

Deeper Truth

1. The Doctrine of God



CRAWLEY
COMMUNITY
CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 24 the disciples ask Jesus an interesting question: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” I’m not sure what answer they were expecting, but it was probably not the answer they got:

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” [Matthew 24:4-5]

And

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [Matthew 24:10-11]

Those are verses that we should take careful notice of. The Christian church throughout the ages, and even more so today, is engaged in a battle for the truth. How do we stay true to God’s word, and how do we avoid being deceived by false teaching or doctrine? The sad truth is we will all probably know people who at one point were walking strongly in the faith but now seem to have been pulled away. The whys and wherefores of that are not really the subject of the course, but rather “How do we stay true to God’s word?” How can we do our utmost to ensure we are not deceived or distracted, or worse still, become those who deceive or distract others? The simple answer is to study God’s word and to understand the truths in there, and what it says and what it does not say.

We are also more likely to be led astray by subtle twists and modifications to God’s word rather than an outright denial. Satan at no point said to Adam and Eve “God doesn’t exist, help yourself to any fruit you like.” They would have seen through that deception very quickly. Rather he asked:

“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” [Genesis 3:1b]

We also need to be aware of those truths that are fundamental to our faith and a denial of such will instantly lead us into error as opposed to other truths that can be interpreted in different ways, and for which Christians can hold different views. An absolute truth that must be defended to the uttermost is the fact that Christ will return. The means and manner of that return, and the whole are of what happens in the end times is however subject to much debate. With such subjects the various viewpoints will be presented.

Likewise, the truth that God created the whole universe out of nothing in one single act of creation is another truth we must hold to. The manner of that creation (was it over seven literal days or seven periods of time) is another area on which much has been written and different view put forth.

This course was first presented as an eight-part course at Crawley Community Church in 2012/13 and the content and accompanying notes have been expanded and revised for 2023/24.

All verses are from the from the English Standard Version (2001]

Bible verses and passages are shown in blue, other quotes are shown in red.

CONTENTS

1. The Doctrine of God

1.1 The Incommunicable Attributes of God

- 1.1.1 United
 - 1.1.1.1 United in Person
 - 1.1.1.2 United in Character
- 1.1.2 Self-existent
- 1.1.3 Immutable
- 1.1.4 Omnipotent
- 1.1.5 Omniscient
- 1.1.6 Omni-temporal
- 1.1.7 Omnipresent

1.2 The Communicable Attributes of God

- 1.2.1 Loving
- 1.2.2 Holy
 - 1.2.2.1 A particular attribute
 - 1.2.2.2 An all-encompassing attribute
- 1.2.3 Merciful
- 1.2.4 Graceful
- 1.2.5 Just
- 1.2.6 Truthful
- 1.2.7 Wise
- 1.2.8 Wrathful

1. The Doctrine of God

God, to keep us sober, speaks sparingly of His essence.

[John Calvin 1509 - 1564]

John Calvin, the great theologian of the Reformation, reminds us God speaks sparingly of His essence and I open with that quote to keep us humble in our endeavours, but of the greatest truths in scripture is that God has revealed Himself to us. He is a God who wants us to know Him, He does not want to be distant, or mysterious or unknowable, and so whilst it might seem presumptuous to devote a whole session to 'knowing God' and looking at His nature, God does reveal Himself to us, and in so many ways we can understand His nature and seek to apply it to our own lives, yet at the same time he is the Infinite Almighty God, who far exceeds our capacity for understanding.

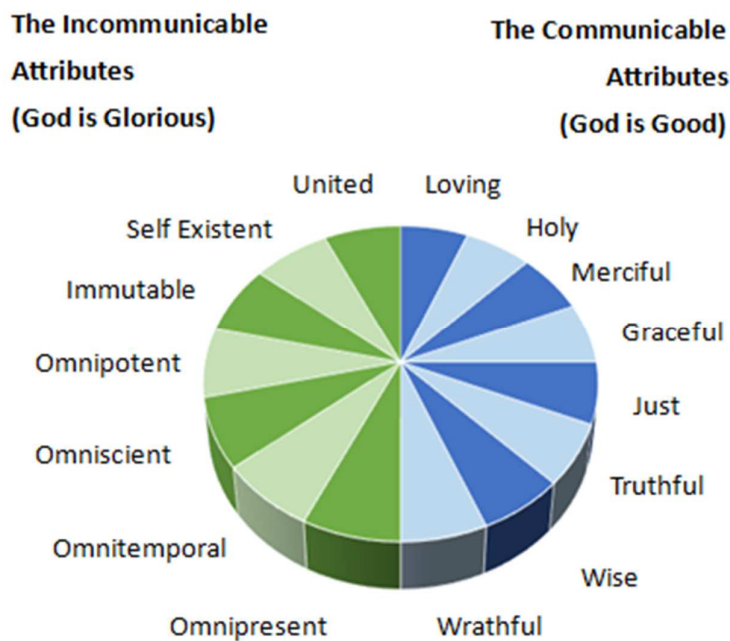
God's nature has, of course, many attributes, and these can be grouped in many ways.

Some speak of *the natural and moral attributes* of God. God has certain absolute attributes because of who He is (Omnipotence, Self-Existence etc) and other because of, and due to, the exercise of His will (Mercy, Justice, Love).

Others speak of *relative and absolute attributes*. God has certain attributes with regards to Himself (Immensity, Immutability etc) and other; relative attributes, in regard to his interaction with His creation (Mercy, Love etc)

The most common division, and the one that will be used here is to divide the attributes of God into two main groups:

- 1) **The Incommunicable Attributes**
- 2) **The Communicable Attributes**



1.1 The Incommunicable Attributes of God

*Immortal, Invisible, God only wise
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes
Most Blessed, Most Glorious, the Ancient of Days
Almighty, Victorious, they great name we praise.*

[Walter Smith 1824 – 1908]

*And no sky contains, no doubt restrains
All You are, the greatness of our God
I'll spend my life to know
And I'm far from close to all
You are, the greatness of our God.*

*And no words could say, or song convey
All You are, the greatness of our God
I'll spend my life to know
And I'm far from close to all
You are, the greatness of our God.*

[Greatness of our God: Ingram/Garrard/Morgan]

When we talk of incommunicable attributes of God, we mean those attributes or characteristics which show God as an absolute being. Incommunicable means these characteristics are possessed by God alone, we cannot aspire to them, or hope to achieve them; they cannot be '*communicated*' to us.

The 'Glory of God' is one way in which we describe a God who goes beyond all finite reality. We talk also of the '*transcendence*' of God or the '*infinite nature*' of God. God is transcendent, infinite, and indeed glorious because of the incommunicable attributes that He alone possesses.

This concept is by its very nature difficult to express, however, when people in scripture come face to face with the glory of God it is often described as an all-consuming, or brightly burning fire.

Moses at Mt Sinai:

Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. *[Exodus 24:17]*

Ezekiel's Vision:

And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. *[Ezekiel 1:27]*

1.1.1 United

God is one:

The Unity of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He is singular and not divided into parts.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

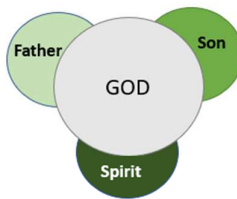
[Ephesians 4:4-6]

1.1.1.1 United in Person

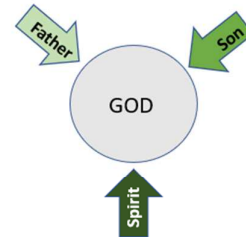
God is not ‘many gods’ nor does He have separate parts. This is key in regard to the Trinity; Father, Son, and Spirit are not ‘parts’ of which the divine essence is composed but are fully and completely united. In the world people often comment on excellent relationships “they act like one”; yet each party is distinct. With God, through the Trinity he is united there is no disunity in God.



God is not divided into three separate parts which together make up ‘God’

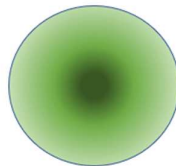


The ‘distinctions’ are not ‘add-ons’ to God’s core being



The ‘distinctions’ are not different ways of viewing God

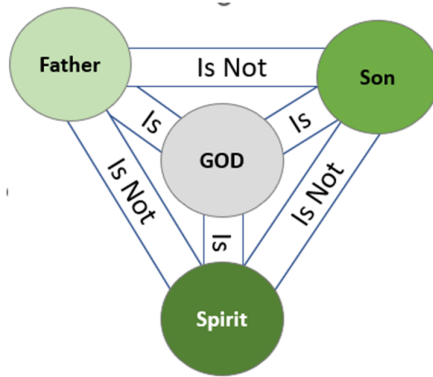
This last view is called ‘Modalism’ or ‘Sabellianism’ and denies there are three distinct persons in the Trinity, rather there is one person who acts in three different ways. Sabellianism has been rejected by the majority of Christian churches in favour of Trinitarianism, which was eventually defined as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons of one substance by the Athanasian Creed, probably dating from the late 5th or early 6th century.



There are three person and the being of each is equal to the whole being God

When we speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together we are not speaking of any greater being than when we speak of the Father alone ,or the Son alone ,or the Holy Spirit alone. The Father is all of God’s being. The Son also is all of God’s being, and the Holy Spirit is all of God’s being. [Wayne Grudem 1948-]

Another diagram which may be helpful is the 'Shield of the Trinity' which summarises the first part of the Athanasian Creed.



A number of theological terms have been used over the ages to stress this point:

Unitas Singularitis	This attribute stressed the oneness and unicity of God.
Unitas Simplicitalis	God is not composed of, nor can be broken down into 'component' parts.

Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[Deuteronomy 6:4]

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

[1 Corinthians 8:6]

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. [1 Timothy 2:5]

If we (or others) have a wrong perception of the Trinity it is possible to 'incorrectly' suggest we worship three gods – after all, the trinity stresses the equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, however this is just another example of our inability to fully grasp the character of God.

1.1.1.2 United in Character

God is also united in regard to his characteristics, and this is an important point to make before other attributes are considered in more detail.

When scripture speaks of the attributes of God it never singles out one as being more important than the other. Every attribute is completely true of God. Consider two verses from 1 John.

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

[1 John 1:5]

Anyone does not love does not know God, because God is love.

[1 John 4:8]

If God is both 'love' and 'light', is he half love and half light? When he is 'being love' does he stop 'being light'? Clearly not, God is both fully love and fully light all of the time.

Or consider these verses.

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [Colossians 1:17]

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. [1 Peter 3:12a]

When God is watching us and listening to us is He distracted' from holding the universe together, or when He is holding the universe together is He not giving us His full attention? God can do both, He holds the universe together yet 100% of his being is focussed on us when we pray.

As we consider the various attributes of God, we need to remember these are not attributes that God possesses part of the time, or attributes that compete with each other, nor is God's nature divided so some part of his reflects one attribute whilst another part of him reflects another attribute.

1.1.2 Self-Existent

God is independent.

The Self-Existence of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He was not created by any greater being, nor is He dependent on anyone for anything.

The self-existence of God is summed up most clearly in His declaration to Moses at the Burning Bush:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say to this people of Israel, I AM . This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." [Exodus 3:14]

We are not Self-Existent beings. If we want to fully describe ourselves to others, we need to do so by referring to others; "I am the son of...", "I am the daughter of..." I come from a particular place or was born at a particular time. God needs no external agency with which to describe or explain himself – he simply IS.

A number of terms have been adopted over the years to convey the idea of a self-existent God:

Causa Sui	His own cause. This term is however inaccurate as it implies God created Himself. God was neither created by Himself or by anyone else. He is the uncaused one who exists by the very necessity of His own being.
Asetas	Self-originated – His origins are in His very nature.
Independentia	Used by Reformist theologians as expressing the fact that God is independent in His being, but also that He is independent in everything else, His virtues, His decrees, His words etc.

We can talk also of the Aseity of God from the Latin 'a' and 'se' meaning 'from himself'.

There is ample scriptural evidence for the self-existent nature of God:

Independent in authority:

Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? [Romans 11:35]

Independent in deed:

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" [Daniel 4:35]

Our God is in heaven; He does all that he pleases. [Psalm 115:3]

Independent in will:

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" [Romans 9:19]

Independent in power:

For You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created. [Revelation 4:11b]

Independent in decrees:

The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. [Psalm 33:11]

Independent in needs:

Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [Acts 17:25]

So far, we have said two main things about the self-existent nature of God:

- a. He was not created, either by Himself or by another.
- b. He is not dependent on anyone for anything.

The self-existent nature of God can be further understood by looking more closely at the concept of God as an 'absolute' being, and the root definition of that word:

- 'ab': from.
- 'solve': to loosen.

It means literally to free from condition or restraint, and that is the picture of God that we have built up so far; one who is totally independent.

Imagine for a moment someone bound in a strait jacket. They are constrained and restrained; their independence of movement has been removed. Or even simpler, imagine being cramped in the back seat of a car for a long journey. Imagine the freedom you feel when you can stretch and move, and the restraints are removed.

Imagine a person in prison whose independence has also been removed. Imagine the joy that goes with released the realisation that the limits that had been imposed have now gone. God has never, nor will he ever know any form of restraint or limitation to his will or desire.

However, some false teachings have arisen over the years that take this idea too far and suggest that God is so absolute, so free from restraint, that He has no relationship with His creation, indeed for Him to interact with His creation would imply that He was in some way bound to it and not totally absolute. We must of course reject his notion as scripture makes it abundantly clear that God is intimately involved with His creation, indeed this is the very essence of the gospel narrative.

Such false doctrine is 'deistic' views of God. They imply a God who has set creation going like a clockwork toy but has now left it to its own devices.

When we talk of God as the absolute one, we are describing Him as the ultimate one who does not exist in any necessary relations because He is self-sufficient, but at the same time He can freely enter into various relations with his creation as a whole or with us as individuals. [Louis Berkoff 1873-1957]

This is an exciting statement; we know that God loves us and has a relationship with us, yet nothing compels Him to form that relationship; no greater power encouraged it, or cajoled God into it. Nor as we well know, was there anything in us to make us acceptable to God. The relationship that exists between God and us exists purely because God wanted it.

Often our faith is questioned by such questions as; “Who created God.” This is the essence of many of the New Atheist arguments proposed by Richard Dawkins and his contemporaries. Whatever is suggested as a primary source of all things is then challenged with; “but who created that.” If something was ‘created’ then it is a legitimate question to ask, “who created it?” If something was not created, it is not a legitimate question to ask. If God is Self-Existent, then the question; “Who created God?” is not a logical question.

1.1.3 Immutable

God is not subject to change.

The immutability of God can be described as that perfection of God by which He is devoid of change, not only in His being but also in His perfections, His purposes, and His promises.

The immutability of God follows naturally from His perfection. Change is either for the better or the worse, but perfection cannot be improved upon. Any change would be for the worse and therefore a change for the worse would render God’s perfection no longer perfect, therefore God cannot change.

There is ample evidence for the immutability of God in scripture:

But you are the same, and your years have no end. [Psalm 102:27]

For I the Lord do not change. [Malachi 3:6a]

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [James 1:17]

Not only is God unchanging in His nature, but His promises do not change:

I brought you up from Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you. [Judges 2:1b]

I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. [Psalm 89:34]

Scripture does, however, show a God who apparently changes His mind:

Abraham pleads for Sodom [Genesis 18:22-33]

Moses pleads for the people of Israel [Exodus 32:10-14]

The people of Nineveh are spared judgement [Jonah 3:10]

We need to realise that God will change His actions and disposition towards us depending on our response. The people of Nineveh repented and God, in his mercy spared them. God immutability does not mean He cannot change His actions in response to people’s changing actions. Another way of putting it is God will not change,

but we can and often do change. That change *in us* will result in a changing response from God, not because He is changing but because we are.

These instances [as above] should all be understood as true expressions of God's present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at the moment. If that situation changes, then of course God's attitude or expression of intention will change. This is just saying that God responds differently to different situations.
 [Wayne Grudem 1948 -]

Actus Purus	A God who is always in action although there is no change to His nature.
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We often talk of God changing His mind, but the reality is a God who is absolutely unchanging in His desire to establish a right relationship with His creation any change is subservient to the outworking of that unchanging desire.

Sometimes in discussing the unchanging nature of God a similar attribute is mentioned, namely the **'Impassibility of God'**. Reformed theology would reject this but the idea, if true, would convey a God who is not subject to passions or emotions.

In 1643 the English Parliament called a number of church leaders to meet at Westminster Abbey to provide advice on doctrine. Chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession talks of a God 'without passions'.

There is but one only living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.
 [Westminster Confession Chapter 2 1643]

However this does not mean God does not have passions or is impassionate (something we would see as a negative characteristic) rather God does not have the 'shifting' and 'changing' passions that men have. God nevertheless does have feelings and emotions:

<i>God rejoices</i>	<i>[Isaiah 65:2]</i>
<i>God grieves</i>	<i>[Psalm 78:40 & Ephesians 4:30]</i>
<i>God feels pity</i>	<i>[Psalm 103:13]</i>

And of course, He loves.

1.1.4 **Omnipotent**

God is all powerful.

The omnipotence of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He, through the mere exercise of His will, can realise whatsoever is present in His will or council.

One of the names of God is 'El-Shaddai' which is derived from the word 'Shadad' and means 'to be powerful'.

God's power is beyond our comprehension.

<i>Is anything too hard for the Lord?</i>	<i>[Genesis 18:14a]</i>
<i>For no word from God will ever fail.</i>	<i>[Luke 1:37]</i>
<i>All things are possible with God.</i>	<i>[Mark 10:27b]</i>

God's power is especially shown in regard to creation.

In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.
 [Romans 4:17b]

I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. [Isaiah 45:12]

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. [Hebrews 1:3a]

Note in this verse the universe is not sustained by might, or by exertion on God's part. It is not maintained by 'His mighty arm' (which it could easily have said), the universe is maintained simply by His word. By His uttered word God called the universe into being, and by His continuing word He maintains it.

Nor should the power of God be seen as something abstract. God's power is demonstrated in salvation:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [Romans 1:16]

There are of course things that God cannot do:

He cannot lie:

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? [Numbers 23:19]

And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret. [1 Samuel 15:29]

It is impossible for God to lie. [Hebrews 6:18]

He cannot be tempted to sin, or sin.

For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. [James 1:13b]

Some might say that if there are certain things that God cannot do then he cannot be all powerful. In understanding this we need to see that God's power is not divorced from His perfection. Whilst He can do anything He will not do anything that diminishes that perfection. Again, God is perfect and the power He exhibits flows from that perfect nature and is subservient to that nature.

God does not wake up one morning in a 'bad mood' or think that 'just for once I would really like to lose my temper with this lot.' It is not that God has to clench his teeth and resist the desire to sin, His perfection means that such a desire cannot even be part of His nature.

1.1.5 Omniscient

God is all knowing.

The omniscience of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself, and all things; possible and actual in one eternal and simple act.

The Internet is a great source of knowledge, we could also imagine that given the rate of growth of computing power all knowledge could be contained within it, the answer to any and all questions. Yet even if that were possible, we would have to ask the right question, refine our search parameters, expend energy and effort in finding our way to the answer. God not only has access to all knowledge He does not need a search engine, but He also instantly knows everything with no effort of expenditure of time or energy.

God's knowledge is eternal; God knew the universe and creation fully, even before it was created. He knew you and I fully, before we came into being.

God's knowledge is immediate; it does not arise from a process of deduction as with man (God's does have to think about the answer).

God's knowledge is simultaneous; He sees and knows things in their totality, not as piecemeal events one after another.

Scripture bears ample evidence to the omniscience of God; Psalm 139 in its entirety declares this, but note also.

for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. [1 Samuel 2:3b]

With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. [Job 12:13]

He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? [Psalm 94:9]

Ah, you who hide deep from the Lord your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" [Isaiah 29:15]

The omniscience of God is pertinent to the theme of judgement when all will be made known. God's final judgement will be just because all things will be made known. There will be no 'new evidence' nothing that escapes 'the attention of the court,'

If God did not know all things, then we could argue that the ultimate judgement would be unfair, that the guilty might go free, or the innocent might be punished. For an omniscient God this is not the case.

The omniscience of God is also pertinent to the theme of salvation and the finality of God's revelation. If God only knew part of the sum of everything His revelation to us might be lacking and there might be need of a further revelation. Note that many heresies have at their core an additional truth or an additional piece of knowledge that needs to be revealed to mankind. God knows all and His revelation to us (through Jesus Christ) is a full and complete revelation. God will not need to amend it or add to it.

[Christ] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [Colossians 2:3]

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [John 16:13]

1.1.6 Omnitemporal

God is eternal.

The eternal nature of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limitations and all successive movements and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.

From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. [Psalm 90:2b]

But you oh Lord sit enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations. [Psalm 102:12]

We generally think of God's eternal nature as infinitely prolonged backwards and forward in time; God was there at the beginning of all things (or before the beginning of all things), and He will be there at the end. However, God is not only someone who exists inside time but transcends time itself. Time, for God, has no meaning.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [2 Peter 3:8]

N.B. This verse is often used in the ‘creation debate’ to argue that each ‘day’ or creation could be a ‘thousand-year span of time.’ This interpretation actually de-values the verse and suggests God just ‘sees’ the passage of time differently. God is absolutely outside of time and unbound by it.

Time has relation only to a world of objects that exist in succession, we talk of the passage of time because we see things growing old and decaying and changing.

In physics there are three fundamental laws called the laws of thermodynamics. The second law introduces a mathematic concept called entropy which simply says all things decay. It seems a simple statement, but it is there at the very foundation of how we understand the universe around us. The machines that we make, the knowledge we possess, the as yet unreached challenges that we strive for in science are governed by this principle that things change and decay. It is fundamental to our existence that we are bound by time – yet God is not.

God is outside of time; he is not bounded by it or impacted by it.

1.1.7 Omnipresent

God is everywhere. God is infinite.

The omnipresence of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby He transcends all spatial limitations yet is present in every part of creation with His whole being. God is everywhere at the same time. We also talk of the immensity of God which conveys a similar idea.

God fills every part of space with His full being. He is neither diluted nor stretched thin. Nor is one part of Him present in one place and another part somewhere else. Whilst omnipresence and immensity are similar words, they do express slightly different ideas.

Omnipresence (Imminence) -God is everywhere-	the fact that God fills all of space with His entire being. His presence is not diluted by Him being everywhere at once. The entirety of God is present everywhere.
Immensity (Transcendence) -God can be anywhere-	the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations. God can be anywhere, and in fact chooses to be everywhere.

The omnipresence of God is best summed up by:

Where can I go from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence? [Psalm 139:7]

Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? declares the Lord. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the Lord. [Jeremiah 23:24]

God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. [Acts 17:27]

Whilst the Immensity of God is shown by these verses:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! [1 Kings 8:27]

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool;

[Isaiah 66:1a]

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands.

[Acts 7:48]

The differences are subtle but important. God is above and beyond all spatial limitations; He can be wherever He wants to be (immensity) yet He chooses to be everywhere, just around the corner from each one of us (omnipresence). Both are necessary for a correct view of God for you cannot have one without the other as various heresies and false teachings have suggested.

Without the omnipresence of God, we have deism.
Without the immensity of God, we have pantheism.

Without the omnipresence of God which has Him **fully present everywhere** we return to a 'deistic' view which has God **divorced from His creation**. He is not bounded by space, but maybe He doesn't want to be present here with us, maybe He would much prefer to be off in some other part of the universe doing something far more interesting.

Without the immensity of God which means he **transcends** all of space, and can specifically choose where he is he is simply **'found everywhere'** which is pantheism or New Ageism.

We also describe God as being infinite although this is a more general term. God is infinite in regard to the fact that He is free from all spatial limitations.

If we were to use some Science Fiction illustrations; in Star Wars we have 'the force' and Obi Wan will tell Luke Skywalker that the force is throughout the galaxy – inhabiting every living thing. It may be everywhere (omnipresent) Yet 'the force' is just an abstract concept, it cannot choose to be in a particular place or present in a particular location.

It may be omnipresent, but it is not immense.

On the other hand, Dr Who is 'immense' he transcends space and time; he can go wherever he wants to go (and has many adventures along the way) but he cannot be everywhere at once.

He is immense, but he is not omnipresent.

The Force can be **everywhere**, but it cannot be **anywhere**.
Dr Who can be **anywhere**, but he can't be **everywhere**.

The Force is impersonal it cannot come alongside each is a special and personal way it is just there. And omnipresence without immensity is just Pantheism (God is in everything) – New Ageism.
Dr Who cannot be everywhere - if fact things fall apart when he is not there, and immensity without omnipresence is simply deism – a God who created the universe but has now gone off to do something more interesting somewhere else.

We see a rise in both New Ageism and Pantheism these days that can probably be traced back to the late sixties and seventies, and you have Dr Who being broadcast in the 60s and 70s and Star Wars being released in 1977 which expresses that doctrine.

1.2 The Communicable Attributes of God

If the attributes we have discussed so far emphasise the absolute nature of God, those that remain stress His personal nature. 'Communicable' means that we are expected to build these characteristics into our lives. They speak also of the way God speaks to and reveals Himself to us; they are 'communicated' to us.

We talk generally of the 'goodness' of God and this is best described as the way in which He constantly desires to establish and maintain a relationship with His creation and is prompted to deal bountifully and kindly toward those He has created.

We can explore the 'goodness' of God through looking at a number of attributes:

1.2.1 Loving

God is love.

The love of God can be described as that perfection of God which compels Him to relate to and communicate with men and women even when they have absolutely nothing to make them worthy and have indeed forfeited all rights to expect such communication.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [1 John 4:8]

The best-known description of God is; 'God is love.' It is important to note that whereas we can be loving, or have a loving nature, or act in a loving way towards someone or something, it is God alone who 'is love'. He is the ultimate definition of love. In humans love has a number of meanings and connotations, however when we talk of God's love it has a very specific meaning:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [1 John 4:9]

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. [John 3:16a]

The word used for love in these passages is 'agape' and it is not used much outside of the New Testament. The more popular word for love is 'eros' which describes the love of a worthy object. In contrast, 'agape' describes the love of an unworthy object.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [Romans 5:7-8]

There are instances of 'agape' love in him Old Testament:

*God's love for idolatrous Israel [Deuteronomy 7:7ff]
Hosea's love for his unfaithful wife [Hosea 3:1 ff]*

These again reinforce the strength of God's love as something far above our exercise of it.

With the communicable attribute we must remember we can, in some way, reflect these back to God in our lives, and whilst we have already said we should not elevate one attribute above another, the call for us to be loving sums up all of our obligations to God:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself." [Matthew 22:36-39]

1.2.2 Holy

God is separate.

The holiness of God can be described as that perfection of God by which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity from His moral creatures."

The Hebrew word for 'to be holy' is 'quadah'. It is derived from the root word 'qad' meaning to cut or separate and is one of the most prominent ideas in scripture. In the New Testament we have the words 'hagazio' and 'haguos' yet all denote the same thing; a God who is absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exulted above them in infinite majesty,

There are two ways of looking at the Holiness of God:

- a) It is a particular attribute.
- b) It is an all-encompassing attribute.

1.2.2.1 A particular attribute

The holiness of God is in itself a fundamental concept which touches all other attributes; the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God all find their basis in the holiness of God. In other words, because God is holy, He can therefore be fully loving, fully graceful, and fully merciful.

In this regard some theologians would describe the holiness of God as an incommunicable attribute it that is describes ideas of absolute inapproachability, absolute overpoweringness; awful majesty and this is certainly a clear concept in the Old Testament:

"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? [Exodus 15:11]

There is none holy like the Lord" [1 Samuel 2:2a]

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy. [Isaiah 57:15]

For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst. [Hosea 11:9b]

Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us? [1 Samuel 6:20]

Whenever God is compared to, or differentiated from 'other gods', the point of difference that is emphasised is His holiness.

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgement, hating what he hates, loving what he loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His word. [John Charles Ryle 1816 – 1900]

Only when we understand the holiness of God will we understand the depth of our sin. [Billy Graham 1918 – 2018]

1.2.2.2 An all-encompassing attribute

However, it is also true to say the holiness of God is not just something we should be in awe of as something beyond us and unobtainable; it is also an attribute that should motivate us, compel us to action, and define our lifestyles, for we are called to be holy:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body[b] in holiness and honour. [1 Thessalonians 4:3-4]

The holiness of God is revealed in the moral law and in our own conscience. It stands out primarily in the law given to Moses and to Israel. The law impressed on them the dual themes of the absolute holiness of God and the injunction to lead holy lives. That is why the word is used so often to describe the people of God; holy people, holy nation, holy city, holy priesthood.

Just as God is set apart from creation, so His people were to be set apart. The New Testament words for holy also carry the idea of not just being set apart but being dedicated to or owned by. We are set apart for God.

Consecrate yourselves therefore and be for I am holy. [Leviticus 11:44]

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. [Leviticus 19:2]

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. [1 Peter 1:15]

Finally, the holiness of God needs to be viewed in the context of the love of God. We can easily stress one above the other rather than seeing them as two sides of the same coin. Often, we see the Old Testament as portraying a stern righteous judgemental God whereas the New Testament displays a loving personal father, but God does not change over time (or between testaments), nor can these two attributes be separated.

God's holiness impresses on us our calling and our need to live a pure life, pleasing to Him, and His love (which is perfectly expressed in Christ) enables us to rise to that calling and be holy.

1.2.3 Merciful

God is merciful.

The mercy of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby love is shown to those in misery or distress irrespective of whether they deserve such love or not."

Justice is receiving what we deserve.

Mercy is not receiving what we deserve.

The Hebrew word most commonly used is 'chesed' . 'Racham; is also used which suggests deep compassion and is often translated as tender mercy.

We speak equally of a compassionate God who pities us and who is anxious to relieve our distress, and it is in the area of sin and our redemption that God most clearly reveals His mercy. God's kindness and forgiving nature are similar concepts. We would have no recourse if God decided to act justly towards us and simply punish us for our sin, yet He acts mercifully towards us and withholds his judgement.

In the Old Testament the mercy of God was a theme spoken of time and time again

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. [Psalm 86:5]

The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

[Psalm 145:9]

In the New Testament the mercy of God is clearly linked with Christ's sacrifice

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ our Lord.

[1 Timothy 1:2b]

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.

[Ephesians 2:4]

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

[Titus 3:5a]

God's mercy is so great that you may sooner drain the sea of water, or deprive the sun of light, or make space to narrow, than diminish the great mercy of God.

[Charles Spurgeon 1834 – 1892]

1.2.4 Graceful

The grace of God can be described as that perfection of God whereby he displayed unmerited goodness and love to those who have forfeited the right to it and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation.

Justice is receiving what we deserve.

Mercy is not receiving what we deserve.

Grace is receiving what we do not deserve.

Grace comes from the Hebrew word 'chanin' and the Greek word 'Charis'. It conveys the idea of showing favour towards someone.

In scripture it is men as well as God who can show grace:

Esau showed favour to Jacob

[Genesis 33]

Potiphar showed favour to Joseph

[Genesis 39]

Boaz showed favour to Ruth

[Ruth 2]

Yet in all of these favour was deserved; Joseph was a good servant, Ruth was beautiful etc. Just as with 'eros' love there was a rationale for the grace; favour was displayed towards something of worth.

With God however, grace is the free bestowal of His kindness on those who have no claim to it, or any inherent worth. Again, we find this concept of God loving, and displaying favour to that which is unworthy:

There are a number of types of grace that we can consider:

Grace to the unrepentant

If favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the Lord.

[Isaiah 26:10]

Grace to the repentant (saving grace)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

[Ephesians 2:8]

to the praise of His glorious grace which He has freely blessed us in the Beloved.

[Ephesians 1:6]

For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people.

[Titus 2:11]

Saving grace is the means by which those who have no right or expectation of salvation are bought into unity with God.

Grace to continue to live the Christian life.

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [John 1:16]

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. [2 Thessalonians 2:16]

Grace can be expressed as: God's Riches at Christ's Expense

1.2.5 Truthful

The truthfulness (or veracity) of God can be described as that perfection of God by which He fully answers to the idea of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees all things as they truly are.

We talk of the **veracity of God** to convey the idea that God is true and faithful. 'Emeth', 'amunah', and 'amen' in the Old Testament and 'alethes', 'alrthinos', and 'pistis' in the New Testament.

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? [Numbers 23:19a]

But the Lord is the true God. [Jeremiah 10:10]

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [John 14:6]

And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." [John 17:3]

In the general sense the veracity of God means that in Him the godhead is perfectly realised; He is all that He should be. He does not in any way 'fall short' of what a true God should be – a charge that is rightly laid at all other 'false gods' in scripture; they fall short and do not truly represent godliness.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. [Psalm 115: 4-8]

Most importantly God's veracity should be regarded in terms of His faithfulness. He is always mindful of His promises and His covenants. This is the reason we can be ultimately confident in God as He will remain true to what He has decreed.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. [Deuteronomy 7:9]

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. [1 Corinthians 1:9]

If we remain faithful He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. [2 Timothy 2:13]

1.2.6 Wise

The wisdom of God can be described as that perfection of God by which always choose the best goals and the best means to realise those goals.

His is wise in heart and mighty in strength. [Job 9:4a]

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. [Psalm 104:24]

To the only wise God, be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen" [Romans 16:27]

God's wisdom is ultimately revealed in Christ and the cross as the perfect means of salvation.

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [1 Corinthians 1:24b]

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in[a] God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. [Ephesians 3:8-10]

Clearly God's wisdom is not fully 'communicated' to us. We do not always know or understand why events have happened. In these instances we must have faith in the ultimate wisdom of God. We can however define wisdom as a 'Communicable' attribute for we are called to be wise and to both discern and act according to Gods will.

Solomon, in particular, was commended for asking for wisdom.

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. [1Kings 3:9-10]

1.2.7 Just

The justice of God can be described as that perfection of God which demands punishment for those who violate His established rule, yet fully vindicates those who are penitent or oppressed.

In considering the next two attributes, God's justice, and His wrath, we can cover them both with the idea that God is righteous. The Hebrew words 'tsaddik', 'tsedhek', and 'tsedhakah' and the Greek words 'dikaios' and 'dikaiousune' all give us our word righteous or righteousness. They imply conformity to a standard so that when we talk of the righteousness of God, we are talking of His adherence to the laws He has established and when righteousness is demanded of men they are called to live by those same laws.

Although God is not subject to any law, law is the very nature of God, and God's maintenance of His law can be seen in the attributes of Justice and Wrath.

God has established a moral law in the world. He has established a just law upon men with promises of rewards for obedience and punishment for transgressions.

For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver. [Isaiah 33:22a]

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and destroy. [James 4:12a]

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. [Romans 1:32]

The justice of God conveys the idea of one who sits in judgement.

But for those who are self-seeking[a] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. [Romans 2:8-10]

In a sinless world there would be no need for the exercise of justice, but in a sinful world it comes to the fore.

Some dilute the justice of God and the punishment of sin by saying God punishes the sinner to reform him or deter others from sin. This focuses justice on the recipient rather than on God. We must always focus on God and see the primary purpose for the punishment of sin as necessary to maintain God's righteousness. This does not mean however, that there is not a wider perspective to justice. It is because of the justice of God that the repentant can be assured of forgiveness."

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [1 John 1:9]

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. [Isaiah 30:18]

God's justice means that He cannot 'forget' or 'overlook' those who are repentant. They are assured of His forgiveness because of His justice,

1.2.8 Wrathful

The wrath of God arises from His self-consistency. All that opposes Him He resists with total and final commitment.

Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being towards that which is a contradiction of His holiness. [John J Murray 1898-1975]

in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [Ephesians 2:2-3]

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God's remains on him. [John 3:36]

Without the wrath of God, He would be content for there to be opposition to His will and so would no longer be truly righteous. Without the wrath of God there would be no demands on man to maintain himself as moral and righteous before God.

Finally, God's wrath is something that is ultimately revealed in judgement. Men and women were never meant to fall under the wrath of God it was primarily something reserved for the judgement of Satan. However, if we remain unrepentant that wrath is exercised at the end of time.

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave[a] and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." [Revelation 6:16]

1.3 Describing God

The attributes of God, help us to describe God and of course they can be arranged in many ways. The structure above is by no means perfect, and others have sought to 'describe' God without making such a difference between the 'incommunicable attributes, and the 'communicable' attributes. Another pattern which may help describe God is as follows:

a) Attributes describing God's being.

- He is spiritual (and whilst we are flesh & blood we too possess a spiritual nature)
- He is invisible (we cannot fully 'see' God, but he makes himself known to us)

b) God's mental attributes

- He possesses knowledge (indeed he knows all things – his omniscience)
- He is wise.
- He is truthful.

c) God's moral attributes

- He is good.
- He is love.
- He is merciful.
- He is graceful.
- He is patient.
- He is holy.
- He is peaceful.
- He is righteous (and he administers justice)
- He is jealous (in the right way)
- He is wrathful (again in the right way in that he is opposed to all that opposes his will)

d) God's attributes of purpose

- He exercises his will.
- He has full freedom of action.
- He is sovereign.
- He is powerful (omnipotent)

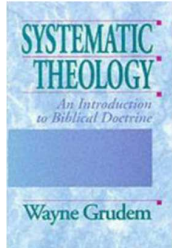
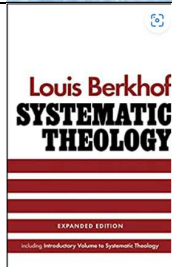
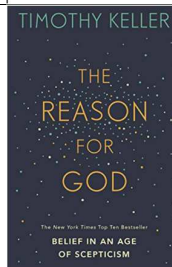
e) God's 'summary' attributes

- He is perfect.
- He is blessed.
- He is beautiful.
- He is glorious.

Questions for consideration

- If you could use just three words to describe God, what words would you pick?
- How would you describe the Trinity in a couple of sentences?
- Thinking of the incommunicable attributes of God, to what extent do you think we will ‘take on’ those attributes in heaven, or are there areas in which we forever be ‘unlike’ God?
- If we should display the communicable attributes of God (to some degree or another) in which areas of your life do you see the most potential for growth?
- Who would you answer someone who says the wrath and anger of God are incompatible with a loving God?

Further Reading

	<p>Systematic Theology Wayne Grudem (1994)</p> <p>The go-to in depth resource for a discussion of Theology.</p>
	<p>Systematic Theology Louis Berkoff (1932)</p> <p>Another very helpful in-depth resource. Reprinted and updated many times and also available</p>
	<p>The Reason for God Timothy Keller (2008)</p> <p>Timothy Keller addresses some of the common questions believers and non-believers ask about God such as Why does God allow suffering in the world? How could a loving God send people to Hell? How can one religion be ‘right’?</p>

Deeper Truth