was felt from the beginning, however, that the distinction was untenable without further qualification, since from one point of view every attribute may be called

# The Attributes of God

---

communicable. None of the divine perfections are communicable in the infinite perfection in which they exist in God, and at the same time there are faint traces in man even of the so-called incommunicable attributes of God. Among more recent Reformed theologians there is a tendency to discard this distinction in favor of some other divisions. ... If we ... remember that none of the attributes are incommunicable in the sense that there is no trace of them in man, and that none of them are communicable in the sense that they are found in man as they are found in God, we see no reason why we should depart from the old division which has become so familiar in Reformed theology." (Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pp.55-56)

Note: **aseity** is not found in most College size dictionaries. Its meaning is, "existence; originating from and having no source other than itself." (Random House Dictionary, unabridged)

2C. We have included other attributes among the incommunicable. In particular, any where the distinction is infinite vs. finite have been included. This is because the distinction between infinite and finite is not one of degree but one of kind. It is improper to speak of an infinite attribute having a finite portion that can be accorded to another.

1 D. Some believe that deity can be communicated. This has led to the horrible and blasphemous error that, "As we are, God once was, and as God is, we may become." This is the error of Satan in Isa. 14:12-16.

2D. Some professed believers seem to think that when we are raptured, we obtain perfection and, as such, we then know all truth. This is in reality a claim of deity.

3D. The traditional distinction has other problems. Some incommunicable are possessed also by the creature to a finite degree just as are the communicable. Even the theologians who use the traditional divisions admit that even those attributes they call incommunicable are possessed *finutely* by the creature. We elaborate more on this in the next section

3C. Note the following:

	<u>God Is</u>	<u>God can give to the creature</u>
<u>Incommunicable</u> (traditionally)	infinite (see notes below) eternal immutable	an eternal future some faithfulness
(perseverance)	-----	
<u>Communicable</u> (traditionally)	omniscient omnipotent	<b>finite</b> knowledge <b>finite</b> power

# The Attributes of God

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perfect holiness	holiness
perfect justice	justice
perfect goodness	goodness
perfect truth	veracity

## notes:

- note: This is usually subdivided where *infinite* is an adjective
- note: Here, **Berkhof** lists three subheadings:
  - 1) Absolute Perfection (included in the introduction to infinity)
  - 2) Eternity -- infinity as to time
  - 3) Immensity -- infinity as to space

4C. Thus, in the traditional separation, infinity as to time or space is incommunicable even though the creature has finite analogues of both of these. Yet infinity as to knowledge and power are communicable. This seems arbitrary and illogical.

5C. We conclude that some divisions in the traditional distinction are not the most valuable.

2B. Communicable Attributes. We hasten to add that even here the creature possesses certain attributes in a fashion different in kind from that way in which God possesses them. God is love while we can only hope to love others. We must reflect the love of God. To some extent, we follow Berkhof's order.

1 C. God is Spirit -- Jn. 4:24; I Tim. 1:17; 6:15,16. Not a spirit but spirit.

2C. The veracity of God

- not equal to other 'gods' which lie -- Ps. 96:5; 97:7; 115:4-8; Isa. 44:9,10
- He reveals Himself reliably -- Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4; Heb. 6:18
- His is the source of all truth -- Ex. 34:6; Num. 23:19; Dt. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; 31:6; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 10:8,10,11; Jn. 14:6; 17:3; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 1 Jn. 5:20,21
- This with immutability means that God is absolutely faithful -- Num. 23:19; Dt. 7:9; Ps. 89:33; Isa. 49:7; I Cor. 1:9; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:17,18; 10:23

3C. Moral Attributes

1 D. The goodness of God -- Mk. 10:18; Ps. 36:9  
God's goodness toward creatures -- Ps. 145:9,15,16

even toward unbelievers -- Ps. 36:6; 104:21; Matt. 5:45; 6:26; Lk. 6:35; Acts. 14:17

2D. The love of God

# The Attributes of God

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- Provisionally -- Matt. 5:44,45
- Redemptively -- Jn. 3:16; 16:27; Rom. 5:8; I Jn. 3:1

## 3D. The grace of God -- unmerited favor (when used of God)

- Word used of men -- Gen. 33:8,10,18; 39:4; Ruth 2:2
- Source of all God gives us including salvation -Eph. 1:3-7; 2:7-9; Tit. 2:11

## 4D. The mercy of God -- tender compassion

- Ps. 57:10; 86:5
- often connected with grace -- I Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4
- mercy withholds punishment while grace grants favors

## 5D. The longsuffering of God -- often used of God's enduring the wicked, temporarily -- Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 3:15

## 4C. The Holiness of God

1 D. One aspect of this attribute is actually infinite and as such is in no way communicable. As such, it is not a moral attribute but can be applied to everything that is God. We find this in such passages as Ex. 15:11; I Sam. 2:2; Isa. 57:15; Hos. 11:9. Some would even call this **the** central attribute of God.

2D. The ethical aspect of this is the basis for saying that God can have no communion with sin. This is moral perfection. Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13; cf. Isa. 6:5

3D. Manifested in the law, in man's heart, in God's revelation -- Jn. 17:11; I Pet. 1:16; Rev. 4:8

## 5C. The Righteousness of God

1 D. Fundamentally, this is strict adherence to a law. For God, the perfect law is found within God Himself and is the highest law in the universe. Absolute righteousness is of the divine nature and is not, in our sense, communicable. Relative righteousness is that perfection of God by which He never violates his own holiness. Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8; Ps. 119:137; 145:17; Jer. 12:1; Lam. 1:18; Dan. 9:14; Jn. 17:25; II Tim. 4:8.

2D. Related to this God:

- established human government -- Ps. 99:4; Rom. 1:32; Rom. 13
- gives rewards
- punishes -- Rom. 1:32; 2:9; 12:19; II Thess. 1:18