

BRIEF SUMMARY OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES¹

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS:

Jesus said, "...*this is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*" (Jn. 17:3). Before we can pray well, we must know the one we are talking to. In order to live right we must truly know God. Not just know *about* Him, but *know* Him.

In Daniel we read "...*the people that do know their God shall be strong* (lit., display strength) *and do exploits* (take action)." (Dan. 11:32b). The Bible also teaches that knowing God is the most important pursuit in life: "Thus says the LORD, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight,' saith the LORD." (Jer. 9:23-24).

In Hosea 6:6 God declares "For I desired mercy (i.e. loyalty), and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Proverbs states, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding ... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 9:10; 1:7 cf. Ps. 111:10). And in Job we read: "And unto man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28). This brief study is given with the hope that we will know God in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Packer observes, "It is clear, to start with, that 'knowing' God is of necessity a more complex business than 'knowing' a fellow-man, just as 'knowing' my neighbour is a more complex business than 'knowing' a house, or a book, or a language. The more complex the object, the more complex is the knowing of it." (Packer, p. 30)

In getting to know God, we must study His attributes. Tozer comments: "What is God like?" If by that question we mean 'What is God like IN HIMSELF' there is no answer. If we mean 'What has God disclosed ABOUT HIMSELF that the reverent reason can comprehend?' there is, I believe, an answer both full and satisfying. For while the name of God is secret and His essential nature incomprehensible, He in condescending love has by revelation declared certain things to be true of Himself. These we call His attributes (Tozer, p.19).

"It would seem to be necessary before proceeding further to define the word ATTRIBUTE...By it is meant simply whatever may be correctly ascribed to God...AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD IS WHATEVER GOD HAS IN ANY WAY REVEALED AS BEING TRUE OF HIMSELF...What is God like? What kind of God is He? How may we expect Him to act toward us and toward all created things? ...To our questions God has provided answers; not all the answers, certainly, but enough to satisfy our intellects and ravish our hearts. These answers He has provided in nature, in the Scriptures, and in the person of His Son." (Tozer, pp.20-21)

"If we would think accurately about the attributes of God, we must learn to reject certain words that are sure to come crowding into our minds-such words as *trait, characteristic, quality*, words which are proper and necessary when we are considering created beings but altogether inappropriate when we are thinking about God. We must break ourselves of the habit of thinking of the creator as we think of His creatures. It is probably impossible to think without words, but if we permit ourselves to think with the wrong words, we shall soon be entertaining erroneous thoughts; for words, which are given us for the expression of thought, have a habit of going beyond their proper bounds and determining the content of thought. 'As nothing is easier than to think,' says Thomas Traherne, 'so nothing is more difficult than to think well.' If we ever think well it should be when we think of God." (Tozer, p.22)

An attribute, then, is not a part of God. It is how God is, and as far as the reasoning mind can go, we may say that it is what God is, though, as I have tried to explain, exactly what He is He cannot tell us. Of what God is conscious when He is conscious of self, only He knows. 'The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.' (I Cor. 2:11). Only to an equal could God communicate the mystery of His Godhead; and to think of God as having an equal is to fall into an intellectual absurdity.

"The divine attributes are what we know to be true of God. He does not possess them as qualities; they are how God is as He reveals Himself to His creatures. Love, for instance, is not something God has and which may grow or diminish or cease to be. His love is the way God is, and when He loves He is simply being Himself. And so with the other attributes." (Tozer, pp.23-24)

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD i.e. "GOD IS..."

¹ This is merely a brief excerpt from my original 24 page compilation of quotes and comments titled "God & His Attributes." –Rev. Mike Edwards P.O. Box 127, St. Vincent, West Indies (revised 2/10 & 9/11). The quotes contained here are taken almost exclusively from two highly recommended sources: "The Knowledge of the Holy" by A.W. Tozer & "Knowing God" by J.I. Packer. For those who wish to pursue the study of God further I would also suggest "God: Coming Face to Face With His Majesty," by John MacArthur & "The Attributes of God," by A.W. Pink. Most Bible verses throughout have been added by me, as well as all italicizing, bolding & underlining. Email: mikedebbie_edwards@earthlink.net

1. **INCOMPREHENSIBLE** (*beyond man's comprehension*) – Ezek. 1:13,26-28; Job 12:7-8; Mt. 11:27; Dt. 29:29; Job 11:7; Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-34. "...God is not like anything; that is, He is not exactly like anything or anybody." (Tozer, pp. 14-15)
2. **THREE IN ONE** (*Trinity*). A) Intimations of a plurality within the Godhead begin in the Old Testament: Gen. 1:1 ("*Elohim*"); Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8 ("*us*"); Jn. 14:23 ("*our*"); B) An explicit trinity is taught in the NT: (all three called "*God*") Rom 1:7 cf. Heb. 1:8 & Acts 5:3-4; Rev. 1:7-8, 17-18 cf. Rev. 22:7, 12,13,20 ("*Alpha & Omega*", "*First & Last*"); Mt. 28:19 ("*in the name*"-singular!); (all three associated together) Mt. 3:13-17; Jn. 15:26 cf. 16:26; I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14; I Pet. 1:2; Jude 20-21.
3. **SELF-EXISTENT** (*He has no origin*) – Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17; Ex. 3:14. "“What bearing does this have on my life? ...[since] we are the handiwork of God, it follows that all our problems and their solutions are theological...knowledge of what kind of God it is that operates the universe is indispensable to a sound philosophy of life and a sane outlook on the world...” (Tozer, pp.34-35)
4. **SELF-SUFFICIENT** (*God needs nothing & no one*) – John 1:4; 5:26. "God, [Jesus said], is self-sufficient (Jn. 5:26)...Almighty God...because He is almighty, needs no support... Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help...God exists for Himself and man for the glory of God is the emphatic teaching of the Bible" (Tozer, pp. 39, 43)
5. **ETERNAL** (*everlasting*) – Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Rev. 4:8; Isa. 46:9-10; Ps. 102:26-28. "God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God. He has already lived all our tomorrows as He has lived all our yesterdays." (Tozer, p. 45)
6. **INFINITE** (*immensity, limitless, without limits*) – I Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:48-49; Rom. 8:39, etc. "Of all that can be thought or said about God, His infinitude is the most difficult to grasp. Even to try to conceive of it would appear to be self-contradictory, for such conceptualization requires us to undertake something which we know at the outset we can never accomplish... Infinitude, of course, means limitlessness, and it is obviously impossible for a limited mind to grasp the Unlimited..." (Tozer, p.50-51)
7. **IMMUTABLE** (*unchangeable*) – Mal. 3:6; Jer. 10:10; James 1:17. "To say that God is immutable is to say that He never differs from Himself. The concept of a growing or developing God is not found in the Scriptures..." (Tozer)
8. **OMNISCIENT** (*all knowing*) – Isa. 40:13-14; Ps. 90:8; Prov. 15:3; Rom. 11:34; I Cor. 2:11. "To say that God is omniscient is to say that He possesses perfect knowledge and therefore has no need to learn. But it is more: it is to say that God has never learned and cannot learn." (Tozer, p. 61)
9. **OMNIPOTENT** (*all powerful*) – Ps. 62:11; Rom. 1:20; Rev. 19. "Sovereignty and omnipotence must go together. One cannot exist without the other. To reign, God must have power, and to reign sovereignly, He must have all power. And that is what omnipotent means, having all power..." (Tozer, p. 71)
10. **OMNIPRESENT** (*everywhere present*) – Ps. 139:7-12. "The word present of course means here, close to, next to, and the prefix omni gives it universality. God is everywhere here, close to everything, next to everyone... This truth is to the convinced Christian a source of deep comfort in sorrow and of steadfast assurance in all the varied experiences of life...The certainty that God is always near us, present in all parts of His world, closer to us than our thoughts, should maintain us in a state of high moral happiness most of the time..." (Tozer, p. 80-82)
11. **WISE** (*wisdom*) – Ps. 147:5; Dan. 2:20-22; I Tim. 1:17. "Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. It sees the end from the beginning, so there can be no need to guess or conjecture." (Tozer, p. 66) "Wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes him utterly worthy of our fullest trust." (Packer, p. 81)
12. **TRANSCENDENT** (*transcendence i.e. incredibly exalted*) – Isa. 57:15; Ps. 36:1; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 10:6-9; Prov. 14:27 produces Acts 9:6. "When we speak of God as transcendent we mean of course that He is exalted far above the created universe, so far above that human thought cannot imagine it..." (Tozer, p. 76)
13. **FAITHFUL** – Lam. 3:22. "Upon God's faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as He is faithful will His covenants stand and His promises be honored. Only as we have complete assurance that He is faithful may we live in peace and look forward with assurance to the life to come. Every heart can make its own application of this truth..." (Tozer, p. 87)
14. **GOOD** (*goodness, kindness, benevolence*) – Ps. 145:9a; Lam. 3:22; Mt. 5:45; Jn. 14:9; Acts 14:17. "The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men...God has an affection for His creatures, though certainly not for their sin ...Now someone who in spite of his past sins honestly wants to become reconciled to God may cautiously inquire 'If I come to God, how will He act toward me? What kind of disposition has He? What will I find Him to be like?' The answer is that He will be found to be exactly like Jesus. 'He that hath seen me,' said Jesus, 'hath seen the Father' [Jn. 14:9]. Christ walked with men on earth that He might show them what God is like and make known the true nature of God to a race that had wrong ideas about Him... From Him we learn how God acts toward people. The *hypocritical*, the basically insincere, will find Him cold and

aloof, as they once found Jesus; but the *penitent* will find Him merciful; the *self-condemned* will find Him generous and kind. To the *frightened* He is friendly, to the *poor in spirit* He is forgiving, to the *ignorant*, considerate; to the *weak*, gentle; to the *stranger*, hospitable. The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but His goodness encourages us not to be afraid of Him. To fear and not be afraid—that is the paradox of faith." (Tozer, pp. 88-90)

15. **JUST** (*justice, righteousness*) – Gen. 18:25; Ps. 9:8; 94:1-3 & 97:2; Dan. 9:7; Rev. 15:3-4. "Justice embodies the idea of moral equity, and iniquity is the exact opposite; it is in-equity, the absence of equality from human thoughts and acts. Judgment is the application of equity to moral situations and may be favorable or unfavorable according to whether the one under examination has been equitable or inequitable in heart and conduct... Why, then do men fight shy of the thought of God as a Judge? Why do they feel the thought to be unworthy of Him? The truth is that part of God's moral perfection is His perfection in judgment. Would a God who did not care about the difference between right and wrong be a good and admirable Being? Would a God who put no distinction between the beasts of history, the Hitlers and Stalins (if we dare use names), and His own saints, be morally praiseworthy and perfect? Moral indifference would be an imperfection in God not a perfection. Not to judge the world would be to show moral indifference. The final proof that God is a perfect moral Being not indifferent to questions of right and wrong, is the fact that He has committed Himself to judge the world." (Packer, pp. 125, 130)

16. **MERCIFUL** (*mercy, lovingkindness*) – Lam. 3:20-22. "Mercy is an attribute of God, an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which disposes God to be actively compassionate. Both the Old and the New Testaments proclaim the mercy of God, but the Old has more than four times as much to say about it as the New." [Note: This debunks the false idea that the OT God is a "God of wrath", but the NT God is a "God of mercy"!-mwe] (Tozer, pp. 96-97)

17. **GRACIOUS** (*grace*) – Gen. 6:8; Ex. 33:17; Jn. 1:17; Eph. 1:5-7. "The Grace of God is love freely shown towards guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance of their demerit. It is God showing goodness to persons who deserve only severity, and had no reason to expect anything but severity..." (Packer, p. 120) "Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God...but the channel through which it flows out to men is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The apostle Paul, who beyond all others is the exponent of grace in redemption, never disassociates God's grace from God's crucified Son. Always in his teachings the two are found together..." (Tozer, pp. 100-101)

18. **LOVE** – Zeph. 3:17; Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; I Jn. 4:8, 10, 16. "The words 'God is love' mean that love is an essential attribute of God. Love is something true of God but it is not God. It expresses the way God is in His unitary being, as do the words holiness, justice, faithfulness and truth... Love wills the good of all and never wills harm or evil to any. This explains the words of the apostle John: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.' (Tozer, pp. 105-106)

19. **HOLY** (*holiness, separate from sin*) – Lev. 11:44; 19:2; Job 25:5; Isa. 6:5; Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 1:16. "God's holiness is not simply the best we know, infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, *but His holiness he cannot even imagine*... Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He *is* that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, all His attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy." (Tozer, pp.111-113)

20. **SOVEREIGN** (*sovereignty, king of kings, reigns & rules over all*) – Isa. 46:9-11; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Isa. 44:28-45:8; Gen. 50:20; Acts 16:14; etc. "God's sovereignty is the attribute by which He rules His entire creation, and to be sovereign God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free." (Tozer, p. 115)

21. **WRATH** (*judgment*) – Gen. 18:25; Judges 11:27; Ps. 75:7; 82:8; Nahum 1:2-8; Mt. 5:31-46; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 16; Jn. 5:22-29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; I Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; II Thess. 1:8ff; Heb. 12:23, 28-29; James 5:9; I Pet. 4:5; Rev. 6:16; 16:19. "The wrath of God in Romans denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin... 'Wrath' is an old English word defined in my dictionary as 'deep, intense anger and indignation'. 'Anger' is defined as 'stirring of resentful displeasure and strong antagonism, by a sense of injury or insult'; 'indignation' as 'righteous anger aroused by injustice and baseness'. Such is wrath. And wrath, the Bible tells us, is an attribute of God. The modern habit throughout the Christian church is to play this subject down...To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex, and self-will, the Church mumbles on about God's kindness, but says virtually nothing about His judgment. How often during the past year did you hear, or, if you are a minister, did you preach, a sermon on the wrath of God?...The fact is that subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter. We may well ask whether this is as it should be; for the Bible behaves very differently. One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was *ever* very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly...A study of the concordance will show that there are *more* references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness' (A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 75).

22. **JEALOUS** (*zeal, zealous*) – Ex. 31:18; cf. 20:5; 34:14; Num. 25:11 cf. vv. 7-8; Dt. 4:24; 6:15; 29:20; Josh. 24:19; Ps. 78:58; 79:5; Nahum 1:2; Ezek. 16:38; Joel 2:18; Zeph. 1:18; I Cor. 10:22; James 4:5. "'The jealous God'-doesn't it sound offensive? For we know jealousy, 'the green-ey'd monster', as a vice, one of the most cancerous and soul-destroying vices that there is; whereas God,

we are sure, is perfectly good. How, then, could anyone ever imagine that jealousy is found in Him? ... From these passages we see plainly what God meant by telling Moses that His name was 'Jealous'. He meant that *He demands from those whom He has loved and redeemed utter and absolute loyalty*, and will vindicate His claim by stern action against them if they betray His love by unfaithfulness." (Packer, p. 155) "The jealousy of God requires us to be zealous for God... As our right response to God's love for us is love for Him, so our right response to His jealousy over us is zeal for Him. His concern for us is great; ours for Him must be great too...Zeal, we note, is commanded and commended in the Scriptures. Christians are to be 'zealous of good works' (**Titus 2:14**). For 'zeal' after [being rebuked] the Corinthians are applauded (2 Cor. 7:11)...When Israel had provoked God to anger by idolatry and prostitution, and Moses had sentenced the offenders to death, and the people were in tears, and a man chose that moment to swagger up with a Midianite party-girl on his arm, and Phinehas, almost beside himself with despair, speared them both, God commended Phinehas as having been 'jealous for his God'...*jealous with my jealousy...so that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy*' (**Numbers 25:11, 13**)." (Packer, pp. 156-157)

23. **GREAT (greatness, majesty)** – **Ps. 48:1; 93:1-3; 95:3, 6; 145:5; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; II Pet. 1:16**. "How may we form a right idea of God's greatness? The Bible teaches us two steps that we must take. The *first* is to remove from our thoughts of God limits that would make Him small. The *second* is to compare Him with powers and forces which we regard as great. For an example of what the *FIRST* step involves, look at **Psalm 139**, where the psalmist meditates on the infinite and unlimited nature of God's presence, and knowledge, and power, in relation to men." (Packer, p. 75) For an example of what the *SECOND* step involves, look at **Isaiah 40:12-ff**. Here God speaks to people whose mood is the mood of many Christians today-despondent people, cowed people, secretly despairing people; people against whom the tide of events has been running for a very long time; people who have ceased to believe that the cause of Christ can ever prosper again. Now see how God through His prophet reasons with them. Look at the tasks I have done, He says. Could you do them? Could any man do them? 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?' (v.12). Are you wise enough, and mighty enough, to do things like that? But I am; or I could not have made this world at all. 'Behold your God!'" (Packer, p. 77)

24. **TRUTH** – **Ex. 34:6; II Sam. 7:28; Ps. 31:5; 108:4 cf. 57:10; Isa. 65:16; Jn. 17:17 & Ps. 119:160** – "Thy word is truth." "What is a Christian? He can be described from many angles, but from what we have said it is clear that we can cover everything by saying: he is a man who acknowledges and lives under the word of God. He submits without reserve to the word of God written in 'the Scripture of truth' (**Dan. 10:21**), believing the teaching, trusting the promises, following the commands...His conscience, like Luther's, is captive to the word of God...He is an independent fellow, for he uses the word of God as a touchstone by which to test the various views that are put to him, and he will not touch anything which he is not sure that Scripture sanctions. Why does this description fit so few of us who profess to be Christians in these days? You will find it profitable to ask your conscience, and let it tell you." (Packer, pp. 104-105)

25. **SPIRIT (spirituality)** – **Jn. 4:24, etc.** The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 states: "The Lord our God is...a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto... having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself...he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things... to him is due from angels and men, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, as creatures they owe unto the Creator, and whatever he is further pleased to require of them."² **Several key concepts should be noted:**

- a) **IMMATERIALITY** (i.e. God is a spirit and does not have a body) – **John 4:24 cf. Luke 24:39**. (e.g. Mormons err on this point)
- b) **INVISIBILITY** (i.e. God is not visible). – **Ex. 33:20; Dt. 4:15-19; Jn. 1:18; 6:46; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17; 6:16**.
- c) **PERSONALITY** (i.e. God possesses personality, e.g. i) **Intellect** (He thinks and reasons) – **Gen. 18:19; Ex. 3:7**; etc; ii) **Will** or volition (i.e. He makes choices of His own will) – **Jn. 6:38**; & iii) **Emotion** (He possesses feelings) – **Dt. 1:37**; etc. Characteristics of personality are attributed to God (e.g. **Gen. 1:3** "speaking"; **Gen. 11:5** "seeing"; **Ps. 94:9** "hearing"; **Dt. 1:37** "anger"; etc).
- d) **LIFE** (i.e. God is alive and is the source of all life!) – **I Thess. 1:9; Ps. 84:2; Col. 1:15-16**; etc.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT:

"God is a Person and can be known in increasing degrees of intimate acquaintance as we prepare our hearts for the wonder. It may be necessary for us to alter our former beliefs about God as the glory that gilds the Sacred Scriptures dawns over our interior lives. We may also need to...protest the frivolous character of much that passes for Christianity among us. By this we may for the time lose friends and gain a passing reputation for being holier-than-thou; but no man who permits the expectation of unpleasant consequences to influence him in a matter like this is fit for the kingdom of God." (Tozer, p. 123)

² *The Baptist Confession of Faith-with Scripture Proofs*. Reprinted by Evangelical Press: London, England, 1974, pp. 10-11.