

## [Attributes & Nature of the True God \[1\]](#)

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One of the great needs in the church, and in the world, today—is a new conviction about the greatness, majesty, holiness, and nature of the living God. Many people in Western society today say they believe in God, but their ideas about God are often almost pagan in content. Many people have no idea what kind of God they believe in.

I read about a group of younger people sitting around a table some time ago, discussing very seriously some of the deeper issues of life.

One young man asked, “Who, at this table, believes in God?”

There was a long silence.

Then, one said, “I believe in a spirit of goodness that connects all mankind.” Another said, “For me, god is nothing more than kindness and happiness and all sorts of good things.” Still another said, “I think there are little chunks of God in everyone—and that’s that!”

That’s how many people in the Western culture are thinking today. One of our greatest needs is to build a conviction about who the true and living God really is! The loftiest thinking that can ever engage the human mind is thinking about the name, the existence, the per-son, and the work of the one and only true God.

I suppose that almost all who are reading this article would boldly say that they believe in the living God revealed in the Bible—but faith is sometimes put to a test. We believe in a personal God, but what kind of God is He?

I don’t know the answers to all the tough questions that one can ask about God—but I’m convinced that the God who reveals Himself in the Bible—is real and active, and in absolute control of the universe, and is closely related to the events of our lives.

## 1. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The term “God’s attributes” speaks of those characteristics that describe God’s being. Some of the characteristics that describe God’s being are listed below.

### a. Omniscience

God knows everything—He has complete and perfect knowledge of all things. God knows the past—the Bible says, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). God knows the present—even the number of hairs on each of our heads (Matthew 10:30). And God knows the future—“There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known . . . what shall be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28).

### **b. Omnipotence**

God is all powerful—He has infinite power—there is nothing that God cannot do. God’s power is evident in creation. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them [all the starry skies] by the breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6). Fifty-six times the Bible declares that God is “the Almighty one”—perhaps expressed most clearly in Revelation 19:6, which says that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns.

### **c. Omnipresence**

God is everywhere present. This does not mean that God is somehow diffused through space, with parts of Him located everywhere. It does mean that everything is included within the scope of God’s vision and reach.

In Psalm 139:8, David says, “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there.” The point of the message in Psalm 139:7-12 is that there is no place in the entire universe—on land or on sea, in Heaven or in Hell—where one can escape from God’s presence. The positive blessing of this truth is that none of us is ever alone.

Jesus says, “And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

### **d. Holiness and Justice**

God is absolutely perfect in all His ways. There is not a single blemish or flaw in His character. God is never partial. He never plays favorites. We read in Deuteronomy 32:4 that God is “a God of truth, and without iniquity—just and right is He.”

### **e. Love and Mercy**

The Bible says that “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). Grace is the undeserved, unearned, incredible kindness of God. There are a number of ways to define grace and mercy, but perhaps the most meaningful way to describe those two characteristics of His being is to say: Grace is getting from God what we do not deserve—God gives salvation, even though we do not deserve it. Mercy is not getting from God what we do deserve—God withholds judgment, even though He would absolutely have every right to give it.

### **f. The Wrath of God**

In this age when multitudes are given to greed and pride and sex and self-will, the church is basically quiet about God’s wrath. Instead, many church leaders ramble on and on about God’s kindness—saying nothing about His judgment. How often, in the past year or two, have you heard a sermon about the wrath of God?

Just as the Bible points out that God is good (to those who trust Him), the Scriptures declare that God is terrible to those who reject Him. Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 says in essence that the Lord Jesus will return some day in blazing fire, and will punish (will take vengeance on) those who know not God, and who do not obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will be

punished with everlasting destruction, and will be shut out from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

Why should we—when the Bible is so clear—feel awkward and silent when the subject of judgment comes up, and evade the issue when we’re asked about it?

God’s wrath is not rage, bad temper, or cruelty. God is not a cruel monster. God’s wrath is something which people choose for themselves. The person who rejects Christ prefers to be by himself, without God, defying God’s offer of salvation—and at the time of judgment, God will respect that human choice! Nobody stands under God’s wrath, unless he has chosen to do so! The Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:9, that since we have now been justified by Christ’s blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him?

### **g. The Goodness of God**

This attribute means that God is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger. He is unfailing in tenderness and forbearance. Psalm 145:9 says, “The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.” And several times in Psalm 107, the psalmist says, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

God controls all that happens in the world—every meal, every wholesome pleasure, every bit of sun, every night of sleep, every moment of health, and everything else that sustains and enriches life—all these are gifts from God.

However, Romans 11:22 reminds us to behold the goodness and the severity of God. God sometimes uses severity to discipline us, to awaken us, and to remind us not to fall into complacency—lest we take His goodness for granted.

In Luke 13:4, Jesus reminded His followers about the tower in Siloam, which fell (in Jesus’ day) and killed innocent people. Although it was a disaster, Jesus said this tragedy did not indicate that those victims were worse sinners than the people who lived in Jerusalem. No! Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!” (Luke 13:5). The lesson to be learned from that kind of disaster, Jesus says, is that death is coming to all of us—and all persons need to repent and receive Christ as their Savior.

We don’t know why disasters hit certain people (the tsunamis in Indonesia, the hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Haiti)—but we do know that those disasters should push all of us toward repentance, and toward doing the works that God commends.

These are some of the essential qualities (the attributes) of the true and living God who has revealed Himself in the Bible.

## **2. THE NATURE OF GOD**

The true and living God has chosen to reveal some details about Himself in the Scriptures.

### a. God is a spirit

John 4:24 says, “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The fact that God is a spirit staggers the imagination. We can’t imagine a formless being, yet Jesus clearly tells us that God is a spirit—which means that He has no physical dimensions—no size or shape. The Bible also says that God is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17). Paul declares that Christ “is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15).

We cannot see God with the human eye because our eyes can only see objects of the material world—and God is not a material being. Sometimes God has appeared briefly in various physical forms (called “theophanies” in theology)—but these were only temporary manifestations of God for a special purpose. No one has ever seen God in His full, real, complete, true essence, for God is a great spirit being, and is not limited by a physical body.

### b. God is a person

God is not some kind of influence, or energy, or a blind force in the universe. He is not a spirit of goodness that somehow connects all mankind. God is a living person Who has all the expressions of personality. God has intelligence and emotions.

- He was grieved that He made man on the earth (Genesis 6)
- He was a friend to Abraham (Genesis 12)
- He searches human hearts (Psalm 139)
- He loves the world of human beings (John 3:16)

God loves, and grieves, and senses pain. A concrete bridge doesn’t have knowledge and feelings and grief—but then a concrete bridge is not a person either!

### c. God is a unity

God is one God; there is no other. One of the reasons God called Israel as a chosen nation was to witness to the unity—the oneness—of God. The Jewish “Shema” (“the Lord our God is one Lord” from Deuteronomy 6:4) is repeated at least 50 times in the Old Testament.

The nations surrounding Israel—the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Ammonites—by way of contrast, were polytheists. The lesson is this: If God is one God, then He expects the unity of our powers and our devotion to be concentrated on Him. An undivided God expects undivided allegiance to Him!

The Apostle Paul says (in 1 Corinthians 8:4), “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.”

The true God revealed in Scripture is one God.

### d. God is a trinity

The Bible gives repeated evidence that God is one in substance, but that He expresses Himself in three personalities—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom is God. Our human minds

cannot fully grasp this truth—yet it is part of the Bible’s revelation of who God is. Each person of the Trinity is truly, fully, and equally God!

- the Father is God: Ephesians 4:6 speaks of “one God and Father of all.”
- the Son is God: Hebrews 1:8 says, “but unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne O God, is forever.”
- the Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3 says that Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, but Peter says in verse 4, “Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God.”

Belief in the Trinity is one of the distinctive characteristics of the historic Christian faith. The obvious teaching of the Scriptures is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—yet there is only one God. We really cannot comprehend that fact.

Yet, we use and benefit from many things which we cannot completely understand. We can’t understand electricity, and computers. We can’t understand how sodium and chlorine (two deadly poisons) are combined together to make table salt—which is a food product that is not poisonous, and is in fact essential to life. We can’t understand how hydrogen (which is a flammable gas), and oxygen (which supports combustion)—can be combined together to make water. The only ingredients in water are these two highly reactive gases—yet water is used to put out fires! Can you explain that?

The word “Trinity” is best defined this way: In the nature of the one God, there are three distinct persons—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—each fully God, co-equal and co-eternal. There are several obvious facts related to the Trinity in the Bible.

### **(a) Simple grammatical observations in the Bible support the doctrine of the Trinity:**

The pronouns “us” and “our” are used when God speaks. At the time of creation, God says (Genesis 1:26), “Let us make man in our image.” At the time of the call of Isaiah, God posed a question, “Who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8).

The Greek and Hebrew languages have two different words for “one”:

When God created the woman, He took one of Adam’s ribs and made the woman (Genesis 2:21). There was one, and only one, rib that was taken from Adam’s side. The word “one” means “one in an absolute sense.”

But when a man and woman marry, the Bible says that the man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife—and the two shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). There the word for “one” means “one in a collective sense.” There are two persons in a marriage, yet the two persons are one unit. The word “one” (when used of God) is always one in a collective sense—a compound unity. The Hebrews used “yochid” for “one” in the absolute sense, and “achod” for “one” in a collective sense.

In the New Testament, we have the same thing. John the Baptist is called “The voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Luke 3:4). There was only one John the Baptist, so the word “one” in the absolute sense is used. But when Paul and Peter and Apollos worked together as a team of preachers in New Testament times, Paul said, “He that plants and he that waters are one” (1 Corinthians 3:6-8). Paul used the word “one” which means one in a collective sense—more

than one person was working as a single team.

Whenever the word “one” is used for “God,” the writers use one in the collective sense. The true and living God is one God, manifesting Himself collectively in three persons.

### **(b) The New Testament epistles are filled with the Trinitarian concept of God:**

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, spiritual gifts are administered by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:13-18, prayer is related to all three persons of the Trinity. Verse 13 speaks of Christ, verse 16 speaks of God, and verse 18 speaks of access through the Spirit. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, thanksgiving is expressed for the gift of salvation, which is accomplished through each person of the Trinity. We are to give thanks because God chose us, Christ purchased us, and the Spirit sanctifies us. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, the benediction is given as an ascription of praise to each person of the Trinity. It exalts the love of God, the grace of Christ Jesus, and the communion and fellow-ship of the Holy Spirit.

Some teachings of Scripture cannot be explained adequately by any human being—but must be accepted by faith simply because God has spoken.

We can't understand the fall of a leaf by the roadside, nor can we understand the hatching of a robin's egg. Why should we be troubled by our inability to understand the Trinity—the nature of God?

The Bible nowhere systematically explains the Trinity. Failure to understand the doctrine fully is not harmful, but failure to believe it is indeed very dangerous!

God did not make us and then leave us like an absentee landlord. Paul told the Greek philosophers in Athens that God is not far from each of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:27-28).

We are not alone here on earth. Those who are genuine followers of Christ are in the presence of a Friend who knows us and cares for us. I walked through an old cemetery in Boston a few years ago; it was near Park Street Church.

- most of the stones were broken
- some were turned over
- many of the names and dates on the headstones were no longer legible.

These were people who worked hard, raised families, and had joys and sorrows just like we do. Perhaps they thought they would be remembered for a long time—but their great-great grandchildren (in most cases) don't even remember their names—and are not concerned about maintaining their place of burial. Life is fleeting—and most of us will soon be forgotten. We may think now that what we have to offer is important, but even our descendants (a generation or two from now) will likely forget us. But remember this: our God will not forget.

First Peter 5:6-7 says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.” This great God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who created the vast universe—cares for each human being!

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