

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Theology Proper – Study of God– Part  
1  
Attributes of God

## Introduction

- It is important to have a proper and accurate understanding of God.
  - The only way to achieve this is by studying His revealed Word.
- We will study the following 15 attributes of God.
  - Greatness = spirituality, personality, life, infinity, and constancy.
  - Goodness = holiness, righteousness, justice, genuineness, veracity, faithfulness, benevolence, grace, mercy, and persistence.

## Attributes of God

- Theology Proper = general study of the person of God.
- First thing to discuss is attributes.
  - What is God like?
- Three challenges to this task:
  1. Magnitude of the subject.
  2. Finitude of the examiner.
  3. Consequences of failure.
- Importance:
  - Understanding of God dictates your walk.
  - Some wrong understandings are damnable.



## Some Wrong Conceptions

- Some Puritans made God too severe. Many moderns have made God too indulgent.
  - Some focus so much on His holiness that they neglect His greatness and vice versa.
- Too many think they can domesticate God.
- People think they can change God.
  - Paramenides = What is, is!
  - Heracletes = What is, is changing!
- Due to ideas like evolution, people see reality as changing – they include God and change Him to meet the demands of the culture.



## Difference Between Attributes and Properties

- It is important to make this distinction.
- Attribute = Attributes refer to those qualities that constitute what God is – meaning the characteristics of His very nature.
- Property = Properties are distinctive to each of the Persons of the Godhead, including functions, activities, and acts.
  - This distinction avoids heresies such as patripassionism.
  - Functions = Father planned redemption; son executed it; Holy Spirit applied it.
  - Activities = Father sustains; Son intercedes; Spirit fills.
  - Acts = Father sent the Son; Son died on the cross; Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost.
- Understanding this distinction clears up confusion over the Trinity.

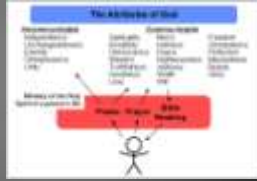
## How To Discover God's Attributes



- Attributes are intrinsic permanent qualities and they should be discerned through Scriptures.
- Scholastics used a different method:
  - Projection: Projecting attributes of man to God, but to the infinite degree.
  - Negation: Saying God is the opposite of the weak aspects of humanity.
  - This comes from general revelation.
- Language to describe attributes is not totally univocal since it is often analogous, but it is definitely not equivocal since they are necessary aspects of His nature.

## Ways to Categorize Attributes

- Reformed theologians like Communicable vs. Incommunicable.
- Others prefer Immanence vs. Transcendence.
- And others like Absolute vs. Comparative.
- These all have one thing in common:
  - One category is unique to God, the other is shared with man.
- We will use Millard Erickson's categories of Greatness and Goodness.



## Attributes of Greatness

- **Spirituality** = God is spirit – in His essence immaterial.
  - John 4:24 – God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
- Related to Spirituality is God's invisibility to us.
  - John 1:18 – No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
  - 1Timothy 1:17 – To the King of ages, immortal, **invisible**, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
  - 1Timothy 6:16 – who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom **no one has ever seen or can see**. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.



## Spirituality

- As a spirit, God is not made of matter and does not have flesh and bones.
  - Idolatry is an offense against God's spiritual nature.
- Spiritual nature allows Him to be limitless and indestructible.
- Mormons claim God is made of matter.
  - Verses they use are anthropomorphisms.



## Personality

- God is not an impersonal "it," or force.
  - Contra Star Wars and Hinduism.
- From the Bible, we learn that God is an individual being, with self-consciousness and will, fully capable of feeling, choosing, and having a reciprocal relationship with other personal or social beings.
  - Personal names = "I AM WHO I AM," in Exodus 3:14 and calling on it in Genesis 4:26. We call on God's name (Psalm 20:7-9).
  - Genesis 3:8 shows a personal relationship (walking in the Garden).
  - Jesus presented God as the Father (a relational and personal term).
- All other worldviews in some form worship an impersonal absolute (avoids the judgment).
- Persons only come from persons.

## Life

- God declared Himself to be living to Moses in Exodus 3:14 – I AM.
  - Scripture assumes God's existence.
  - Hebrews 11:6 says, "whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists."
- Jeremiah 10:10 is a polemic against the false Gods.
  - Jeremiah 10:10 But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.



## Life

- God's attribute of life is qualitatively and quantitatively far different than our possession of life.
  - We are contingent, meaning we have our life in God.
  - Job 34:14-15 – If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.
- God does not derive His life from any external source.
  - John 5:26 – For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.
  - Acts 17:25 – nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.
- Since God is eternal, there is never a time that He did not exist. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God ..."
- He is the uncaused one, and it is His very nature to exist. He cannot NOT exist. Thus, God is true life!

## Infinity

- God is both unlimited and unlimitable.
- This applies to place:
  - Acts 17:24 – The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.
    - Thus, He is not confined any place.
  - Psalm 139:7-12 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
    - Thus, He is not absent from any place.

## Immanence vs. Transcendence

- This creates the paradox of God's immanence (God is everywhere) and transcendence (God is not anywhere).
- The truth of the matter is nowhere within creation is inaccessible to God. God cannot be confined to any single place, yet there is no place where He is not.
  - Jeremiah 23:23-24 – "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.
- This paradox is actually philosophically necessary for God to exist and be understandable to His creation. It maintains:
  - Creator/Creature Distinction
  - Absolute Personality

## Infinity

- This also applies to time:
- God is from everlasting to everlasting.
  - Psa 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
  - Jud 1:25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
- Jesus' Great Commission statements apply to both time and place.
  - Mat 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, **to the end of the age.**"
  - Act 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth.**"

## Infinity

- Thus, God is timeless.
  - He does not grow or develop like us.
  - There are no variations in His nature at different points in time. He has always been what He is.
  - Even being unbound from time, He still understands the succession of points of time.
  - God knows what is now occurring in human experience, and He is aware that events occur in a particular order. Yet, He is equally aware of all points in time simultaneously despite their chronology.
- Therefore, through infinity of place and time, God is clearly omnipresent. This by default leads to the next point – omniscience.

## Infinity

- God's knowledge is infinite.
  - Psalm 147:5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
- We should have Paul's attitude.
  - Rom 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!



## Infinity



- God is infinite in power (omnipotent).
- In Genesis 17:1, God declares himself as such by calling Himself God Almighty.
- Jeremiah 32:17 declares God's infinite power.
  - Jeremiah 32:17 'Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

## Infinity

- Omnipotence is observed in many ways.
  - Power over salvation – Matthew 19:26
  - Power over nature through miracles (Exodus)
  - Power over history by controlling whole peoples (Acts 17:26).
  - Power over human life and personality as He changes people into what He wants them to be (Romans 9:20-23).
- God's omnipotence is unchallenged by anything.
  - Psalm 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.



## Dumb Objections

- Can God make a square circle?
- Can God make a rock so big that He can't lift it?
  - These are traps.
- All-Powerful means power over all. Having all power means it is impossible to have a circumstance where God all of sudden does not have all power.
  - This is why He cannot make a rock that is too big for Him to lift.
  - God defined by His Word through creation that a square has four corners and a circle has none.
  - To alter that would surrender His sovereign power that declared their fixity in the first place.
  - Furthermore, God cannot do anything that contradicts His nature (Hebrews 6:18).
- Thus, infinity means God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. If God ceased to have any of these, He would cease to be God.

## Constancy/Immutability

- This is the final attribute of God's greatness.
- Immutability means God does not change and is unchangeable.
- Everything else changes, but not God.
  - Psalm 102:26-27 – They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.
  - Psalm 33:11 – The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.
  - Malachi 3:6 – For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.
- There is not qualitative change or quantitative change in God.
  - He cannot increase in anything because He is already complete or perfect. He cannot decrease in anything for that would cause Him to cease being God. It is impossible for Him to cease being God.

## God Really Doesn't Change?

- What do we do with the few times in Scripture that it looks like God has changed His mind?
- The answer falls into three categories.
  - Anthropomorphisms (actions) and Anthropopathisms (feelings) – explanations of God's feelings and actions in human terms so that we can understand them. Statements of regret or pain fall under this category.
  - Dispensational Plan of Salvation – this refers to stage progression within God's plan. For example, God including Gentiles in salvation was not angry reaction against Jews, but it was a new stage in the plan of salvation history. God did not change.
  - Human change – God doesn't change, but human orientation does. Adam and Eve's sin caused the relationship to change (thus they saw the other side of it – separation from God). God is consistent, so the way humans experience God depends on their condition within His presence. Nineveh's repentance in Jonah is an example.

## Process-Theology/Open-Theism

- Process theology holds that all reality is in a state of change, and thus if God is real, He too is in a state of change.
  - His omniscience only applies to the present. Since the future has not happened yet, He does not know it.
  - When the future becomes the present, He now knows it, and thus His knowledge changed.
- They use the apparent changes of God in Scripture to justify their position.
- Their position is self-contradictory.
  - If all reality changes, then it is true that the one thing that does not change is that reality changes. Thus, something is unchanging!



Predictive Prophecy in the Bible undermines their position!