

Attributes of God

*I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever...
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable...
The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made...
Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all
generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.*

*The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down...
Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is
just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call upon
him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfils the desire of all who fear him,
he also hears their cry, and saves them. ~ Psalm 145:1, 3, 8, 13-14, 16-19*

WHO IS GOD?
While this question may seem obvious

to some, after a phrase or two many of us begin scratching our heads and are at a loss for words. To know who someone is and to have a relationship with that person means knowing something about him or her. God is no different in this respect. In order to develop a relationship with him, we must learn who he is. Learning about his divine attributes certainly will not exhaust the mystery that he is, but it will open him up to us and allow for a deeper relationship with him as we grow in our understanding and faith. Faith in God is fundamental and at the foundation of reality.

God is One

God revealed himself to Israel as the one true God: *"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your*



Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:4-5). Israel's weakness was their desire to be like the other nations and seek after their gods. God's Revelation to them pulled them out of the darkness of idolatry and into the light of the one true God. While our idols today take on different forms than those of the ancient world, they are no less dangerous and deceptive. Jesus warned that money can become for us an idol and keep us from God.

God is Eternal

A second attribute of God is that he has always existed: *"Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?" (Hb 1:12). There*

never was a time when he was not, nor will there ever be a time when he is not. God is transcendent, which means he exists outside of time. In fact, time is part of creation and so God is the creator of time. God simply "is"; he has no future or past.

His timeless nature was revealed to Moses when

Moses asked him for his name. *“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I AM... this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Ex 3:13-15). “I Am who I am” in Hebrew is “Yahweh” and is a name that is revered by Jews but Christians alike. It reveals God has no beginning or end. When placed before this revelation, we realize our own insignificance and praise God for his greatness.*

Also, God’s eternity means he does not change. He is outside time: *“O eternal God, [you] discern what is secret, [you] art aware of all things before they come to be” (Dn 13:42).* When he created us, he knew that we would fall and that he would save us. His will to save us has been in his mind for all eternity. God is ever faithful to his promises even when we sin against him. His love for us does not falter. *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23).*

God is Almighty

God is the Lord over all things: *“Let all thy creatures serve thee, for thou didst speak, and they were made. Thou didst send forth thy Spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist thy voice” (Jdt 16:14).* “In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical”¹ (CCC 271). His power is infinite and cannot be diminished or conquered by the power of evil. However, because he created us with freedom, he has made it so that the execution of his power in this world depends in part on our actions. Nothing is impossible for God; yet, it seems that when we need him most, he is powerless to help us. The apparent weakness of God is at the heart of

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The Ascension of Christ, 15th century cedar panel from Egypt

his plan to conquer evil. Christ was exposed to the powers of evil and *“humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8).* But his apparent weakness revealed the mystery of his power and conquered sin and death when he rose again on the third day. The power of God manifested in the weakness of Christ is not something that we can understand apart from faith. Only in faith can we follow Christ, believing that nothing is beyond God’s power even when its perfection is found in weakness (see 2 Cor 12:10).

God is Holy and Good

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty” (Rv 4:8) sing the angels in Heaven. *“No one is good but God alone” (Mk 10:18),* Jesus tells us. God is the source of all holiness and all goodness: *“Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God” (Bar 2:6).* Throughout the history of God’s dealings with humankind, he gradually reveals his glory and goodness to us. When we seek to be holy, we seek to imitate God. Although evil abounds in the world, God is not the source of evil. Our human freedom, our freedom to do the good, can also choose to do evil: *“He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God” (3 Jn v 11).* God permits evil, and brings good from it, but is not the source or cause of evil. *“We know that in everything God works*

for good with those who love him” (Rom 8:28). Our belief in an all-good God requires our belief in Satan — as a fallen angelic being, not as a “force” — whose choice against God brought evil into existence (see handout on Angels).

God is Truth

The revelation of God’s love is manifested not only in his goodness and mercy but also in his faithfulness

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 25, 5, ad 1

and truth. God keeps his promises: “[S]o shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:11). “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5). The truth is God’s wisdom clothed in radiance and beauty. Because of God’s goodness and purity, his truth pervades and penetrates all things and governs all his actions. Truth is beautiful and one of God’s greatest treasures. In praise of wisdom we read in Scripture: *It is an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction.... [Wisdom] is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness* (Wis 7:14, 26).

God is Love

God declares to us: *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”* (Jer 31:3). As a reflection of his love and goodness, he created all things good. He created us in his own image and *“show[ed] his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8). No one loves us more than God, and he will not be outdone by anyone in lavishing upon us his grace and mercy. In him we have nothing to fear because God is perfect love and *“perfect love casts out fear”* (1 Jn 4:18). Also, *“[w]e know that in everything God works for good with those who love him”* (Rom 8:28).

God loved us first and then created us; or to put it another way, we have been created out of love. As much as his love for us is as that of a father for his children, it is also that of a spouse for his beloved: *“And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, My husband... And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in*

“The only limitation to his power is our freedom. We can still refuse his love and the happiness he offers, but he never stops loving us.”

mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (Hos 2:16, 19-20). The power and intensity of God’s love can be compared to that of the love shared

between lovers whose hearts beat as one: *“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me”* (Song 7:10).

Because he is love, he desires what is best for us. But his love does not stop there. The power of his love reaches beyond his desire for our happiness to the actual attainment of it: *“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”* (1 Jn 4:10). He has secured our happiness and lasting peace through the death of his Son. The only limitation to his power is our freedom. We can still refuse his love and the happiness he offers, but he never stops loving us. His love is forever, even for those in Hell whose anguish is the result of God’s love beating on the hearts of those who have rejected him.

Faith in God

Believing in the one true God who is transcendent, almighty, gracious, merciful and loving has many consequences for our lives. Because of his almighty power and sovereignty, faith means we have to put him in the first place in our lives and serve him. Because of his truth, it means we have to walk in the light of truth, recognizing the beauty and fullness it brings to life. And lastly, because of his mercy and love, it means we have to trust in his providence even during times of suffering and trials. *“Rejoice”* says St. Paul, and *“again I will say, Rejoice.... Have no anxiety about anything,*

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:4, 6-7).

(CCC 198-221, 268, 271-274, 385, 2465, 2809-2810)



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