

9/13/2025

One-Day Seminar: The Nature and Attributes of God

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

The ATTRIBUTES of GOD

Common framework: Communicable and **Incommunicable** Attributes of God

“In this chapter we will adopt probably the most commonly used classification: the *incommunicable attributes* of God (that is, those attributes that God does not share or “communicate” to others) and the *communicable attributes* of God (those that God shares or “communicates” with us),” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1st edition), 156).

“Those are called incommunicable which according to the proper and true sense of the words are not really imparted to created beings...” (*Synopsis of a Purer Theology* (University of Lieden, 1625), 60).

“Attributes of the second sort, which pertain to quality, belong to God in such a way that they are communicated also to created beings...” (Leiden, 62).

Why I don't think this framework is ideal:

Pro: It lets you group the attributes in an intuitive way for easier discussion and teaching.

Con: It tends to **fame** the communicable attributes and **mystify** the incommunicable attributes.

Everything that we can say about God we can say based on an **analogy** to creaturely realities.

But on the other hand, every attribute that we share in common with God is still held in **categorically** different ways.

Sum: Communicable/incommunicable is a decently helpful teaching tool, but might be more **misleading** than helpful.

Both Grudem and the Lieden Synopsis make the same point.

“Upon further reflection we realize that this distinction, although helpful, is not perfect. That is because there is no attribute of God that is *completely* communicable, and there is no attribute of God that is *completely* incommunicable!” Grudem, 157.

“Those are called incommunicable which according to the proper and true sense of the words are not really imparted to created beings, but only partially in a comparative sense,” Leiden, 60.

“Attributes of the second sort, which pertain to quality, belong to God in such a way that they are communicated also to created beings to some degree,” Leiden, 62.

My preferred arrangement:

Quiddity, Quantity, Quality

God in himself, God with regard to creation in general, God with regard to rational and moral creatures

What is God? How **great** is God? How **good** is God?

Quiddity – God in himself – what is God?

- **Simplicity**

- Deuteronomy 6:6, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [And] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
- Isaiah 44:6-8, “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god... Is there a god besides me? There is no rock; I know not any.”
- James 2:19, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”
- God is the most fundamental reality, he is not composed of anything more basic than himself. He has absolutely no parts or composition. His attributes are all various ways of perceiving the one undivided nature of God.
- All that is in God is God. All of God's acts are all of God acting.

- **Immutability**

- Psalm 102:25-27, “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.”
- “Unchanging in his existence and being, he is so also in his thought and will, in all his plans and decisions. His is not a human that he should lie or repent. What he says, he will do,” Bavinck, *RD* II, 153.

- **Aseity**
 - o Acts 17:25, “nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”
 - o From Latin, *A se* – “From itself.” Total independence and self-sufficiency. God’s being, life, and blessedness is completely in and of himself.
- Pure **Actuality**
 - o Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’””
 - o God has no potential but is entirely *actual* – a most pure act. Every created thing is a mixture of what it is (actuality) and what it could be (potential). Anything that moves from potential to actual is actualized by something actual.
- **Infinity**
 - o **Eternity**
 - Isaiah 57:15, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”
 - 1 Peter 3:8, “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.”
 - God is not merely without beginning and without end. God is without *sequence*, he fills eternity. All of time is present to God.
 - o **Omnipresence**
 - Psalm 139:7-10, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”
 - All of space is present to God.

Quantity – God with regard to creation in general – how great is God?

- **Life**
 - o Psalm 36:9, “With you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”
 - o John 5:26, “as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”
 - o God is supremely alive, he is the source and power of all life. He is simple, immutable, *a se*, purely actual, infinite *life*.
 - o God is not a static principle, but all life, growth, and vitality is an image of the supreme immutable vitality of God.
 - o Life is God’s **active** fullness with regard to creation.
- **Knowledge**
 - o 1 John 3:20, “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”
 - o Isaiah 46:8-10, “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”
 - o “Though rational creatures possess a measure of knowledge, there is nevertheless an infinite difference between God’s knowledge and the knowledge of His creatures, both in reference to the mode as well as to the objects of their knowledge,” (Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christians Reasonable Service*, I, 102).
 - o Man knows through observation and deduction. (It is, we see it, therefore we know it)
 - o God knows as a function of his will and decree. (God wills it, therefore he knows it, therefore it is)
 - o “[God] does not acquire His knowledge concerning His creatures through the process of research and rational deduction; rather, He knows them since He has decreed that they should exist and operate,” (Brakel, 102-03).
 - o Knowledge is God’s **mental** fullness with regard to creation.
- **Will**

- Psalm 115:3, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”
- Ephesians 1:11, “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”
- Four kinds of will in God
 - Approving will – approval and disapproval of things and actions as they conform or not to his own goodness.
 - Efficient will – the things that God freely chooses to actually bring about.
 - Commanding will – the things he requires and instructs his creatures to do
 - Permitting will – the bad things that he forbids, yet freely chooses to permit his creatures to do (in fact, not decree), while still holding them accountable for their free choices.
 - Sometimes this is simplified to *revealed* will (approving + commanding) and *secret* will (efficient + permitting).
- Will is God’s **volitional** fullness with regard to creation – he is supremely free.
- **Power**
 - Ephesians 1:19, “and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might”
 - Revelation 1:8, “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”
 - Acts 17:28, “In him we live and move and have our being.”
 - Not only is God unlimited in his power (he can and does do whatever he pleases), but all power is God’s and belongs to him (Isaiah 26:12, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Timothy 6:15-16, Hebrews 1:3).
 - Just like God is necessarily present in all of time and space, so God is the power behind all power. Power is the ability to cause change, the ability to actualize potential, and this always rests on the first unactualized actualizer (God). Hebrews 1:3, “he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”
 - Power is God’s **effective** fullness with regard to creation.
- **Blessedness**
 - 1 Timothy 1:11, “in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”
 - 1 Timothy 6:15-16, “which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”
 - God is supremely, radically, infinitely, eternally, omnipotently, righteously, immutably, superabundantly happy. God lacks nothing but is himself the supreme source of all good. God is supremely content in himself, and this is the blessedness, the happiness, the contentment that he invites us into.
 - Blessedness is God’s **joyful** fullness with regard to creation.

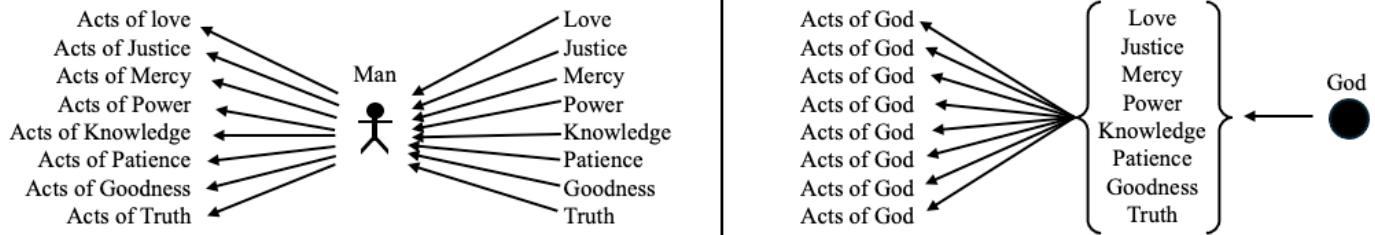
Quality – God with regard to moral and rational creatures – how good is God?

Good rule to remember: Within every **similarity** we might find between God and the creature, there is an ever-greater **dissimilarity**.

These most concern God’s actions.

Helpful to remember the Quiddity attributes at this point. Especially simplicity. “All that is in God is God.” This means that God’s attributes aren’t really **distinct** in him, but are just ways of naming what we perceive of the undivided nature of God. “All of God’s acts are all of God acting.” He never acts out of one attribute and not others, or one attribute at the expense of others. All of God’s acts are expressions of his perfect love, justice, mercy, power, knowledge, eternity, and all the rest.

Simplicity, God's Character Attributes, and God's Acts



- Truth

- Romans 3:3-4, "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.'"
- "Truth, or veracity is the virtue whereby God both in words and signs, in works and deeds, loves and exercises the truth – but most of all the virtue whereby He is willing and able to show his trustworthiness in his promises," (Lieden, 65).

- Love

- Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- 1 John 4:15-16, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."
- "God is **Love**" is only true if "Jesus is **Lord**"
- Two kinds of love: Love of benevolence, and love of complacency.
 - "Love of *benevolence* is that affection or propensity of the heart to any being, which causes it to incline to its well-being, or disposes it to desire and take pleasure in its happiness," (Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue*, in *Works*, Vol. 1, 123).
 - "Love of *complacency* presupposes beauty. For it is no other than delight in beauty; or complacency in the person or being beloved for his beauty," (Edwards, 123).
 - Love of *good will*, love of **delight**. Or, love of *giving*, love of *getting*.
- God's love towards us is exclusively love of benevolence. Whatever beauty we have, is a result of his love of benevolence, not a cause of his love of complacency. Rom. 5:8 makes this point with regard to redemption.
 - 1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"
 - God's love of complacency rests completely on *himself*.
 - Even God's delight in our faithfulness, and grief over our sin flows from his love of benevolence – concern for our welfare – not his own pursuit of blessedness.
 - Psalm 147:11, "but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love."
 - Job 7:20, "If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?"
 - Job 22:2-3, "Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?"
 - Job 35:5-8, "Look at the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds, which are higher than you. If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him? And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him? If you are righteous, what do you give to him? Or what does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself, and your righteousness a son of man."

- Goodness

- Psalm 119:68, "you are good and do good; teach me your statutes."
- God's **essential** goodness means that he is the source and substance of all beauty, and worthiness in creation.

- Whatever is good and true and beautiful in creation is to that extent a dim echo of God's essence.
- God's essential goodness undergirds his truth, justice, and strength. He is the supremely substantial reality, the supreme rock of the cosmos. God's goodness is both what makes him a refuge for the weak, but also a threat to the agents of evil, death, and chaos.
- God's **active** goodness means that all his words, decrees, and actions accord with perfect goodness (his own nature), and are the supreme example of moral rectitude.

- **Gentleness**

- Psalm 18:35, "You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great."
- Isaiah 40:11, "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."
- Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"
- Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
- God's actions are always perfectly adapted to the accomplishment of his ends. He understands our frailty and deals gently and softly with those who need gentleness and softness. He does not treat all people the same way in every circumstance. He knows when to use tough love, and he knows when to use gentle condescension. Even his tough love is an extreme manifestation of his gentleness.

- **Generosity**

- Psalm 145:16, "You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing."
- Isaiah 65:2, "I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices," (cf. Romans 10:21).
- Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."
- God is quick to give, and gives abundantly, both in **creation** and **redemption**. He is not stingy. He doesn't offer you much, all the while begrudging you for taking. He is an infinite fountain of generosity towards his creatures.
- He is generous in creation. Life is full of gifts from God for you to enjoy, and he is delighted in your enjoyment. He is generous in redemption. He freely offers grace upon grace to forgive, restore, reconcile, and sanctify. He gladly holds open his hands saying, "take, take more."

- **Grace and Mercy**

- Psalm 145:8-9, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."
- Ezekiel 33:11, "Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"
- "If the grace of God contemplates man a guilty before God, and therefore in need of forgiveness, the mercy of God contemplates him as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in a pitiable condition... *irrespective of their desserts*," (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 60-61).
- Grace: God's benevolent love towards **sinners**. He is quick to forgive sin.
- Mercy: God's benevolent love towards **sufferers**. He is concerned for creatures in their sufferings, limitations, weaknesses, and frailty.

- **Longsuffering**

- Exodus 34:6, "The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,'" (cf. Numbers 14:18, Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Jonah 4:2, Neh. 9:17...).
- Joel 2:13, "and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster."

- God is exact and precise, but he is patient and is not quick to punish. He endures much, puts up with much, overlooks much all in a benevolent desire to give his rational and moral creatures time and opportunity to repent.

- Anger

- Romans 2:4-5, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”
- God’s goodness expresses itself in patience towards sinners, but God’s goodness also is expressed through God’s wrath and anger towards unrepentant sin and sinners. His patience now does not mean he does not keep track of sin. All sin will finally be punished one day, either in Christ on the cross, or on individuals who do not repent and believe in Christ. No one escapes final justice.
- God’s wrath, anger, and judgement are just as much a expressions of God’s goodness as is his mercy.

- Justice

- Genesis 18:25, “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”
- “Justice is the virtue whereby He deals with everything fairly, and whereby He decrees rewards for the upright, and punishment for the unjust, and whereby He wills to work retribution, and He does so powerfully,” (Leiden, 66).

- Holiness

- Isaiah 6:3-5, “And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’”
- Habakkuk 1:13, “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?”
- Hebrews 12:14, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
- Holiness is to the moral and intellectual attributes what simplicity is to the ontological (whatness) attributes. Holiness in God is the result of truth, love, goodness, mercy, patience, anger, and justice all pushed to the infinite and finally merged together.
- Holiness is both the supreme **otherness** of God that repulses creatures and sinners in fear, and the supreme **goodness** and very fount of life that creatures seek for their final wholeness, and sinners need for their comprehensive restoration.
- Holiness is why creatures **fear** God, and why creatures **love** God.
- Holiness is God’s ontological completeness, his transcendence over creation, and his perfect moral purity, and thus prompts his delight in what is pure, and his repulsion to its opposite.

Another angle to consider

Proper attributes – True of God in and of himself, with regard to either himself or creation.

Derivative attributes – True attributes of God, but only from the perspective, and in the presence of finite and fallen creatures.

Metaphorical Attributes

- Two basic kinds of metaphor (often these are both in play and mixed together)
 - Metaphor of similar prior proper **affection**
 - Metaphor of similar **effect**
- Rock – Psalm 18:2, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”
- Regret – 1 Samuel 15:11, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.”
 - Cf. 1 Samuel 15:29, “And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”

APPLICATION

11 Ways that the Nature and Attributes of God Should Shape Us

1. Humility

- a. Isaiah 66:1-2, “Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”
- b. His utter transcendence and self-sufficiency should end all ideas of God needing anything from us.
- c. Nothing we could do or say impresses God, but he is pleased by our humble obedience to him.

2. Gospel Confidence

- a. Psalm 36:5, “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.”
- b. God’s love and faithfulness is as big and as powerful as he is.

3. Proper Fear of God

- a. Psalm 36:6, “Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord.”
- b. God’s righteousness and goodness is as strong and as immovable as the mountains.
- c. God’s wisdom (judgments) is as deep and mysterious to us as the ocean,
- d. Both mountains and the ocean are not to be played around with.

4. Gospel Shelter

- a. Psalm 36:7, “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”
- b. Since he is strong and good, he can protect us and preserve us.

5. Delighted Gratitude

- a. Psalm 36:8, “They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.”
- b. Cf. Psalm 145:16, “You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”
- c. Every good thing we experience comes from the ontological base and source of reality – the Simple God, and the gracious and loving Lord of creation – God himself.
- d. Understanding who and what God is must drive you to radical gratitude.

6. Focused Devotion

- a. Psalm 36:9, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”
- b. He himself is the end and goal of all your striving. All that you long for points to your soul’s longing for God himself.
- c. God is supremely blessed in himself. The best thing he could do for you is to turn your eyes to what can make you supremely blessed, supremely happy – Himself.
- d. God has nothing to gain from us, and everything to give.
- e. We have nothing to give to God, and everything to gain.

7. True Wisdom

- a. Proverbs 10:9, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”
- b. True wisdom comes from knowing God and understanding his power and purposes in the world.

8. Proper Grasp of the Trinity and Incarnation

- a. John 16:14-15, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”
- b. Philippians 2:5-7, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”
- c. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all subsist in one divine nature, then we better know what that one nature is like if we want to say anything meaningful about the Trinity.
- d. If the Incarnate Lord exists in two natures, Divine and human, then we need to understand what the Divine nature is, and how it is different from the human nature.

9. Confidence in Suffering

- a. Job 1:21, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

- b. Job 2:10, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”
 - c. Psalm 36:6, “Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord.”
 - d. All suffering in life comes through God’s undivided hand of love, mercy, wisdom, goodness, and power.
 - e. We won’t always understand God’s righteousness or understand his wisdom, but it is the bedrock we need to rest on in suffering.
10. **Contentment** under his Providence
- a. Psalm 34:10, “The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”
 - b. Romans 8:28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
 - c. If God is good, just, and merciful, all the while omnipotent, then we can rest with contentment in the place and station that God has placed us in.
 - d. If God is not this God, then our life is shaped by chance, and the wills of creatures as much as the will of God.
 - e. The comfort we derive from providence will rise and fall with our view of God. Contentment will rise and fall based on our view of God.
11. The **Simplicity** of Godliness
- a. Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
 - b. Godliness, like God, is not a piecemeal thing.
 - i. True godliness is both joy and self-control, not either or.
 - ii. It is both the softness of meekness, humility, and kindness, and also the hardness of conviction, self-control, and uprightness.
 - iii. Godliness is both truth and grace. It is both justice and mercy.
 - iv. God is simple omnipotent, immutable, justice, mercy, and love.
 - v. Godliness is integrated conviction, consistency, uprightness, mercy, and love.