

THE CHRISTIAN GOD

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“May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.” C. S. Lewis’ prayer is helpful for all of us. We already have some ideas of God that are correct: God is good, true, holy, loving. Yet how we understand these concepts about God is filtered through our own conversion, experience, culture, and church traditions. Though getting some things right, we likely also get some things wrong.

When studying God, we must also question our motives. What do we intend to do with our knowledge of God? If we seek theological understanding for its own sake, it may begin to destroy us. Our purpose should be to love our Lord more deeply and to serve him more fully.

THE NAMES OF GOD

For My NAME will be great among the nations (Mal 1:11)

Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your NAME (Luke 10:17)

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his NAME (1 Chron 16:29)

1. WHAT IS IN A NAME? WHY ARE GOD’S NAMES IMPORTANT?

A. *God’s Names Reveal His Person:* Exod 3:13-15; Judges 13:17-18

B. *God’s Names Represent Him:* Ps 8:1; 75:1

C. *Therefore, God’s Names Are Sacred:* Exod 20:7; Matt 6:9

2. What Are God’s Names in the Bible?

A. *Elohim:* lit. “powerful ones or God, gods or most high ones,” found 2,602 times in the OT, it describes God as Creator-Sustainer of the universe, usually translated as “God” in the NT, yet used of pagan deities (Ps 97:7, Exod 20:3) and even humans (Exod 21:6). Typically *Elohim* stands in direct relation to *Yahweh* and *Adonai* (Deut 10:17).

B. *Adonai*: lit. “my lords, or master, lord, Lord” 425 times used exclusively of the true God, often together with Yahweh (310 times, 2 Sam 7:18). Adonai is perhaps a plural of majesty or intensity as about 100 other Hebrew words.

C. *Yahweh, or YHWH* (יהוה): “LORD, I AM; Jehovah,” probably from the verb “to be,” it is found 6,828 times in the OT. Generally it is God’s personal name in covenant with his creation (Gen 2:4) and his people, especially Israel (Exod 3:13-15). In the LXX and NT, it is typically translated *Lord*, related to “I AM” in Ex 3:13-15; cf. John 8:58).

D. *Compound Names of God in the Old Testament:*

COMPOUND NAMES OF GOD

God Most High (El Elyon)	(אֵל עֶלְיוֹן)	Gen 14:18, Ps 78:35
God Who Sees (El Roi)	(אֵל רֹאֵי)	Gen 16:13
God Eternal (<i>El Olam</i>)	(אֵל עוֹלָם)	Gen 21:33, Is 40:28
God Almighty (<i>El Shaddai</i>)	(אֵל שַׁדַּי)	Gen 17:1, Ex 6:3
The Lord is Jealous (<i>YHWH Kana</i>)	(יְהוָה קַנָּא)	Ex 34:14
The Lord Will Provide (<i>YHWH Jireh</i>)	(יְהוָה יִרְאֶה)	Gen 22:14
The Lord is Peace (<i>YHWH Shalom</i>)	(יְהוָה שְׁלוֹם)	Gen 6:24
The Lord of Hosts (<i>YHWH Tsebbot</i>)	(יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת)	1 Sam 1:3
The Lord Who Makes You Holy (<i>YHWH Mecaddeshhem</i>)	(יְהוָה מְקַדְּשֵׁכֶם)	Ex 31:12

E. *Other Names of God:*

ALL POWERFUL (2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17); ANCIENT OF DAYS (Dan 7:9); FATHER (Rom 1:7; 8:15; Gal 4:6; James 1:27; 1 Pet 1:3); HOLY ONE, MOST HOLY (Isa 1:4; 6:3, Rev 16:5); JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH (Gen 18:25); MASTER, LORD, SOVEREIGN LORD (Luke 2:29; Jude 1:4); KING/MY KING (Ps 5:2; 44:4; 1Tim 6:15); MY LORD, MY HUSBAND (Hos 2:16); ROCK OF ISRAEL (Gen 49:24); SHEPHERD, MY SHEPHERD (Gen 48:15; Ps 23:1).

WHAT IS GOD LIKE? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HIM TO OTHERS?

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The attributes of God are what characterize the essential nature of God, manifest in each divine person. The divine attributes distinguish the one infinite, personal God from all others. The God of the Bible is far from either the belief in many gods (polytheism), or the belief that God is in everything (pantheism). Other religions have ideas closer to the God of the Bible because they believe in a Creator separate from this world, all powerful and just and merciful (Judaism and Islam). Understanding who the God of the Bible is, in turn, will help us understand who we are as human beings created in his image. As we come to know our Lord, through Jesus Christ, we also learn how we are to live before God and how we are to see other human beings and, for that matter, all of God's creation.

HOW ARE HUMAN BEINGS SIMILAR TO GOD?

HOW ARE HUMAN BEINGS DIFFERENT FROM GOD?

1. **MYSTERY:** God is "wonder-ful," beyond all we can comprehend. "Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend." (David Covington). (Deut 29:29; Prov 25:2; Isa 45:15)

2. **SELF-EXISTENT, SELF-SUFFICIENT, AND FREE.** God does not derive from or depend on anything outside of himself. He sustains all things and is necessarily self-existent (Job 41:11; Acts 17:24-25; Rom 11: 35-36).

3. **PERSONAL AND TRIUNE.** The one God of the Bible eternally exists as three distinct Persons (thinking, feeling and choosing) who have different roles within the Godhead but possess the same divine characteristics and enjoy eternal fellowship (Job 36:26; Ps 90:2; John 3:35; Col 1:16; Heb 9:14). The Christian God, therefore, is different from the God of other religions, which either deny that God is truly personal or which describe God as only one person. The God of the Bible and Christian faith is forever fulfilled in Trinitarian fellowship, each person communicating, caring, loving, glorifying, and indwelling the others. The God of the Bible invites us to believe in God's provision of forgiveness through the Cross. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we may be made sons and daughters of God and enter into the Trinitarian fellowship. It is by his grace, not of our own works.

4. **GOD IS SIMPLE AND ONE.** There is no contradiction of the divine attributes, which are common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God can share the same full Godness yet be three persons without confusion (Deut 6:4; Isa 42:8; 43:10; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6, 1 Tim 2:5, James 2:19).

5. **PERFECT.** God defines himself and his Being as the measure of all that is correct, pure excellent, good and complete. (Deut 32:4; Hab 1:13; Ps 18:30; Matt 5:48; 1 Tim 4:4).
6. **GOD DOES NOT CHANGE (IMMUTABLE).** Although the divine Persons live in dynamic relationship with one another and with creation, God's character does not change (Ps 102:27; Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8; James 1:17).

IF GOD DOES NOT CHANGE, HOW CAN GOD BECOME A MAN?

7. **ETERNAL.** God exists infinitely before what we know as time. Time is not only cyclical but also linear, with a beginning but no end. God is everlasting (in time) yet seems also to stand outside time. As Trinity, God has a time unto himself.
8. **ALL-KNOWING (OMNISCIENT).** God knows all things past, present and future, together with the trillions of contingencies (Job 11:7; 28:24; 34:21; 37:16; Ps 44:21; 139:1-6; 147:5; Matt 6:8; Heb 4:13; 1 John 3:20).
9. **ALL-POWERFUL (OMNIPOTENT).** There is nothing that God cannot do. He has all dominion, power and might. As completely sovereign, no one can defeat his counsel, thwart his purpose, or resist his will. (Deut 10:14; 1 Chron 29:11; Jer 32:17; Ps 62:11; 103:19; Matt 19:26)
10. **ALL-PRESENT (OMNIPRESENT).** God is present in every part of his creation, but he is not creation itself but is distinct from it (Ps 139:7-12; Isa 66:1; Eph 4:6). There are many aspects to God's presence. Two words often used are ...
 - A. **Beyond and Outside All Creation (Transcendent).** God exists beyond and separate from all earthly and heavenly creation. He is unknowable apart from his graceful revelation. God's innate mode of existence is spirit (1 Kings 8:27; Isa 40:12-28; John 3:31; 4:24; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15-16).
 - B. **Everywhere Present (Immanent).** God is always everywhere present within creation, sustaining it by His presence yet unconfused with it (Jer 23:23; Col 1:16-17; Acts 17:28; Heb 1:3). Yet creation is not God, we are not God. God is personally present but not confused with his creation.

- 11. GOD IS TRUE AND WISE.** God is absolute truth, the standard for all knowledge. He designs the perfect ends and achieves those ends. He cannot lie, for that is contrary to his character. He will not fail his covenants and promises. (Job 9:4; Ps 33:10-11; Jer 10:10-11; John 17:3, 17; Rom 11:33, 16:27; Eph 3:10; 1 Tim 1:17; James 1:5; Rev 3:4).
- 12. GOD IS HOLY AND JUST.** God's very nature defines what is pure and just. Sin is whatever is contrary to his moral nature; it calls for the exercise of his righteousness in justice and judgment. (Lev 19:2; 21:8; Josh 24:19; Isa 6:3; Job 34:10; Pss 24:3; 99:3, 9; Hab 1:13; 1 Pet 1:16, Rev 4:8; 15:3-4).
- 13. GOD IS GOOD AND FAITHFUL.** By nature God is profoundly good; he is not good and evil. God is eternally generous and self-giving as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover God loves his creation which he sustains and for which he provides. God is faithful to his promises, faithful to His being. He never falters, fails or forgets. (Deut 7:9; Pss 25:8, 10; 34:8; Isa 49:7; Mark 10:18).
- 14. GOD IS LOVING, MERCIFUL, AND GRACEFUL.** Because God is Trinity, self-giving love is infinitely enjoyed in equality yet order; lovingkindness and mercy are freely extended to creation, even to sinful humanity (John 17:24; Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:8; Gal 2:20; Exod 34:6; Deut 5:10; 1 Chron 16:34; 2 Sam 24:14; Pss 86:15; 103:8, Luke 1:78; Rom 15:9; Eph 2:4; James 5:11).

So, God is different from us and yet we have been made to reflect his image. No other major world religion gives this high place and dignity to human beings: we are made in God's image to know him and to have fellowship with him. Every person is precious in God's sight. The Bible has the highest view of who we are as human beings; it also has the lowest view of what we have become by sin, wholly separated from God.

The Holy Trinity stands both outside and inside creation. In one sense the infinite Godhead exists to itself, outside and beyond all creation. In another sense, the Triune God comes to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, every moment personally relating to his creation. Through the Son and the Spirit, the tripersonal God enters into time and space, in purity and love, in judgment and mercy.

REFLECTION. QUESTIONS? WORSHIP.