

DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ESSENCE

The Attributes or Perfections of God

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MEMORY VERSES

• **Ro.11:33** — “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”



INTRODUCTION

We cannot define God in His essence. He is totally beyond our comprehension. But if the definition is descriptive then we may understand some characteristics or attributes of God. We say God is incomprehensible which means it is impossible to know Him (Jd.13:17-18, 22; Is.9:6; Ps.145:3). Yet God has chosen to reveal some truths of His character in the Bible. These truths allow our minds a limited, yet vital understanding of His character. Those things that have been revealed to us should be learned (Du.29:29).

Attributes are qualities inherent to a subject. With God all His qualities are perfect, so perfections may better describe God. The attributes of God describe His total being. They are not simply part of His nature. From time to time one attribute may seem preeminent over the others, yet this is not the case. No quality is independent of or preeminent over any of the others. So when God displays His wrath, He is still love. God is more than the sum total of His attributes. If we list and described all the attributes of God from His revelation to us, we have not fully described God.

God is free or independent of His creatures and creation. Is God free to do whatever He wants? Yes. He will only want what is consistent with His divine essence. God is not obligated to us in any way unless He chooses to initiate an obligation.

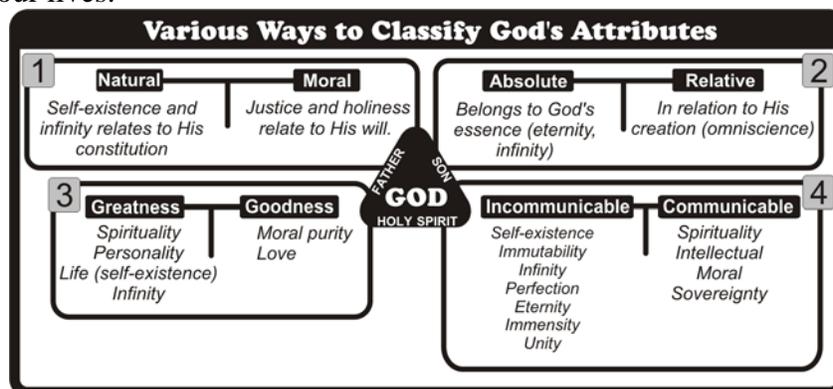
Is there a sense where God is restricted? No, how can we use the word restrict in connection with perfection?

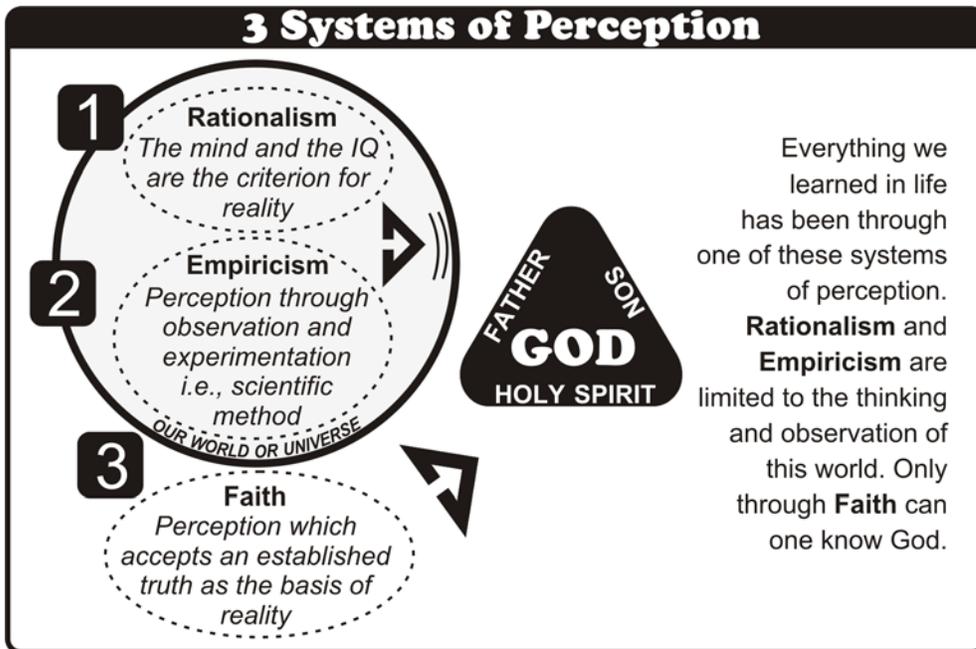
Why Study the Attributes of God?

The nature of God is composed of intrinsic attributes or characteristics. The attributes of God explain God to man. If we understand the doctrine of divine essence, and apply it in prosperity and adversity, you will possess inner peace in every experience of life. Many problems stem from a misunderstanding and misapplication of who God is, and what He is willing and able to do.

Classification of God's Attributes

The four approaches below show some of the ways man uses to explain God. The fact that there are several means used demonstrates the challenge of finite man trying to explain an infinite God. Each of the approaches divides the characteristics into two categories. Your choice of classifying God's attributes is not as significant as studying the attributes themselves to know more about God, and thus how they relate to our lives.





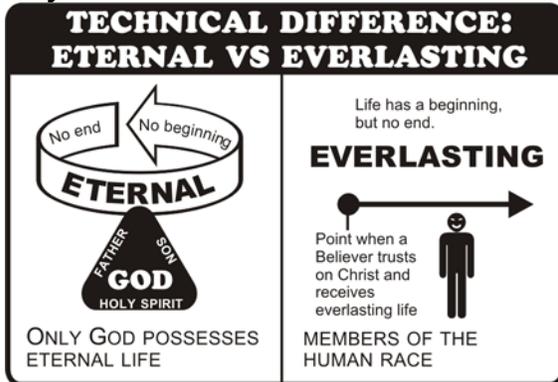
Everything we learned in life has been through one of these systems of perception. **Rationalism** and **Empiricism** are limited to the thinking and observation of this world. Only through **Faith** can one know God.

Man has limitations in understanding the subject of God. Our rational mind and systems of observation cannot of themselves prove the existence of God.

Veracity

God is absolute truth. What He says is certain, correct, and dependable (Titus 1.2). His veracity is seen in His ways (Ps.25:10; 86:15; Re.15:3), His works (Ps.33:4; 111:7-8; Da.4:37) and His Word (2Sa.7:28; 1Ki.17:24; Ps.19:14; 138:2; Jn.17:17; 2Co.6:7; Ep.1:13).

Eternity



God exists endlessly. He possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present. He is endlessly self-existent. He sees the past and future as clearly as the present. There never was a time when God did not exist. He never had a beginning or an end (Ps.90:1-2). Technically, there is a difference between eternal life and everlasting life. Eternal life is the life that only God possesses, whereas everlasting life is the life the human race possesses.

Eternity is everlasting for both the believer and unbeliever. The believer has assurance of eternal life which God gives to all who believe on His Son (Mt.25:46; Jn.8:51). The unbeliever, because he has failed to believe on Christ, will suffer everlasting punishment and regret (Mt.25:46). We humans, because we live inside of time, are slaves to time itself. We think in terms of past, present, and future. Yet our lives are likened to vapor trails (Ja.4:13-14). We are here today, and gone tomorrow.



Immutability

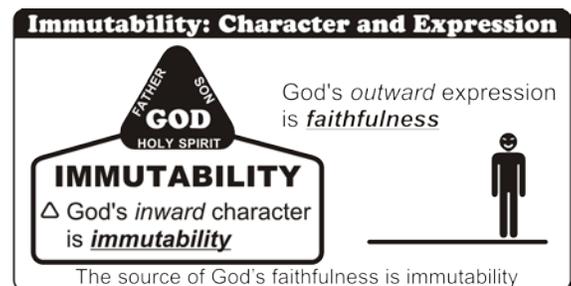
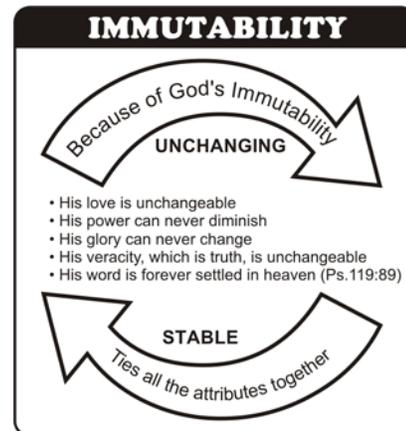
God is unchangeable, thus unchanging. God is never inconsistent or growing. Malachi 3:6 uses this attribute to guarantee Israel's preservation. This attribute assures us that none of God's perfections change. (a) It offers comfort and assurance that God's promises will not fail (Ml.3:6; 2Tm.2:13). (b) It reminds us that God's attitude toward sin does not change.

God's nature and essence is "simple" and devoid of all composition. The more simple and free from mixture and composition anything is, the less subject to change. Spirits, being un-compounded and not consisting of parts, are not as changeable as bodies. And God, being an infinite and uncreated Spirit, and free from composition in every sense, is entirely and perfectly immutable.

Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now and will remain that way forever.

Man is prone to change making us mutable. In our fallen state, even after becoming believers, we are inconsistent and self-contradictory. No human being is to be totally depended upon. If we reject God's advice on this matter than we deserve to be deceived and disappointed by people (Ps.146:1-5). People may like you today but hate you tomorrow. Human nature cannot be relied upon, but God's can! There is nothing in us that is stable. Yet if we have doctrine in our soul we have a stabilizer in life. Because of God's immutability He is faithful. Immutability is the essence and character of God, and faithfulness is the expression of that character. Thus faithfulness stems from God's immutability. The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises. God is faithful in what He withholds just like in what He gives. God is faithful to send us sorrow (Ps.119:75) as well as joy. We can depend on God to keep His Word (Du.7:6-9; He.6:13-20; 10:23; 11:11).

God's faithfulness is true whether we are at ease or in trouble. Understanding these principles will preserve us from worry. To be worried or concerned is to deny this divine attribute. We need to recognize God's attributes in action.



PROBLEM - If God is immutable, how can it be said that He repents (Ge.6:6; Jh.3:10)? 1) These verses are using anthropomorphism which is interpreting what is not human in human terms for our understanding. 2) These verses describe God as sorry or grieved. Thus it is not contradictory to His immutability.

Infinite

God has no bounds or limits. He is not limited by time-space boundaries. It emphasizes the transcendence of God because He's not bound by space. Omnipresence focuses on the immanence of



God because He is everywhere present. USE- Paul used this attribute to argue against false deities of the Athenians (Ac.17:24-28).

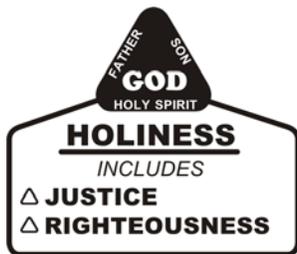
Holiness

Holiness is separation from all that is common or unclean. It also has the idea of being positively pure and thus distinct from all others. Holiness is the absence of evil as well as the presence of positive right. God is not simply righteous by comparison with someone else. His righteousness is independent and incomparable.

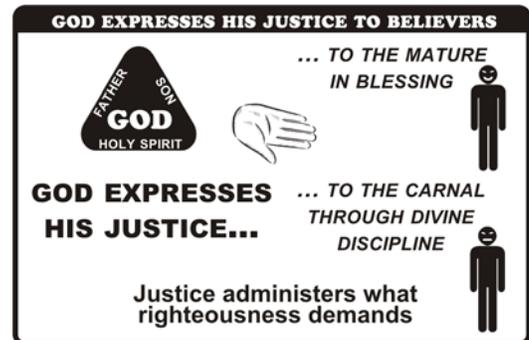
The key to perfect holiness is righteousness. God is righteous in His attitudes and actions. Things happen in life that we do not understand, and they seem unfair. We will find out in the end that God was absolutely right and just in dealing with the situation. Whatever God does in our lives is consistent with His righteous attitudes and actions.

Righteousness is not determined by what one does. Righteousness is a blessing bestowed at the moment we believe on Jesus Christ. God declares us righteous. It is not something we can improve on through our efforts (Pr.17:15; Lk.7:29; 1Tm.3:16). God is the source of this blessing, not us. Our position (declared righteous) enables our practice, not the other way around.

God's holiness relates to His separateness; righteousness relates to God's justice. Righteousness has to do with law, morality, and justice. There are 2 aspects of righteousness - 1) absolute (in relation to Himself, Ps.11:7; Da.9:7) and 2) relative (in relation to His Creation, Ps.19:9; Ac.17:31).



God is also just. God's holiness includes His justice and righteousness. As part of God's justice, is that He is fair. It is impossible for God to be unfair (2Ch.19:7). This means that He is not a respecter of persons (Ro.2:11).



Because the Lord Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God the Father, God is free to pardon and justify those who believe in His Son. The justice of God is seen as the guardian of His divine essence. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross allowed the justice of God to demonstrate His love. Thus, God's justice is the source of grace. So justice becomes the believer's point of contact with God. God's justice is necessary for His love to be demonstrated.



OT references: Le.11:44; Js.24:19; Ps.99:3,5,9; Is.40:25; Hb.1:12). NT references: (Jn.17:11; 1Pe.1:15; 1Jn.1:5; Re.4:8). A proper understanding of the holiness of God should make the believer sensitive to his own sin (Is.6:3,5; Lk.5:8).



God's holiness is the believer's standard for life and conduct (1Jn.1:7). God says we are a "holy nation" (1Pe.2:9). So we are not to think, act, or talk like to world around us. He wants us to be different. If we adopt the world's viewpoint thinking this is the way to reach people, we misunderstand God's holiness. God has always called His people to be holy (different or separate) in all aspects from the world. That difference should provide the tension that draws men toward God.

Love

Many Christian terms are often discussed more than defined. Love consists of affection and correction. Babies are cuddled and corrected, and both are true expressions of parental love. Love seeks good for the object loved. For God it implies no selfishness. - 1Jn.4:8 "God is love". The absence of the article before 'love' indicates that this is the very nature of God. The presence of the article before 'God' (literally, 'the God is love') shows that the statement is not reversible (does not read, 'Love is God' as Christian Science asserts). - All the attributes are possessed by each Person of the Trinity, there must be some loving interaction. God allows Himself to love sinful people. God's love is poured into the believer's heart (Ro.5:5). God's love always depends on His character, and never on man's character. Love is a divine resource "of God" (1Jn.4:7-8).



To abide in His love and to keep His commandments are synonymous in God's Word. You know when somebody loves you by the patience with which they treat you.

Related Sub-Words:

- 'Goodness': God's benevolent concern for His creatures (Ac.14:17).
- Mercy: The aspect of God's goodness which causes God to show pity and compassion (Ep.2:4; Ja.5:11).
- Long-suffering: Self-restraint in the face of provocation (1Pe.3:20; 2Pe.3:15).
- Grace: the unmerited favor of God shown to man primarily in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

HERESY: Universalism grows out of an unbalanced concept of the attributes of God. They teach that since God is love He will ultimately save all people. But God's attribute of love does not operate apart from His other attributes which include holiness and justice. Love cannot overpower holiness and save those who reject Christ and die in their sins. Universalism contradicts statements such as found in Mark 9:45-48.

Omnipotence

OMNIPOTENCE	
OMNI = "ALL" AND POTENCE = "POWER"	
THUS ALL-POWER	
Does omnipotence have any limitations? Yes. There are 2 areas of this limitation:	
NATURAL LIMITATION Things God cannot do because they are contrary to His nature: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He cannot lie (Ti.1:2) • He cannot be tempted to sin (Ja.1:13) • He cannot deny Himself (2Tm.2:13) 	SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATION Things God has not chosen to include in His plan which he might have included as long as they were not contrary to His nature. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God did not choose to spare His Son • God did not choose to save all people

God is all-powerful and able to do anything consistent with His own nature. The word 'almighty' is only used of the God of the Bible (Ge.17:1; Ex.6:3; 2Co.6:18; Re.1:8; 19:6). God is limitless, and nothing is too difficult for Him. His power is not manifest by muscle. His power is in His word. Whatever He says happens!



Though God’s power has no limit, not all that happens is from the power of God. God allowed both angels and mankind to possess volition (free choice), and both chose a negative choice. Believers see the power of God demonstrated as we observe the word of God fulfilled.



When we do not understand the omnipotence of God, even the privilege of prayer may become a burden or chore to us. Answered prayer should be an avenue to witnessing His power in our lives. God has the power to answer prayer (Jn.14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26). God’s power is seen in His creation (Is.44:24; 45:5-7, 18), control of events and circumstances (Is.44:6-8; 46:5, 9-11), and in His care for His people (Is.43:1-13).

God is absolute stability. We do not have to worry about God getting tired or changing (Is.40:28).

- God did not choose to spare His Son
- God did not choose to save all people
- God did not choose all nations in Old Testament times
- God did not choose Esau
- God did not choose to spare James (Ac.12:2) - God could have done any of these things without being inconsistent with omnipotence.

Omnipresence

God is everywhere present with His whole being at all times. This does not mean that God's being is diffused throughout the universe as if part of Him is here and part of Him there. His whole being is in every place. This is how the presence of the Lord can be within every believer. Omnipresence does not mean the immediacy of His presence does not vary. It does. God’s presence on His throne (Re.4:2), in Solomon's temple (2Ch.7:2), or in the believer (Ga.2:20) certainly differs in its immediacy from His presence in the Lake of Fire (Re.14:10). In the Lake of Fire people will be separated from the face-presence of God (2Th.1:9, *prosopon*). They will never be separated from Him who is omnipresent (Re.14:10, *enopion*).

There is no place where God is not present. This is not the same thing as Pantheism which teaches that God is everything. God is everywhere, but is not everything. Yes, God is “present” inside a tree and inside a person, but that does not make that tree or person God.

Omnipresence vs Pantheism	
 OMNIPRESENCE God is present everywhere	 PANTHEISM God is everything
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God is independent of His creation • God is everywhere, not everything. 	
<p>God is “present” inside a tree and inside a person, but that does not make that tree or person God.</p>	

HERESY: Omnipresence differs from pantheism which identifies the universe with God. They fail to distinguish the Creator from the created (Ge.1:1). Many people confuse pantheism with the doctrine of God's omnipresence. They take a passage like Psalm 139:7-8, which teaches that God is everywhere, and turn it into God is everything. This is not what the Bible teaches. God's omnipresence means He is everywhere present.



No person can escape the presence of God. Omnipresence warns unbelievers and comforts believers. Because of God's omnipresence, we can practice the experience of His presence in every circumstance of life.



Omniscience

Omni means all and science means knowledge, thus all-knowledge is the root meaning. God knows everything, things actual and possible, effortlessly and equally well. Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. God's knowledge is not based on time, nor is it related to or limited by time.



God never discovers anything. He is never surprised. God knows everything about our lives before we are born (Ps.139:16). Nothing can ever come to light in a believer's life that would surprise God and cause Him to cast us out. This also means that no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him.

It is comforting to know that a perfect God provided a perfect provision and solution for every problem we would ever face! The Lord's discernment and understanding is unsearchable (Is.40:28).

OMNISCIENCE	
OMNI = "ALL" AND SCIENCE = "KNOWLEDGE" THUS ALL-KNOWLEDGE	
The omniscience of God motivates at least two things to mankind:	
COMFORT	SOBRIETY
That God is not surprised by what man does should comfort the believer and support assurance	That we shall stand someday before an all-knowing God (He.4:13) should produce sobriety in all men's lives.

Because God is omniscient, He knows what is best. This should especially comfort the believer. We may not understand the adversities and sufferings that come into our lives, yet we will discover that God knew all along exactly what we needed (Jn.13:7). Often we do not understand why God does what He does. The only time we think we understand why God does something is when He does something that seems to bring immediate gratification to us.

Sovereignty

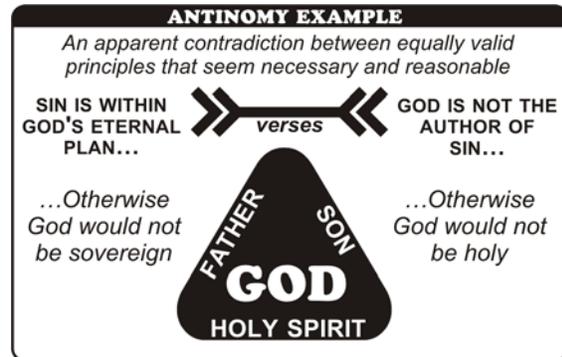
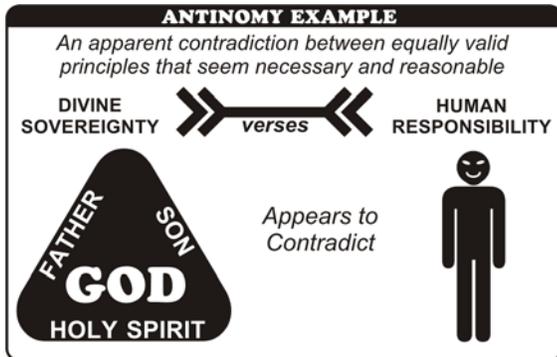
Sovereignty means supreme. God is supreme in rule and has authority over all things. He has the will and right to make decisions. He is in complete control of all things, though He may choose to let certain events happen according to natural laws which He has ordained (De.4:39; 1Sa.2:6-8; 1Ch.29:10-12; Is.46:10).

God will never use His sovereignty to coerce human volition. This is in harmony with His divine essence. He honors our decisions, whether for or against Him. Thus we cannot blame God for "bad" things that happen. "Who [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge [Gk. *epignosis*] of the truth" (1Tm.2:4). The fact that all men are not saved, and that all believers do not come unto an intimate knowledge of the truth, demonstrates that God will not violate or coerce human volition.

PROBLEM: The sovereignty of God seems to contradict the freedom or actual responsibility of man. Sovereignty is clearly taught in Scripture so must not be denied because of our inability to reconcile it with freedom or responsibility. If God is sovereign, how can the creation be so filled with evil - Man was created with genuine freedom. The exercise of that freedom in rebellion against God introduced sin into the human race. Even though God hates sin, for reasons not revealed to us, sin is present by His permission. Sin must be within God's eternal plan (or God would not be sovereign) in some way in which He is not the author of it (or God could not be holy). Sovereignty/freedom forms an antinomy. An antinomy is an apparent contradiction between two equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles. Antinomies consist only of apparent contradictions, not ultimate ones. One can accept the truths of an antinomy and live with them, accepting by faith what cannot be



reconciled. When one tries to harmonize the apparent contradictions of an antinomy, our human nature often leads to overemphasizing one truth to the neglect or even denial of the other.



The things we cannot reconcile in our minds, we must accept by faith. Faith is never blind as some may claim. Faith is always based on evidence. When things happen, it is according to God's reasons, not ours. Sometimes we think we know why things happen. Often we are mistaken. If something happens the way we thought, either we happen to be thinking along the same lines as God, or we are living in submission to God's will.



QUESTIONS

1. What attribute of God guarantees Israel's preservation? (See Malachi 3:6)
2. What heresy grows out of an unbalanced concept of God's love?
3. In what way does God's omnipresence encourage the believer?
4. What are the three essential characteristics of personality?
5. If God is sovereign, how can the creation be so filled with evil?