

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

A. GOD CANNOT BE KNOWN APART FROM HIS SELF-REVELATION

To consider knowing God presupposes that God is. So the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote that, “he who comes to God must believe that He is” (Heb. 11:6). But specifically who is this God who is so definitively referenced in Hebrews (Heb. 1:1-2; 3:4; 10:31; 12:28-29; 13:20) to Hebrew Christians? Paul declared in equally definitive terms, to the religious sophisticates on Mars Hill in Athens including Epicureans and Stoics, that, “what [unknown God] you worship in ignorance, that [God] I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). He then declared this God to be the Creator, the sovereign over heaven and earth, transcendent and imminent, life-giving, and demanding accountability from man in terms of His impeccable righteousness. This being our assumed starting point, we are specifically concerned here solely with the God of the Bible according to His self-revelation, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹ This is the God (Elohim) of Genesis 1:1, the God (Elohim, Adonai) of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God (Elohim, Adonai, Jehovah/Yahweh) of Moses, the God of the prophets, the God of the Apostles including Paul, and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which God is one and the same in biblical Judaeo-Christianity. So Paul writes, “there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. . . . [T]here is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (I Cor. 8:4, 6).

1. God cannot be known through human self-discovery.

Can a man, believing in the existence of the God of the Bible who he confesses not to know, yet find that same God by diligent, even strenuous searching? Man may attempt this quest, as was the case with Greek philosophy, except that its ultimate failure was evidenced by its inability to deal with sin, especially in any effectual redemptive sense. Such a trail, like a man attempting to find light by groping in the midst of darkness, or his impossible quest to reach the extremities of the universe, is doomed to failure. When man is seen to take the initiative in the discovery of God, even though seeming pietistic motives are expressed, or sincere ritualistic forms are employed, such as meditation concerning self or the universe, whatever he discovers

¹ In contrast with the Roman Catholic Church, which has added the fifteen books of the Apocrypha to the Old Testament, for very good reason it is excluded from the Canon as non-inspired Scripture. The Old Testament here is essentially the same as the Hebrew Bible or Tanach. The Jews have never included the Apocrypha within the Canon of the Tanach as if it were God-inspired Scripture.

will only fall within the realm of his cognitive and analytical capacity. How futile it is for finitude to discover infinity or mortality to attain to immortality. Zophar was correct when he exhorted Job concerning such an impossibility: "Can you discover the depth of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?" (Job 11:7-8).² Carl Henry well describes the futility of man's arrogance at this point.

God is not the Great Perhaps, a clueless shadow character in a Scotland Yard mystery. Far less is he a nameless spirit awaiting post-mortem examination in some theological morgue. He is a very particular and specific divinity, known from the beginning solely on the basis of his works and self-declaration as the one living God. Only theorists who ignore divine self-disclosure are prone to identify God as the nondescript John Doe of religious philosophy.³

Hence as John the Baptist declared: "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven" (John 3:27; cf. Matt. 16:16-17). Of course such truth is humiliating for proud humanity. However man's egotism at this point is such that it causes him to think otherwise and, as a result, reach for his own conceptions of deity that, by means of mere projection, lead to sophisticated self idolatry. In contrast, God's self-revelation, according to His sovereign intent, being wholly exclusive of human derivation, is by its very nature an act of purest grace. This is even more the case when one contemplates man's debilitating spiritual blindness (Matt. 16:16-17; John 3:3, 9-10; I Cor. 2:10-14; Gal. 1:11-12; Heb. 1:1-2).

But in it being granted here that God's self-disclosure is in the Bible, is it not then man's responsibility to search this self-revelation so as to find God? However the presupposition here is that man, as a sinful child of Adam, with the Bible open before him, yet has the innate capacity to discover and embrace God's saving truth for himself, and for such a man boasting in his autonomy at this juncture, this becomes a serious and most fundamental error. During Jesus Christ's public ministry, the Jews were very well acquainted with the Scriptures, yet were blind to the truth that confronted them even as the Son of God plainly pointed out (John 5:39-40). Pontius Pilate was similarly blind when Jesus was on trial before his very eyes (John 18:37-38). However the Psalmist was well aware of man's spiritual blindness in such a situation, even when the Word of God was cerebrally embraced. For this reason he wisely sought God's Spiritual self-revelation when God's objective self-revelation was in his hand, and so prayed: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law" (Ps. 119:118). Ultimately, God's self-revelation only reaches deep within the human heart when it is His sovereign good pleasure (Matt. 11:27; Gal. 1:15-16). It is for this reason that the mere academic study of theology proper, that is

² F. Delitzsch comments on these verses: "The nature of God may be sought after, but cannot be found out." *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, I, p. 181.

³ Carl Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, II, p. 7.

God's being, is a most dangerous pursuit, except the Holy Spirit directs the human heart, in which case it then becomes a most blessed pursuit.

2. God cannot be known through human representation

Man, especially fallen man, cannot portray God in material terms, whether by means of the painter's canvas, the stone craftsman's chisel, the potter's molding, or the metalworker's casting. Here is the problem of idolatry that God so vehemently condemns (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:15-19). For man to attempt to reproduce God is supreme arrogance and suggestive of ignorance concerning the glory of His Being. For man to profess that he can be aided in the worship of God by means of a material depiction is to lay down terms of worship before God that He has clearly repudiated. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:14). To believe that God can only be known by means of His self-revelation is, of necessity, to renounce that He can also be known by means of human reproduction. So J. I. Packer quotes Calvin in making explanation here.

Images *dishonor* God, for they obscure His glory. . . . 'A true image of God', wrote Calvin, 'is not to be found in all the world; and hence . . . His glory is defiled, and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form. . . . Therefore, to devise any image of God is itself impious; because by this corruption His majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is.' . . . The heart of the objection to pictures and images is that they inevitably conceal most, if not all, of the truth about the personal nature and character of the divine Being whom they represent. . . . Images *mislead* men. They convey false images about God.⁴

3. God can only be known through Self-disclosure.

While man cannot, of his own initiative, come up to God, yet the wonder of His condescension is that He is pleased to come down to man: "The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:7-8; cf. 19:11; Num. 11:16-17). The Scripture is abundantly clear that for man to know Him, God must take the initiative in finding man and making Himself known. Even in the Garden of Eden, following the fall of Adam and Eve in sin, it was God who was calling out, "Where are you [Adam]?" (Gen. 3:9), and not to the contrary since they were in hiding (Gen. 3:8). Man is limited as a creature in being finite while at the same time he is perverted in nature as a sinner. For this reason, while being "dead in trespasses and sins," yet at the same time he "walks according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:1-2). However, God graciously stoops to reveal Himself

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 40-41.

wherever man is, especially in his extremity, even as He desired to walk with him in the Garden of Eden immediately following the fall (Gen. 3:8-9). Further He reaches through the barrier that man has encountered so that, the “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit” (I Cor. 2:9-10).

4. God can only be known through His chosen media.

But specifically, how has God made Himself known? What means has He employed? According to Hebrews 1:1-2 God has spoken “to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.” Further there has been progress that is climactic in the Lord Jesus Christ since, “in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son.” For the Christian through the centuries all of this has come by means of Scripture. Yet a clear distinction has been recognized in God’s speaking.

a. Natural revelation (Psalm 19:1-6).

God speaks *universally* through nature, the created order, especially by means of his evident power and majesty, such as through the wonder of the silent heavens that loudly, eloquently speak of His great glory. As John Hampden Gurney has written:

Yes, God is good—in earth and sky,
 From ocean depths and spreading wood,
 Ten thousand voices seem to cry:
 God made us all, and God is good.

The sun that keeps his trackless way,
 And downward pours his golden flood,
 Night’s sparkling hosts, all seem to say
 In accents clear, that God is good.

Yes, God is good, all nature says,
 By God’s own hand with speech endued;
 And man, in louder notes of praise,
 Should sing for joy that God is good.

Yet there is limitation with nature, especially when we observe it, according to Tennyson, “red in tooth and claw.” At best the goodness we behold at this level concerns God’s attractive benevolence as, “all nature says,” not goodness on account of moral attractiveness. For man as a sinner, this revelation will likely cause him to mingle awesome admiration with guilty trembling. But it does not announce the provision of redemption and thus bring joy and comfort to the soul; it does not reveal the holy gracious heart of God.

b. Special revelation (Psalm 19:7-14).

What a contrast these verses provide concerning the preceding vs. 1-6. Here God reveals Himself through “law,” “testimony,” “precepts,” “commandment,” and “judgments,” that, unlike creation, speak of the demands of God’s moral being. In particular it is His essential attribute of righteousness that is at the heart of man being enabled to be reconciled with his holy Creator. Now God speaks *particularly*, at a personal level to individuals, “Your servant,” v. 11, concerning “the restoration of the soul,” v. 7, through grace and reconciliation to the end that they might be saved and have a sanctified relationship with God. Again, this special revelation concerns God’s sovereign, saving initiative, even as John Grindlay Small has written:

I’ve found a Friend; O such a friend!
He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him;
And round my heart still closely twine
Those ties which nought can sever;
For I am His, and He is mine,
Forever and forever.

The main agents of this special gospel communication are the Word of God written and incarnate in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. “All Scripture is inspired of God” (II Tim. 3:16). “And the Word [Jesus Christ] became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). “Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Pet. 1:21). There is also the engraving of “the work of the Law” on the conscience within the heart (Rom. 2:14-15). All of these, though distinct, are inseparably related. Yes God has, in the past, spoken through audible speech and historical events, yet now these all subsume under written revelation. Even general revelation is included in the special revelation of the Bible (Ps. 19:1-6), yet the concrete speech of God that comprehensively describes God is today exclusively found in the Word of God written. This is not to deny personal, subjective encounter with God; yet this must nevertheless submit to the bar of Scripture. Here then is the only authoritative, objective basis for rightly comprehending the knowledge of God, which principle our subsequent study will uphold.

B. GOD CANNOT BE KNOWN APART FROM HIS ATTRIBUTES

1. Can God be defined in a manner of speaking?

Attempt to define a personal, admired friend apart from obvious physical features. In doing so we are bound to use distinguishing personal characteristics. Then try reverently to define "God," specifically the God of the Bible, in one extended sentence. In doing so, we are certain to have mentioned numerous personal attributes and then begun to wonder what aspects of His being we have either misrepresented or neglected due to spiritual ignorance. While such an exercise is not illegitimate, yet it ought to have engendered a spirit of caution lest we respond without serious reflection based upon truthful revelation.

a. From where does our definition of God arise?

What was the basis of your definition? Was it a matter of subjective opinion expressed as follows, "I think God is . . .," or, "A particular theologian has opined about God that . . ."? These personal responses are not objective expressions of God's self-revelation. Such opinions may very well lead to intellectual idolatry. On the other hand, was our definition more a matter of concrete revelation and knowledge expressed thus, "God has revealed Himself in the Bible to be . . . , God has authoritatively spoken of Himself thus"? In this case, such a confession, having much more the quality of authority about it, will more likely lead to sober reflection and even worship.

b. Does our definition of God conform with our experience?

However the objective revelation concerning God in no way meant to exclude a resultant subjective experience. Therefore, could you honestly claim to know God as you described Him according to His self-revelation, that is in an intimate and experiential manner? If you claim to know the God you subjectively conjectured about, all you have probably ended up doing is expressing your adoration of a token God who in reality is not only crafted within man, but also takes on the character of self. However, even if you defined God objectively, according to the revelation of Scripture, was your definition, though theologically correct, yet coldly theoretical? In other words, is your true knowledge of God merely cerebral and cognitive, even as the demons believe (Jas. 2:19)? Or is it after the manner of David who enthused: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1-2). Francis Xavier has written a hymn in this regard.

My God, I love Thee—not because
 I hope for heaven thereby,
 Nor yet because who love Thee not
 Are lost eternally.

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
 Should I not love Thee well?
 Not for the sake of winning heaven,
 Or of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught;
 Not seeking a reward;
 But as Thyself hast loved me,
 O ever-loving Lord.

E'en so I love Thee, and will love,
 And in Thy praise will sing;
 Because Thou art my loving God
 And my eternal King.

2. Some descriptions of God described in the Bible.

While the following portrayals of God are not quite so systematically arranged as *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, yet they present a historic panorama of harmonious truth that spans a broad period of 1500 years from Moses to Paul. Furthermore, explicit biblical definitions of God ought always to have primacy over systematic formulations, as helpful as the latter may be.

- a. *Exodus 34:4-9*. Here God is not discovered, but rather He gloriously and specifically reveals himself by His own speech, standing directly before Moses. "Then the LORD passed by before 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 the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations,'" vs. 6-7. Note the harmonious balance that is declared involving both God's gracious forgiveness and His demanding justice that coalesce in His "lovingkindness," חֶסֶד, *chesed*, or loyal, covenant love.. The setting concerns the pastor of God's fallen, rebellious people being reassured of grace greater than all their sin. As a result, Moses' encounter with God's attributes is productive of humble worship and the hopeful cry: "O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession," v . 9.

- b. *Numbers 14:11-19*. In a setting reminiscent of Moses' prior intercession in Exodus 34:4-9, he again pastorally reasons with God that, for the sake of His holy reputation before the Egyptians and in accord with His previously revealed character, He manifest further grace. "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now," v. 19. Thus this personal knowledge of God, especially His "lovingkindness," רַחֲמֵי, *chesed*, again becomes the basis for Moses' reverent yet successful intercession with God for mercy in the face of Israel's ongoing carnal hankering after Egypt. *Keil and Delitzsch* comment: "This 'sermon on the name of the Lord,' as *Luther* calls it, disclosed to Moses the hidden nature of Jehovah. It proclaimed that God is love, but that kind of love in which mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness, and truth are united with holiness and justice"⁵ (cf. Rom. 3:26; I John 1:9).
- c. *Deuteronomy 5:1-6:15*. This review of God's revelation of the Ten Commandments (5:6-21; cf. Ex. 20:1-21) and the Shema (6:4-9)⁶ describes the exclusive moral glory of Jehovah in terms of required worship and godly conformity on the part of Israel. Of particular importance are God's holiness and power, 5:11-12, 22-26, 32, grace, 5:15, expectation of reverence, 6:2, 13, benevolence, 6:3, 10-11, unity, 6:4, 14, and anger, 6:15. Here is the classic revelation of biblical monotheism, the absolute uniqueness of Jehovah. In a world of polytheistic paganism, the dawning of such a revolutionary thought inevitably resulted in anti-Semitism. Polytheists were generally tolerant to a degree of other unknown God's (Acts 17:22-23), even if rivalry resulted through claims of superiority. However the proclamation of not only one living and holy God, but also the falsity and impotence all others, was to deny religious pluralism and relativism. Over the centuries, since Abraham, an unbelieving world has declared such a claim to be arrogant, offensive, and lacking in ecumenicity.
- d. *Deuteronomy 10:12-22*. This review of God's earlier revelation of Himself (Ex. 34:4-9) requires reverent fear and obedience from rebellious Israel. Why should this chosen nation respond in such a way? Because God is the only true God being holy, vs. 12, 20, sovereign, vs. 14, 17, 21, gracious, v. 15, glorious, v. 17, 21, glorious, benevolent, v. 18, and the Savior of His people, vs. 19-22. Especially notice the repeated specificity here where God is defined as "the LORD [Jehovah] your God [Elohim]," vs. 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, that is unrivaled in a pagan world, v. 17. Response to Moses' preaching/teaching/inscripturated ministry is expected

⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, II, p. 240.

⁶ The Hebrew for "hear" is "shama," שָׁמַע, the first word of v. 4, so that the "Shema," as popularly designated amongst Jews, has become the representative motto for vs. 4-9, namely the essence of monotheistic Judaism. In persecution the recitation of this passage has often been the dying Jew's last cry.

to be comprehension of this essential truth that ought to be productive of “fear, obedience, love of God, service, v. 12, as well as “love of aliens” v. 19, motivated by personal and national redemption. This, as with the preceding revelations about God in association with Moses, enhances our understanding of Jesus Christ who declared: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

- e. *Nehemiah 9:5-38*. Following the return of exiles from captivity in Babylon and subsequent completion of the walls surrounding Jerusalem, with gates attached, Ezra, one of the greatest scholars of Scripture in the Old Testament, headed a revival of expository ministry of the recovered Word of God, 8:3, 8-9. The result was an awakening productive of repentance and feasting, 8:1-9:5. At this point Ezra stepped forward to first extol the singularity and sovereignty of God, v. 6. Then he unfolded God’s gracious dealings with Israel over the centuries. Integral to this psalm is the repeated reference to God’s attributes that are intended to stimulate worship. God is revealed as: solitary, unitary, v. 6, Creator, life-giver, v. 6, self-existent, v. 6, sovereign, almighty, vs. 6, 10-12, 22, benevolent, vs. 6, 15, 19, 21-25, 35, righteous, v. 8, faithful, vs. 8, 17, 32-33, merciful, vs. 9, 27-28, immanent, vs. 13-14, gracious, compassionate, vs. 17-20, 31, patient, long-suffering, vs. 17, 28-31, spiritual, v. 20, just, vs. 27-28, 33, glorious, v. 32, immutable, v. 32. The result is a constraint to abide by a covenant that calls for obedience to God’s commandments and ordinances, 10:28-39. Hence a right vision of God is intended to be productive of godliness.
- f. *Ezekiel 1:26-28*. Here is an astonishing revelation of, “a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the likeness of the glory [כְּבוֹד, kabod] of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.” vs. 27-28. This glory is described as fiery radiance so that the overall impression is one of supreme, brilliant majesty. Such a vision is not unlike that of Isaiah 6:1-7: “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. . . . And one [seraph] called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’” Again in Revelation 1:12-15 we are told: “In the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were while like wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.” All of these descriptions of the glory of the Lord speak of reflection of His unveiled essence. Here, as with Moses, the

effect upon the prophet was his falling prostrate on his face. When a person draws near to God it will be with similar reverence.

- g. *Romans 11:32-36*. The writers of the New Testament obviously concur with the character of God described in the Old Testament. Here Paul, drawing upon Job 35:7; 41:11 and Isaiah 40:13-14, expresses intense delight and rapture at the being of God, especially His transcendent wisdom in the application of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. The attributes of God here include, sovereignty, v. 32; infinity, vs. 33-34; wisdom, vs. 33-34; omniscience, vs. 33-34; self-existence, v. 35; glory, v. 36. But what is the context of these perfections being brought to the fore so prominently? It is v. 32 where Paul declares: "For God has shut up all [unbelieving Jews] in disobedience so that He may show mercy on all [unbelieving Gentiles and Jews]," though in fact it is also the whole of the preceding display of God's gospel plan. There is nothing like the evangel to display all that God is, His singularity, sovereignty, righteousness, grace, fidelity. So Jonathan Edwards summarizes this grand conclusion:

In the preceding context, the apostle observes the marvelous disposals of divine wisdom, for causing all things to be *to* him, in their final issue and result, as they are *from* him at first, and governed *by* him. His discourse shows how God contrived this and brought it to pass, by setting up the kingdom of Christ in the world; leaving the Jews, and calling the Gentiles; including what he would hereafter do in bringing in the Jews, with the fullness of the Gentiles; with the circumstances of these wonderful works, so as greatly to show his justice and his goodness, to magnify his grace, and manifest the sovereignty and freeness of it, and the absolute dependence of all on him. And then, in the last four verses, he breaks out into a most pathetic exclamation, expressing his great admiration of the *depth* of divine wisdom, in the steps he takes for attaining his end, and causing all things to be *to* him: and finally, he expresses a joyful consent to God's excellent design in all to *glorify himself*, in saying, 'to him be glory forever;' as much as to say, as all things are so wonderfully *ordered for his glory*, so let him *have the glory* of all, for evermore.⁷

- h. *I Timothy 1:15-17*. Here Paul is once again carried away with a profound sense of awe at God's gracious salvation that extends more particularly to himself, the "foremost of sinners," v. 15. His expression of adoration is a spiritual eruption of praise to, "the King eternal [of the ages], immortal [incorruptible], invisible, the only God." From this we conclude that it is a right appreciation of the character of God that leads to a right appreciation of the gospel. Thus we have proof here that the child of God, having been saved by Jehovah God, not only delights to contemplate His wonderful character, but also spontaneously responds with

⁷ Jonathan Edwards *Works* (Banner), I, p. 107.

praise that joyously, expressively contemplates that same character. Paul might well have eagerly sung as Samuel Davies has written:

Great God of wonders! All thy ways
Display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace
Beyond Thine other wonders shine.

3. Some confessions of God derived from the Bible.

These historic statements or confessions, one by an assembly of church leaders, and others by an individual Christian, have something in common, namely the systematic definition of attributes or characteristics derived from the Old Testament and New Testament. However we have purposely placed them after the preceding biblical definitions simply because they are not only of human derivation and construction, but also lacking in that divine luster and dazzling glory that the inspired record alone contains. One reason for this distinction is that the credal definitions, for all of their formal exactness, nevertheless do not reflect the living, historic encounter with God that Moses, Ezra, Ezekiel, and Paul portray.

a. The Westminster Confession of Faith.

Adopted by both Houses of Parliament in London, 1648, and being the definitive statement of Presbyterian doctrine ever since, it has also influenced a broader Calvinistic constituency, including Baptists and Congregationalists, during subsequent centuries. It declares:

There is but one only (Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:4, 6) living and true God (I Thess. 1:9; Jer. 10:10), who is infinite in being and perfection (Job 11:7-9; 26:14), a most pure spirit (John 4:24), invisible (I Tim. 1:17), without body, parts (Deut. 4:15-16; John 4:24; Luke 24:29), or passions (Acts 14:11, 15), immutable (Jas. 1:17; Mal. 3:6), immense (I Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23-24), eternal (Ps. 90:2; I Tim. 1:17), incomprehensible (Ps. 145:3), almighty (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 4:8), most wise (Rom. 16:27), most holy (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), most free (Ps. 115:3), most absolute (Exod. 3:14), working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will (Eph. 1:11), for his own glory (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11); most loving (I John 4:8, 16), gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin (Exod. 34:6-7); the rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6); and withal most just and terrible in his judgments (Neh. 9:32-33); hating all sin (Ps. 5:5-6), and who will by no means clear the guilty (Exod. 34:7; Nah. 1:2-3).

God hath all life (John 5:26), glory (Acts 7:2), goodness (Ps. 119:68), blessedness (I Tim. 6:15; Rom. 9:5), in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made (Acts 17:24-25), nor deriving any glory from them (Job 22:2, 23), but only manifesting his own

glory in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36); and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth (Dan. 4:25, 35; I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 4:11). In his sight all things are open and manifest (Heb. 4:13); his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature (Ps. 147:5; Rom. 11:33-34); so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain (Acts 15:18; Ezek. 11:5). He is most holy in all his counsel, in all his works, and in all his commands (Ps. 145:17; Rom. 7:12). To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, obedience, he is pleased to require of them (Rev. 5:12-14).⁸

Consider how many attributes have been described and ask yourself to what degree you understand these truths. Do you not best become acquainted with a friend when you understand his personal characteristics? God is primarily known by who He is, and secondarily by what He does. What He does is the result of Who He is. In this regard notice how this confessional definition tends to move from attributes of being to attributes of doing. Consequently, it is important that we first be concerned with Who God is in Himself, in His essence, lest we merely see Him as some abstract, cosmic utilitarian wonder-worker and benefactor.

b. John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The famous 17th century tinker of Bedford and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was, although not formally educated to a high level, nevertheless was an astute student of the Word of God, and thus well respected over subsequent centuries.

- (1) Bunyan composed *A Confession of My Faith, and a Reason of My practice* toward the conclusion of his twelve year imprisonment. It was published in 1672 upon his release and seems designed to concisely declare the doctrine for which he suffered.

I believe, that there is but one only true God, and there is none other but he. 'To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things' (I Cor. 8:6). 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God.' &c. (Jn. 17:3; Mark 12:32; Acts 17:24).

I believe, that this God is almighty, eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, &c, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect' (Gen. 17:1). 'The eternal God is thy refuge' (Deut. 33:27). 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever' (I Tim. 1:17; Job 11:7; Rom. 11:33).

⁸ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, III, pp. 606-7. For a closer study of this classic statement, refer to the exposition and study questions of A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, pp. 46-62.

I believe, that this God is unspeakably perfect in all his attributes of power, wisdom, justice, truth, holiness, mercy, love, &c. His power is said to be eternal (Rom. 1:20), his understanding and wisdom infinite (Ps. 147:5). He is called the just Lord in opposition to all things (Zeph. 3:5). He is said to be truth itself and the God thereof (II Thess. 2:10; Deut. 32:4). There is none holy as the Lord. 'God is love.' 'Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' (Job 11:7).⁹

- (2) Posthumously published in 1692, Bunyan's *An Exposition on the Ten First Chapters of Genesis* was intended to commence an extended commentary on Scripture that was most likely concluded due to his illness and resulting demise. He commences:

GOD is a Spirit (John 4:24), eternal (Deut. 33:27), infinite (Rom. 1:17-20), incomprehensible (Job 11:7), perfect, and unspeakably glorious in his being, attributes, and works (Gen. 17, 51; Isa. 6:3; Exod. 33:20). 'The eternal God.' 'Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord.' (Jer. 23:24). 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight' (Heb. 4:13; Prov. 15:11). In his attributes of wisdom, power, justice, holiness, mercy, &c., he is also inconceivably perfect and infinite, not to be comprehended by things in earth, or things in heaven; known in the perfection of his being only to himself. The seraphims cannot behold him, but through a veil; no man can see him in his perfection and live. His attributes, though apart laid down in the Word of God, that we, being weak, might the better conceive of his eternal power and godhead; yet in him they are without division; one glorious and eternal being. Again, though sometimes this, as of wisdom, or that, as of justice and mercy, is most manifest in his works and wonders before men; yet every such work is begun and completed by the joint concurrence of all his attributes. No act of justice is without his will, power, and wisdom; no act of mercy is against his justice, holiness and purity.¹⁰

C. WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY THE "ATTRIBUTES" OF GOD?

1. A biblical definition.

- a. I Peter 2:9 describes the characteristics of God as "excellencies" (ἀρετή, *aretē*, cf. singular use "excellence," II Pet. 1:3), that is the "virtues," especially from a moral perspective, or "perfections" of God being various aspects of His essential being. In context, we are to focus on those admirable, glorious qualities of God that effectually call sinners out of darkness into His holy light. Also consider God's "invisible attributes/unseen things [τὰ ἀόρατα, *ta aorata*]" in Romans

⁹ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, II, p 594.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-5.

1:20 which are defined as “His eternal power and divine nature.” Thus we conclude:

- (1) These “excellencies” are comprehended in greater undistorted fullness by, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, . . . the people of God,” that is genuine believer priests (I Pet. 2:9-10).
 - (a) The unbeliever has a finite, distorted and arid knowledge of God (Rom. 1:21-25). Hence, he should hear the undistorted truth about God that will contrast with modern, autonomously conceived concepts of deity. This principle should regulate our evangelistic message and method, as it did with Paul at Athens (Acts 17:16-34), since the gospel is about man being reconciled to God, who must be definitively proclaimed.
 - (b) The believer has a finite, progressively corrected knowledge of God that is basic at conversion and requires cultivation. To begin with this foundational knowledge is γνῶσις, gnōsis (Luke 1:77; I Cor. 1:4-5; II Cor. 10:5; II Pet. 1:5-6). However, such basic knowledge becomes more mature and full, that is, ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10; II Pet. 1:2, 8; 2:20), through a sustained pursuit of an intimate knowledge of God.¹¹
- (2) These “excellencies” are communicated, that is certain attributes, by the living embodiment and proclamation of a believer priests, who “in the likeness of God [have] been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24), becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4). This resemblance is called “God-likeness” or godliness.
- (3) These “excellencies” are distinctively evident in God’s great plan of salvation: “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:17-18; cf. 11:33-36). “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, . . . But by His [God the Father’s] doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:4, 30; cf. I Tim. 1:15-17).

¹¹ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 285-6, citing Chrysostom, Bengel, and Lightfoot for a distinction of meaning.

2. Doctrinal definitions.

- a. According to John Owen, *Congregationalist*, the attributes of God are, “His infinite perfections in being and working (Rev. 4:8-11).” More specifically they are his, “goodness (Ps. 119:68; Matt. 19:17), power (Exod. 15:11; Ps. 62:11; Rev. 19:1), justice (Ps. 11:7; Zeph. 3:5; Jer. 12:1; Rom. 1:32), mercy (Ps. 130:7; Rom. 9:15; Eph. 2:4), holiness (Exod. 15:11; Josh. 24:19; Hab. 1:13; Rev. 4:8), wisdom (Rom. 11:33, 16:27), and the like; which he delighteth to exercise towards His creatures, for the praise of his glory.”¹²
- b. According to James P. Boyce, *Baptist*, the attributes of God are, “those peculiarities which mark or define the mode of his existence, or which constitute his character.”¹³
- c. According to Augustus H. Strong, *Baptist*, the attributes of God are, “those distinguishing characteristics of the divine nature which are inseparable from the idea of God and which constitute the basis and ground for his various manifestations to his creatures.”¹⁴
- d. According to Robert L. Dabney, *Presbyterian*, the attributes of God are, “those permanent, or essential, qualities of His nature, which He has made known to us in His Word. . . . They are traits qualifying His nature always, and making it the nature it is.”¹⁵
- e. According to William G. T. Shedd, *Presbyterian*, the attributes of God are, “modes either of the relation, or of the operation of the Divine essence. They are, consequently, an analytical and closer description of the essence. . . . The attributes are essential qualities of God.”¹⁶

3. Understanding “attribute” as a description of God’s being.

This most common term for describing an aspect of God’s being, an “attribute,” has the unfortunate connotation of some quality being added or “attributed.” But facets of God’s person are not derived. Hence, the preferred term is a “perfection” or “property” or “virtue.” However, these all, including “attribute,” may be understood to perceive of God:

¹² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, I, p. 471-2.

¹³ James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, p. 65.

¹⁴ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 244.

¹⁵ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 147.

¹⁶ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, p. 33.

- a. *Analytically and synthetically*, that is by a study of separate aspects of the essential nature of God, as are commonly defined. These are aspects which God Himself has revealed; they are not of human derivation. At the same time, it is important that God's attributes be studied synthetically, that is as a related whole or as part of one indivisible God. While aspects of God's nature are to be considered distinctively because the Bible does so, yet individual attributes must also be understood in relation to other aspects of God's being. This is extremely important since failure at this point has led to heresy. For example:
- (1) God must be known as both immanent (close), and transcendent (beyond). Overemphasis on immanence leads to pantheism as reflected in eastern mysticism and Christian Science (God is all and all is God, including nature). Overemphasis on transcendence leads to Gnosticism (God is beyond inferior materiality), and deism (God has wound up the universe like a clock and departed).
 - (2) Some have posited the "clever" question, "Could God make a rock so heavy that He could not carry it?" Of course the emphatic answer must be "No!" However this foolish question attempts to pit one aspect of God's being, His omnipotence, against another, His infinity. Rather such a challenge to God's power must not be considered alone; He is not only omnipotent and infinite, but also wise. Hence He does not consider enacting foolish propositions proposed by finite man that attempt to engage infinity.
- b. *Anthropomorphically*, that is as portrayed by various physical parts of the human body. These include:
- (1) God's face, denoting His sight and presence, being both loving, "When You said, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, O LORD, I shall seek'" (Ps. 27:8), and wrathful, "The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth" (Ps. 34:16).
 - (2) God's eyes, denoting His omniscience, His seeing of all good and evil. "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (II Chron. 16:9). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3; cf. Amos. 9:8).
 - (3) God's nose and nostrils, denote His acceptance of men and their sacrifices. "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD. . . . The LORD smelled the soothing aroma" (Gen. 8:20-21). They also express His anger and non-acceptance of

them. "Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured" (Ps. 18:8; cf. Is. 65:2-5).

- (4) God's ears, denoting His readiness to hear, answer and deliver concerning the requests of His people. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1; cf. Ps. 34:15).
 - (5) God's mouth, denoting His commands, promises and prophecies. "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3). "Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Is. 1:20; cf. Jer. 23:16).
 - (6) God's arm and hands, denoting His power and its operation in creation, providence and redemption "Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands" (Ps. 102:25; cf. 89:13; 104: 28; 118:16). "Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom, or have I no power to deliver" (Is. 50:2; cf. 59:1).
- c. *Anthropopathically*, that is as pictured by various emotional responses and attitudes of the human being.
- (1) God rests. "By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Gen. 2:2; cf. Exod. 20:11).
 - (2) God is sorry (repentant), and grieves. "The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth" (Gen. 6:6). "God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would ring upon them [the people of Nineveh]. And He did it not" (Jonah 3:10).
 - (3) God is jealous. "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5). "Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My hole name" (Ezek. 39:25).
 - (4) God does not slumber or sleep. "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:3-4). However, at times He may foolishly be charged with dozing. "Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever" (Ps. 44:23; cf. 7:6). "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord" (Is. 51:9).

- (5) God is weary and tired "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them" (Is. 1:14). "'You who have forsaken Me,' declares the Lord, 'You keep going backward. So I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am tired of relenting'" (Jer. 15:6).
- (6) God grieves, weeps. "He [the Lord] was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:6). "When Jesus therefore saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled. . . . Jesus wept." (John 11:33, 35).
- (7) God is angry, indignant in the manifestation of His wrath. "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day" (Ps. 7:11). "The anger of the LORD has burned against His people" (Isa. 5:25). "Hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).
- (8) God is joyful. "For the LORD will again rejoice over you [Israel] for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers" (Deut. 30:9). "The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exalt over you [Jerusalem] with joy" (Zeph. 3:17).

D. WHAT WE DO NOT MEAN BY THE "ATTRIBUTES" OF GOD

1. They are *not* philosophic elements that encourage mere cerebral speculation.

The greatest danger of finite man studying the characteristics of the infinite God is his becoming captive to abstract reasonings and detached analysis. On such a pathway man attempts to explore beyond his finite limitations, which tendency is not unlike the aspirations of Lucifer. "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13-14). He tends to lose sight of God's glorious being as a whole and rather focuses on impersonal metaphysical particulars, especially as they are considered in the light of pagan speculations. Whereas Paul warns us: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men" (Col. 2:8).

2. They are *not* man's conception of God.

Man does not discover God; he does not find God; he is unable to independently conceive of God; he cannot initiate fellowship with God. If the redeemed child of God sees "in a mirror dimly" (I Cor. 12:13), then certainly the true characteristics of God

are neither obvious nor readily comprehensible before the sinful human race in general. Further, God is not a finite mental projection of the infinite, as Ludwig Feuerbach postulated, or wish fulfillment according to Sigmund Freud.¹⁷ That the finite should originate conception of the infinite is as illogical as the belief that mere random matter should evolve into mind producing rationality. There is also further contradiction here in that finite man, in congratulating himself about his origination and contemplation of the infinite, consequently deifies self. So infinite man reigns over the infinite. How absurd! Rather God is only rightly understood according to his own self-disclosure (II Cor. 4:3-6; Heb. 1:1-2).

- a. God is the subject of this universe, not a passive object who is available for human scrutiny, as if under a microscope. Certainly man does investigate God's sovereignly given revelation both in nature and Scripture, but only as a babe looks at an adult world and not as an analytical chemist. "And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with" (Eccles. 1:13).
 - b. God's excellencies are not discovered by means of man's polluted, subjective, limited faculties since the focus of his soul is distorted. Rather the corrupt soul needs cleansing by means of the Holy Spirit whereby spiritual illumination of objective revelation becomes possible. "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (I Cor. 2:12-16; cf. Titus 3:5-6; II Pet. 1:20-21).
3. They are *not* separate parts of a composite God.

God's attributes are not a patchwork quilt, an assembly of pieces of God's being, partitions within an essence box, but rather manifestations of the one true God's indivisible, simple being.

- a. God is not composed of numerous compartments. The revelation of one particular attribute, as is so often the case in Scripture, nevertheless is undetached from the totality of God's being. God's grace is at the same time holy, eternal, sovereign, and based upon omniscience. Therefore, because of God's immutability, His character as a whole has not developed.
- b. Hence, God is not to be clinically dissected. We can only know Him in truth when we know Him in His fullness. In the night sky we perceive only a crescent of the moon, yet in fact we do not merely believe in a crescent, but a whole

¹⁷ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, pp. 42-43.

spherical moon. Therefore it is important to consider how one revealed attribute of God is indivisibly related to the fullness of His being.

4. They are *not* distinctive parts of the persons of the triune God.

Sometimes the persons of the triune God are erroneously described as possessing certain attributes in a disproportionate manner. The Father is said to be more just and stern; the Son is more gracious and conciliatory; the Holy Spirit is more pervasive and life-giving. But this is erroneous doctrine that a careful study of God's nature will rectify. The Bible reveals that all three persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have precisely the same attributes because they have the same essence, even though these perfections may appear to have distinctive economic out-workings in the three individual Persons.

- a. The members of the triune God have the same attributes.

The Father is as just as the Son is as just as the Spirit. The Father is as loving as the Son is as loving as the Spirit. The Father is as powerful as the Son is as powerful as the Spirit.

- (1) The Father has all the attributes of God

"David said, 'Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Your, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.'" (I Chron. 29:10-13). "To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 25).

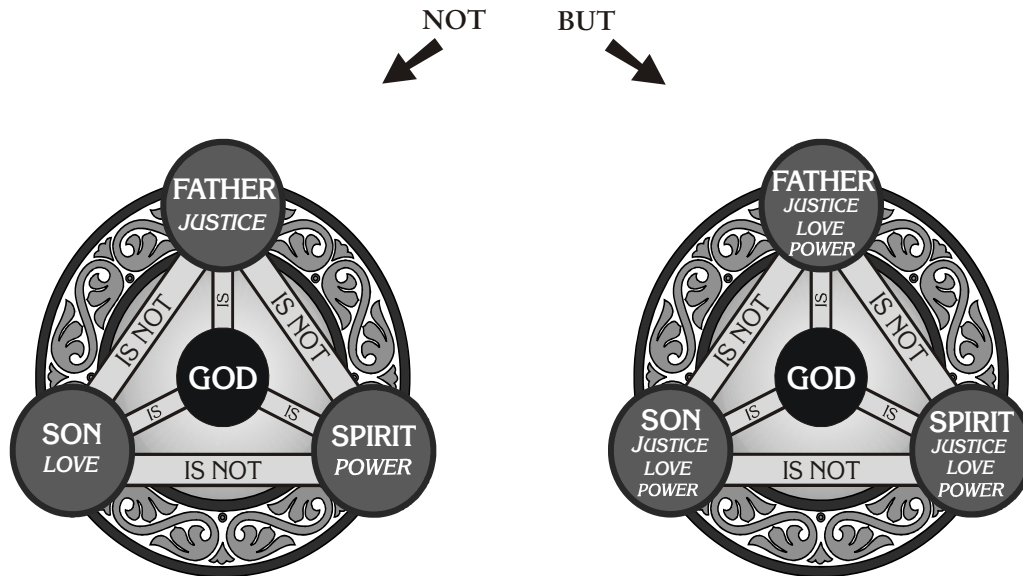
- (2) The Son has all the attributes of God.

This is to be expected since Scripture declares Him to be God. As Thomas declared of Jesus: "My Lord and my God," literally, "the Lord of me and the God of me" (John 20:28). Likewise Paul writes that, "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

- (a) *Holiness*. "The holy child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." (Heb. 7:26).

- (b) *Eternity*. "In the beginning was [existing] the Word, and the Word was [existing] with/before God, and the Word was [existing as] God. He was [existing] in the beginning with/before God." (John 1:1-2).
 - (c) *Immutability*. This concerns His divine essence, not His outward manifestation. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).
 - (d) *Omnipotence*. "The government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Is. 9:6). Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," (Matt. 28:18).
 - (e) *Omniscience*. Peter declared to Jesus, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17; cf. 16:30). Yet of the coming of the Son of Man, "of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). Hence, according to Philippians 2:5-8, Jesus Christ's omniscience was willingly re-strained, yet not absent. It was obedient, contained self-limitation, agreeable to the Father and the Spirit, through the putting on of humanity, but *not* to the exclusion of deity.
 - (f) *Omnipresence*. Jesus declared to His disciples: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:20). Paul writes of Christ's "body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23).
- (3) The Holy Spirit has all the attributes of God. Consider Acts 5:3-4: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men but to God." Here both His deity and personality are declared. Further, He is eternal, "the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14); omnipresent, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Ps. 139:7-10); omnipotent, "You send forth Your Spirit, they [animals] are created (Ps. 104:30; cf. Rom. 15:19; omniscient; "the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God"(I Cor. 2:10-11; cf. Isa. 40:13-14); sovereign "The wind [as with the Spirit] blows where it wishes" (John 3:8).
- b. God is one in essence (Deut. 6:4), yet manifest in three persons, a triunity, who have the same attributes (Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; I Pet. 1:1-2). Consider the following classic diagram which portrays that it is wrong to distinguish between the justice of God the Father, the love of God the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Rather justice, love, and power are equally attributes of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

THE TRIUNE GOD IS ONE IN ESSENCE



E. WHY SHOULD WE STUDY THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

1. Because it is inherent in the creature to understand his Creator.

While the contemplation of self is essential to personal being, Calvin commences his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as follows: “[N]o one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he ‘lives and moves’ [Acts 17:28]. . . . [T]he knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him.”¹⁸ Although sin may invert this priority so that man responds by spurning that God he is first led to contemplate (Rom. 1:25), it nevertheless remains mandatory for man to learn about his Maker from the days of his youth onward (Eccles. 12:1). So David describes his own reflection in this regard in Psalm 139:13-14.

For You formed my inward parts;
 You wove me in my mother’s womb.
 I will give thanks to You, for I am
 Fearfully and wonderfully made;
 Wonderful are Your works,
 And my soul knows it very well.

So in his own being, David contemplates his Maker, and that with great fascination, delight and grateful acknowledgment.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, I, 1.

2. Because upon acknowledging God as God, man first ought to know Him.

“In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1), and God being God, His claims upon mankind have absolute priority. So man ought to accept that in the realm of knowledge, He is to be, by lordly and logical right, the chief of his interests and enquiry. Such a quest ought to be the most sensible and intelligent and reasonable of all pursuits. So Tozer reasons:

Let us begin with God. Back of all, above all, before all is God; first in sequential order, above in rank and station, exalted in dignity and honor. As the self-existent One He gave beings to all things, and all things exist out of Him and for Him. ‘Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created’ (Rev. 4:11).¹⁹

Hence nothing matters more than the personal knowledge of the God of the Bible, by His creatures, and no other. His claims here are absolutely primary, for He declares, “I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6).

3. Because the knowledge of God is essential to our desire to give Him glory.

How can man possibly delight in some vague, generic entity designated as “God”? We delight in a house or automobile through the knowledge of numerous, distinctive features and aspects of beauty, performance, etc. What we delight in, particularly in romance, we have first examined and learned about in great detail. Upon learning of distinguishing personal features, only then can we boast in a person. So we can only glory in God when we have learned of the facets and fullness of His glorious person (I Cor. 1:30-31). David declared that, “My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue” (Ps. 39:3). So protracted contemplation of God generates the heat of joyous praise that cannot be contained; the mouth must give vent to heartfelt worship in prayer, proclamation and song. As Charles Wesley has written.

My heart is full of Christ, and longs
Its glorious matter to declare!
Of Him I make my loftier songs,
I cannot from His praise forbear;
My ready tongue makes haste to sing
The glories of my heavenly King.

¹⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, pp. 101-2.

4. Because a right biblical understanding of God produces godly virtues.

In the days of his innocence, man bore certain unblemished characteristics of God; in other words he was “God-like” or “godly,” in an untested sense. But upon the entrance of sin, he assumed an unholy image that bore the image of Satan, his new master.²⁰ The gospel, as central to God’s plan of salvation, is basic to the restoration of godliness in man. “For by His [God the Father’s doing] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 3:17-18; 4:4). Further, Christians have “become partakers of the divine nature” (I Pet. 1:4). Hence the cultivation of this likeness must presuppose that “there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (I Cor. 8:6).

- a. The unbelieving sinner needs to know about God, to whom he is accountable as his Creator, in order that he might be justified and reconciled. He needs to know about who God *is*, especially His holiness and sovereignty, and what He *does* in just judgment and saving mercy. Through the reception of this mercy, godliness is obtained. The believing sinner then needs to behold God more clearly and adoringly, to the end that he might become godly to a greater degree, and thus progressively sanctified. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that conversion comes by a mere gradual apprehension of God’s attributes. Rather the saving of the sinner unto godliness involves his heartfelt understanding, of both who God *is* and what He has *done*, through faith alone in the sacrificial, substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. John 3:16 well describes this essential gospel truth. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” However it needs to be well understood here that the “God” who John reverently speaks of is not some generic deity, but the God who his Gospel so specifically commends, the only true and living God of Abraham (John 1:1,14; 4:21-24; 6:69; 17:11, 25).
- b. Apart from Charnock’s extensive work, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, he has a separate discourse of 160 pages entitled *The Knowledge of God* based on John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” He lists seven graces that are reliant upon the knowledge of God and Christ.²¹

²⁰ This is not to deny that man is presently void of any aspects of the original “*imago Dei*.” However, it is maintained that any remnants of this “godliness” are not in the moral sphere. This subject is more fully dealt with in the section dealing with the personality of God in Chapter XII.

²¹ Charnock, IV, pp. 31-4.

- (1) *Faith in God* requires the knowledge of God (II Tim. 1:12; Heb. 11:6). To the degree that faith comprehends or is deprived of the truth about God, so it is either strengthened or weakened.
 - (2) *Desire for God* requires the knowledge of God (John 4:10; I Pet. 2:2-3). To the degree that God is found attractive and admirable according to the knowledge of God, so the believer will have increasing longing for God.
 - (3) *Love to God* requires the knowledge of God (Mark 12:29-30; I Cor. 2:8). To the degree that the love of God for sinners is understood by them, so love for God by those same sinners will be generated.
 - (4) *Joy in God* requires the knowledge of God (Ps. 104:34). To the degree that the goodness of God is personally beheld and understood, so those who appreciate this goodness will respond with glad praise and rejoicing.
 - (5) *Repentance toward God* requires the knowledge of God (Acts 17:24-30). To the degree that God's demanding and saving righteousness is understood, so the convicted sinner will yet turn to pardoning grace.
 - (6) *Fear of God* requires the knowledge of God (Is. 8:13). To the degree that man understands the holiness and sovereignty of God, so he will bow with trembling before the only Lord of heaven and earth.
 - (7) *Patience before God* requires the knowledge of God (Heb. 10:31-32). To the degree that man understands God's perfecting ways through the years, His ordained experiences and even affliction, so he learns to wait upon God.
5. Because God has begotten children after His own likeness.

Is there to be expected any resemblance between the children of God and their saving, adopting Father? We expect orange trees to bear oranges, and apple trees to bear apples. But what does the seed of God produce. "No one who is born of God [habitually] practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (I John 3:9-10)? What are the characteristics of His offspring? What are the distinguishing traits of a child of God?

- a. By way of illustration, on seeing a new-born babe for the first time, we are quick to detect parental likenesses and birthmarks, indeed these are our expectation. Indeed this likeness is expected to become more evident as the child grows. No likenesses could suggest masquerading parentage, illegitimacy! Hence, we

readily accept the “like father, like son” principle as that which God has ordained in the spiritual as well as the natural realm.

- b. Hence in the spiritual realm the children of God reflect their parentage, the source of their begetting. There ought to be birthmarks on the begotten of God. “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and even sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:44-45). The absence of spiritual birthmarks indicate doubtful parentage. Visible godliness authenticates legitimacy, lineage, parentage.
 - c. It is to be expected then that God’s attributes will be reflected, by means of divine communication, from His children. Further, the true child of God looks to his Father with longing to be more conformed to that image. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure. (I John 3:2-3). Thus, “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love,” and, “We love, because He first loved us” (I John 4:7-8, 19). God’s attribute of love is to be the recognizable hallmark of His children, and thus they will aspire to be more like their Father. “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (I John 3:10). “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35).
6. Because a study of all of the revealed attributes of God results in a balanced view of the Godhead, especially with regard to those perfections that may appear to be in tension with each other and with man. Many a heresy or peculiarity of a sect is rooted in deviant understanding of the character of God.
 - a. Consider God’s transcendence (beyondness) and immanence (nearness). Although King Hezekiah addresses God as “enthroned above the cherubim” in heaven, yet he confidently prays that He will “incline Your ear, . . . open Your eyes,” (II Kings 19:15-16) so as to pay close attention to an earthly pagan challenge to His people. In spite of man’s limited comprehension, God is always both near, involved, pervasive, and other than, surpassing, beyond. We shall later see that imbalance in understanding both aspects of God’s transcendence and immanence in balance leads to serious heresy.

- b. Consider God's unity and triunity. Peter writes to believers who have been saved by the triune God, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood" (I Pet. 1:1-2; cf. Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 8:4-6). In spite of man's limited comprehension, God is one in essence while at the same time a triunity of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We shall later see that imbalance with regard to both truths here has resulted in ancient Arianism, Unitarianism, and the Watchtower Society comprised of Jehovah's Witnesses.
 - c. Consider man's accountability and God's sovereignty. "Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" acted freely, deliberately according to their sinful nature, in crucifying Jesus Christ. They sensed no coercion, yet their evil actions were "to do whatever Your [God's] hand and Your purpose predestined to occur" (Acts 4:27-28). In spite of man's finite comprehension of this truth that does involve mystery, God is absolutely sovereign over all while man remains a free agent and accountable under that dominion. We shall see that perversion of this truth leads to evangelistic confusion, and either arminianism or hyper-Calvinism.
7. Because a true knowledge of God purges our minds of human conceptions and unworthy views of God which are in fact intellectual idols. The antidote to low views of God, resulting in man-centeredness in local churches, is renewed proclamation of His glorious perfections, in all of their fullness, by the faithful pastor. His exposition of the Word will always have that exalted aura of God about it. His manner of preaching comprehensive biblical truth in this regard will be by means of an impassioned soul that knows this God in the depths. As a result he will be known as a "man of God." How different today are countless churches where God has become god in terms of the manner in which His person is devalued, the result being casual and even irreverent worship as the order of the day.
 - a. Often this god is supposedly comprehended through human self-discovery, especially because the gulf between such a god and man is not seen to be in terms of a vast breach between the Holy One and unholy man. Further, it is assumed that finite man retains a measure of ability that enables him to delve and probe into this sacred infinite realm. Therefore the absolute need of self-revelation from God is not seen to be of such critical importance.
 - b. Often this god proves to be the result of subjective conception, even wish-fulfillment, who eventually conforms to the image of the subject and ultimately results in auto-idolatry. As a result, the objective God of Scripture is repudiated according to a litany of objections to aspects of His character, especially holiness and sovereignty, that are fundamentally humanistic in nature and propounded by various strains of theological liberalism.

- c. Often this god is described in terms of having reliance upon man, that is divine dependency is implied, that is the need for divine fulfillment that man satisfies. The inevitable result is the inflation of human self-esteem with the thought that god needs man. Such a perception is at the expense of understanding the truth of the living God's total self-sufficiency that human finitude and the necessity that self-revelation indicates.
8. Because a true knowledge of God places the gospel in its proper, exalted, and glorious position. At its most basic level, the Christian gospel concerns who God is, especially His essential moral qualities in relation to man's immoral qualities. In one word Paul describes this gospel as concerning "righteousness," that is "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 21-22; 10:3; II Cor. 5:21). Inadequate understanding concerning who God is inevitably leads to inadequate understanding concerning the essence of the Christian gospel.
- a. The greater our conception of the moral glory of God, the greater will be our sinful consciousness, and consequently we will acknowledge that only a great salvation can bridge the gap. So when Isaiah was confronted with the seraphic proclamation, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory," that he was constrained to confess, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3, 5).
 - b. When God is conceived of in more modest proportions, certainly with less holy awe than that which confronted Isaiah, then man is less troubled over the condition of his soul and consequently perceives himself more in terms of being a moderate sinner. Hence the gospel reckoned to be appropriate for moderate alienation from God is defined in more relational terms, that is assistance that looks for cooperation from man, not salvation from the wrath of God that confronts guilty man as a thorough, inexcusable and guilty sinner.
 - c. Further, in the gospel is the wonder of seeming opposite attributes of justice and grace, or holiness and mercy, yet being harmonious in God's being. So, "righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). Thus God is understood as one who is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The wonder of the gospel is that God, through righteous grace, pardons the sinner and maintains His integrity. So for the Christian: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous/just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).
9. Because a true knowledge of the infinite living God is the most profound and loftiest pursuit that can engage the finite human mind. "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5; cf. Deut. 29:29). "For as the

heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

- a. The atheist or humanistic materialist can pursue the realms of time, space and matter, insofar as his regnant, healthy mind allows. Yet such a trail, void of spiritual and eternal realities, only offers direction within this shallow compass of man's life, which is no longer, on average, than seventy years. At the end, his humiliation is total. For all of his vaunted sophistication: "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no more" (Ps. 103:15-16).
- b. But for the Christian, true epistemology (the nature of knowledge and knowing) and ontology (the nature of being and existence) plunge beyond time, space and matter, beyond the limits of man's puny mind, toward the spiritual, eternal, omnipotent God! Oliver Wendell Holmes has written:

Lord of all being, throned afar,
Thy glory flames from sun and star;
Center and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near.

So having previously considered Psalm 103:15-15, we find a better hope in v. 17: "But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him."

- c. In the year 1855, at the commencement of his ministry at the New Park Street Chapel, London, C. H. Spurgeon, aged twenty, proclaimed:

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thoughts that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. We shall be obliged to feel

"Great God! how infinite art thou!
What worthless worms are we!"
[Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to thee.]

But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. . . . The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently *consolatory*. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound, in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.²²

- d. The following diagram illustrates that holy or unholy behavior in man is directly related to his prior comprehension of God, whether it be orthodox or unorthodox. Therefore orthodoxy does regulate orthopraxy. A specific style of behavior results from a specific state of being (Prov. 23:6-7).

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE	PERVERTED PERCEPTION	PERVERTED RESPONSE	PROPER RESPONSE
HOLINESS	God is common, ordinary, secular	Irreverence, disrespect	Reverence, personal purity
RIGHTEOUSNESS	God is unjust, not straight	Criticism, anger, moral flexibility	Virtue, integrity, love
GOODNESS	God is easygoing, abstract love	Moral indifference, sentimentality	Benevolence, grace, mercy, longsuffering
BENEVOLENCE	God is selectively, materially kind	Selective, material social welfare	Indiscriminate, godly generosity
GRACE	God is easy on sin, very tolerant	Lawlessness, antinomianism	Holy graciousness toward sinners
LONGSUFFERING	God is tolerant, rarely offended	Loose living, presumption	Patience, holy gratitude
MERCY	God's deliverance is always available	Indifference, insensitivity	Active concern, holy helpfulness

²² C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, I, p. 1.

SOVEREIGNTY	God's reign is limited by human autonomy	Man determines his eternal destiny	Humility, strong faith, true worship
INFINITY	God is finite, limited, progressive	Weak faith, human pride	Humility, awareness of human limitation
ETERNALITY	God is influenced by the temporal	Earthly concern in the present	Soul and heavenly hope focus
OMNISCIENCE	God can learn and needs advice	Seeks earthly truth, faithlessness	Confidence in divine care, accountability
OMNIPRESENCE	God is distant, unconcerned	Licentiousness, irreverence, fear	Reverence, confidence
SELF-EXISTENCE	God is dependent, needy, reliant	Disrespect, pride in fulfilling God's need	Humility, reverence, Dependence
ONENESS	God is unitary, no personal diversity	One God with three persons is illogical	Trust in the triunity of one God
IMMUTABILITY	God is fickle, moody, unreliable	Despair, uncertainty about the future	Trust, confidence in God's character
PERSONALITY	God is like frail, human personality	Regard for God on human terms	Friendship with a holy God

F. HOW ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD TO BE CLASSIFIED?

1. Difficulties in classifying the attributes of God.

If finite man, albeit Christian, admits to difficulty in pondering the depths of the infinite person of Almighty God (Rom. 11:33-36), then it ought not to be a surprise when classification of His revealed attributes also presents some problems. Consider God's personal holiness, often distinguished as moral/ethical (Isa. 6:1-5) and majestic (Exod. 15:11), then the holiness that is incumbent upon man (Exod. 19:3-4), and then the holiness often attributed to the material world (Ps. 87:1; Zech. 14:20-21). Distinctions have most commonly been made between God's incommunicable and communicable attributes, which terms we will employ here.²³ Other distinguishing

²³ More recently, criticism of this classic understanding has been forthcoming and, notwithstanding the necessary qualification that these two categories require, which is rooted in the very pure character of God, they nevertheless remain preferable to suggested alternatives, and especially with regard to the applicability of the character of God to humanity since Christians have "become partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Paul Enns has a very helpful chart in this regard. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 189-91. Robert Reymond, in rejecting Berkhof's analysis, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 55-6, prefers the *Westminster Shorter Catechism's* description of God's attributes which he distinguishes as "transcendent"

terms are His essential and dynamic, natural and moral, intransitive and transitive, absolute and relative, active and passive perfections. It will be noted that in many of these classifications, basic difference concerns who God *is*, and what He *does*.

2. God's incommunicable and communicable attributes.

This, the most commonly acknowledged classification concerning God's being, such as by Herman Bavinck, Louis Berkhof, Charles Hodge, and William Shedd, will be utilized in this study as follows:

- a. *Incommunicable* (intransitive) attributes are those which, in no degree, are reflected in man. They include God's self-existence, infinity, immutability, omnipresence, omni-science, omnipotence, etc. Man is dependent in his existence, finite, and changeable. Certainly man has knowledge, but not in any total, comprehensive, profound sense as the term "omniscience" requires. He has a small degree of potency, but not immeasurable "omnipotence."
- b. *Communicable* (transitive) attributes are those which, in some degree, may be reflected in man. They include holiness, righteousness, justice, goodness, love, grace, mercy, benevolence, longsuffering, wisdom, veracity, spiritual life, personality, etc. There is a strong moral emphasis here. Certainly no Christian has any of these attributes in an absolute sense, but according to each term nevertheless he does possess some legitimate degree of the essence of that characteristic that will be enhanced at the return of Jesus Christ (I John 3:1). The child of God is to attain "to the measure of the stature that belongs to Christ," that is, "put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4:13, 24). We are to "share His [the Father of spirits, v. 9] holiness" (Heb. 12:10), so that eventually "we will be like Him [His Son, Jesus Christ, v. 5]" (I John 3:2; cf. II Pet. 1:4).

3. God's attributes as *moral* and *non-moral*.

There is a sense in which the moral/ethical character of God is most pervasive in the Bible. All of His acts and relationships are governed by His essential righteousness; the heavenly hosts appear to give priority to His holiness (Isa. 6:1-5; Rev. 4:2-11). Even so, the proponents of these designations, such as Henry Thiessen, Vernon Doerksen, and John Feinberg, all first consider God's non-moral attributes. It is as if the prominence of God's moral being must first be understood in terms of the non-moral framework of His being.

and "condescendent." *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 163-165. John Feinberg distinguishes between "non-moral" and "moral" attributes, *No One Like Him*, pp. 235-374. John Frame opts for the concepts of "power," "knowledge," and "goodness," that are intended to reflect his theology of lordship, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 397-99.

- a. God's *non-moral* attributes are His self-existence, infinity, sovereignty, immensity, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, immutability, wisdom, unity, simplicity.
 - b. God's *moral* attributes are His holiness, righteousness, love, grace, mercy, longsuffering, goodness, lovingkindness, truth.
4. God's essential attributes of *being* (absolute) and dynamic attributes of *manifesting/doing* (relative).

These categories are, in general, designated by Augustus Strong and Paul Enns. God manifested Himself to Israel through Moses as: "'I AM WHO I AM;' and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you''" (Exod. 3:14). Here His essence is revealed, namely that He is the eternally existing Jehovah God. However He also revealed Himself to Israel through Moses as the God who "will be" for His people. Thus, concerning the "I AM" God of Israel, "I *will* bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I *will* deliver you from their bondage. I *will* also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I *will* take you for My people, and I *will* be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I *will* bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I *will* give it to you for a possession; [why? Because] I am the LORD." (Exod. 6:6-9). Here God reveals His dynamic character that flows from His essential character.

- a. God *is*, essentially, in His being, holy, righteous, living, true, singular, self-existent, independent, good, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable.
 - b. God *does*, dynamically, manifest Himself, responds actively with justice, love, benevolence, grace, mercy, longsuffering, integrity, faithfulness, omnipresence, eternity, immanence, transcendence.
5. God's attributes in a fourfold distinction.
- a. His *existent* being, including His self-existence, singularity, eternity, infinity, omniscience, etc.
 - b. His *moral* being, including His holiness, righteousness, wisdom, goodness, benevolence, grace, mercy, longsuffering, etc.
 - c. His *dynamic* being, including His omnipotence, liveliness, spirituality, omnipresence, etc.

- d. His *personal/emotional* being, including His joy, peace, anger, hatred, wrath, sorrow, etc.

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
 Thy majesty, how bright;
 How beautiful Thy mercy seat
 In depths of burning light!

How dread are Thy eternal years,
 O everlasting Lord,
 By prostrate spirits day and night
 Incessantly adored!

How wonderful, how beautiful,
 The sight of Thee must be;
 Thy endless wisdom, boundless power,
 And glorious purity!

O how I fear Thee, living God,
 With deep and tender fear;
 And worship Thee with trembling hope,
 And penitential tears!

Yet, I may love Thee, too, O Lord,
 Almighty as Thou art;
 For Thou hast stooped to ask of me
 The love of my poor heart!

No earthly father loves like Thee,
 No mother, e'er so mild,
 Bears and forbears as Thou hast done,
 With me, Thy sinful child.

Only to sit and think of God,
 Oh, what a joy it is!
 To think the thought, to breathe the Name,
 Earth has no higher bliss.

Father of Jesus, love's Reward!
 What rapture it will be
 Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
 And gaze, and gaze on Thee!

Frederick W. Faber