

God is best known by his **attributes**

Read Exodus 33:11 to 34:8

God describes Himself by His attributes in Exodus 34:6-7:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; **who** keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

There is no definition of God in the Bible. He is revealed relationally and by His characteristics and attributes. But, we can never really know Him in His fullness or perfection. "I am that I am" is as close as you get to a definition (Exod. 3:13f).

According to Arthur W. Pink

<http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Attributes/>

Solitariness / decrees / knowledge / foreknowledge / supremacy / sovereignty / immutability / holiness / power / faithfulness / goodness / patience / grace / mercy / love / wrath / incomprehensibility

According to Charles C . Ryrie

Self existence / infinity / justice / holiness / omniscience / holiness / Freedom / immutability / love / omnipotence / omnipresence / omniscience / righteousness / simplicity / sovereignty / truth/ unity

According to James Montgomery Boyce

Spirituality (of a spiritual nature and the creator of spirits) / infinite intelligence / infinite skill and wisdom / an absolutely untrammelled will / invisible / intangible / incomprehensible by the bodily senses / unchangeable / incorruptible / indestructible / simple and uncompounded / living, personal being / intelligent / moral / free /

active / infinite / eternal / all knowledgeable / all controlling / purposeful in all things /

Communicable versus Incommunicable Attributes

Incommunicable attributes are those that cannot be shared with the creature (like omnipresence). These emphasize the absolute distinction between God and the creature. But, even the communicable attributes, humans exercise imperfectly. So, in their perfect sense, God alone exercises His divine attributes.

Communicable attributes are shared, at least in some limited sense, with humans. Every positive attribute that humans possess must first have been found in God. These are the attributes of which we find some resemblance in man. It should be borne in mind, however, that what we see in man is only a finite (limited) and imperfect likeness of that which is infinite (unlimited) and perfect in God.

In his book, *Behold Your God*, Donald Macleod notes that,

None of these [classifications] has much to commend it and certainly none is to be regarded as authoritative. Scripture nowhere attempts a classification... All the suggested classifications are artificial and misleading, not least that which has been most favoured by Reformed theologians - the division into communicable and incommunicable attributes. The problem here is that these qualities we refer to as incommunicable adhere unalterably to those we refer to as communicable. For example, God is "infinite, eternal and unchangeable" (The Shorter Catechism, Answer 4) and these are deemed to be incommunicable properties: and God is merciful, which is deemed to be a communicable property. But the mercy itself is "infinite, eternal and unchangeable" and as such is incommunicable. The same is true of all the other so-called communicable attributes such as the love, righteousness and faithfulness of God. On the other hand, to speak of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence as incommunicable is equally unsatisfactory. If we remove the prefix omni we are left simply with power, knowledge and presence, all of which have analogies in our own human existence. (*Behold Your God*, p. 20-21)

However, [Louis Berkhof](#) justified his use of these categories, saying that, if we... remember that none of the attributes of God are incommunicable in the sense that there is no trace of them in man, and 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. (*Systematic Theology*, p. 55-56).

God's Attributes According to Berkhof --

Incommunicable: Independence or self-existence / immutability / infinity / simplicity

Communicable: The knowledge of God / the wisdom of God / the goodness of God / the love of God / the holiness of God / the righteousness of God / the veracity of God / the sovereignty of God

Read Psalm 148 – God is supreme.

This list of attributes will essentially follow Grudem, initially. But Berkhof, Pink, and others will be added as we go.

(Incommunicable Attributes)

1) *Independence or self-existence or solitariness.*

Sometimes called “aseity.” (Meaning: “self” with the alpha negative). the property by which a being exists in and of itself, from itself. The word is often used to refer to the Christian belief that God contains within himself the cause of himself, is the first cause, or rather is simply uncaused.

God does not need us, or the rest of creation, for anything. He will continue being Himself. (Acts 17:24-25, Gen. 1:1, Job 41:11, Psalm 50:10-12, Romans 11:34-36)

God did not create humans because He was lonely or had some deficiency within Himself. (But, the Trinity already existed. Jesus spoke of glory He had with God before creation. John 17:24) Everything He did outside Himself was done by His choice, for His good pleasure. We exist for His glory, His pleasure, His worship – which should produce humility. We need Him; He does not need us. And life will go on just fine without us. (Rev. 4:9-11)

I am that I am. Nothing else has the character of “necessary existence.”

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" (Isa. 40:15-18).

God gains nothing from us. Yet, we can glorify Him and bring Him joy. So, don't despair. We have purpose. (Isa. 43:1-7) He takes pleasure and joy in His creation. (Isa. 62:3-5.) Our significance is that God decided to count us as important to Himself. He wrote your name in the Lamb's book before the foundation of the world and sent His Son to redeem you. We do not have “self esteem” outside of the knowledge that God accepts us.

"In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if "time" is could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three Divine Persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning, God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises; no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and that, not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting." During a past eternity, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God

essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.

God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure; for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

A.W. Pink. The Attributes of God

Via Louis Berkhof --

a. The independence or self-existence of God. This means that God has the ground of His existence in Himself, and unlike man, does not depend on anything outside of Himself. He is independent in His Being, in His virtues and actions, and causes all His creatures to depend on Him. The idea is embodied in the name Jehovah and finds expression in the following passages, Ps. 33:11; 115:3; Isa. 40:18 ff.; Dan. 4:35; John 5:26; Rom. 11:33-36; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11.