GOD The personal Creator worthy of human worship because of His holy nature and His perfect love revealed in creating the universe, electing and redeeming His people, and providing eternal salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

God is unique in nature. No person, object, or idea can be compared to God. Anything said about God must be based on His revelation of Himself to us. Anything said about God must be said in human terms, the only terms we have and understand. The reality of God is always much greater than human minds can understand or express.

God as the Bible's Primary Subject The Bible and history begin with God (Gen. 1:1). The last chapter of the Bible describes God as the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13 NRSV). All the way through Scripture God is primary. For Christians the primacy of God is reassuring, liberating, and instructive. It reassures us that God controls all existence. It liberates us to know the loving, redeeming God seeks to set us free. It instructs us to be able to look for signs of God throughout His universe.

God as Present with Us God is present in His world in a unique manner. He is never separated from any part of His creation. As spirit, God has the perfect capability of being present everywhere in the world at once. The psalmist exclaimed, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Ps. 139:7-8). The prophet looked for the Messiah to be named Emmanuel, meaning, "God with us"; and Matthew reported that God fulfilled that promise in Jesus (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). The end time will make the presence of God even more clear: God will live with His people (Rev. 21:3).

Atheists affirm the total absence of God, saying God does not exist, but most human experience affirms a sense of the divine within the reality of life. In some mysterious way God is immanent, that is, He is present in the day-to-day human existence. He enters into personal relationships with the people who inhabit His world.

The Bible speaks of God's presence in two major ways: in space and in relationships. Theologians used the term omnipresence, derived from Latin, to speak of God's presence everywhere in all the world's space. Moses experienced that presence on a wilderness mountain (Ex. 3); Isaiah, in the Jerusalem Temple (Isa. 6); and Paul, on an international highway (Acts 9). Most often the Bible speaks in terms of God being present in relationships. He called Israel to be His people (Ex. 19:3-6). He appeared to Elijah in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). Most of all God appeared Person to person in the human flesh of His Son Jesus.

God as Mystery Revealed in Christ The personal presence of God in Jesus Christ is the central and normative source of knowledge about God. Christ is known today through the witness of inspired Scripture and through the personal witness of the Holy Spirit. Still, what is revealed is the mystery of Christ. Even as it is revealed, God's revelation in Jesus Christ remains mysterious (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:1-10; Col. 1:24-27; 4:2-4). Faith believes that what remains hidden in mystery is totally consistent with what is revealed in Christ.

Revelation of Christ in the form of Bible narrative allows us to describe God but not to define Him. Perhaps the closest we can come to a definition is that God is the holy Being who is love in servant form. This rises out of Bible statements: "the Lord our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9); "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16). These contain partial descriptions, not definitions. The norm for a definition comes in Jesus, who said, "but I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27 NRSV). Thus Christian preaching echoes Paul: "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord; and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5 NRSV).

God's Unique Nature God is the only God. He is not simply the greatest of many gods--He is the only true God. God is the living God. This separates Him from all other gods and idols, which are merely forms humans have created in the image of things God created (Isa. 41:22-24; 44:9-20; 46:1-2,6-7). "The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king" (Jer. 10:10; compare 1 Thess. 1:9). Christians see this in Jesus, joining Peter in confessing, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

The living God is also Lord and Master. In English translations He is Lord in two ways. LORD spelled with small caps represents the Hebrew Yahweh, the personal name of God, by which He introduced Himself to Moses (Ex. 3:15; 6:3). See Names of God; Yahweh. Lord with lowercase letters represents the Hebrew 'adonai and the Greek kurios. See Lord. This refers to the master, the boss, the owner, the person with authority over another. As Lord, God is sovereign Ruler over all the earth; He is the Creator and Judge of all persons. Thus the Hebrew identifies God as "the Lord God (Yahweh), the God of Israel" (Ex. 34:23). He is "Lord of lords" (Deut. 10:17). The New Testament proclaims, "let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36 NIV). Thus Jesus receives the same titles as the Father, leading to a doctrine of the Trinity.

God is holy. The most basic word we have to describe God is holy. This is the unique quality of God's existence that marks Him off as separate and distinct from all else. Holiness includes the ideas of righteousness and purity, but it is more. Holiness belongs to God alone. It sets Him above us in majesty, power, authority, righteousness, and love. Persons or objects can be said to be holy only by virture of being drawn into relationship with God. (Compare Isa. 5:16; 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16.)

God is eternal. He has no beginning and no ending. All else begins and ends as an expression of the will of God, but God has always existed and will always continue to exist.

God is spirit. He is not material or physical as we are. As spirit, He does not have the limitations of material form. Spirit is the highest form of existence. It enables God to be with His people everywhere simultaneously. As spirit, God chose to humble Himself and take on the form of human flesh (Phil. 2:6-11).

God is love. "God is love itself" is the nearest humans can get to making a non-symbolic statement about God (1 John 4:8,16). His love is coordinated perfectly with His righteousness. God's love is always righteous, and His righteousness is always marked by love. Love is the primary motivation behind revelation (John 3:16). God's love is expressed as His mercy in forgiving sinners and in rescuing or blessing those who do not deserve His attention. His love is expressed in grace, the love and power of God reaching to those who do not deserve His blessing. God's grace is shown in forgiveness, conversion, blessing, nurturing, and chastising of individual persons. God's grace creates a response of love, faith, and obedience in the hearts of people whom He is trying to reach. His grace also works in and through His servants to give them guidance and power as they seek to carry out His will.

God is Father. The love of God finds supreme expression as Father. God is known in Scripture as Father in three separate senses that must not be confused: (1) He is Father of Jesus Christ in a unique sense--by incarnation (Matt. 11:25-27; Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; 2 Pet. 1:17); (2) He is Father of believers--by adoption or redemption (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 11:2, 13; Gal. 3:26); (3) He is Father of all persons--by creation (Ps. 68:5; Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10; Matt. 5:45; 1 Pet. 1:17).

God is intimate. He is not an impersonal force like gravity, exerting influence in some mechanical, automatic way. He has personal characteristics, just as we do. God is living, working in His world, and relating to His people. He is aware of what is going on, makes plans, and carries them out. He forms relationships and has purpose and will. He is a jealous God, taking himself seriously and insisting that others take Him seriously (Ex. 34:14; Nah. 1:2; 1 Cor. 10:22). He wants more than divided loyalty or indifference from His people.

Attributes of God God has distinctive qualities that summarize what He is like.

God's glory refers to the weight or influence He carries in the universe and to the overwhelming brillance when He appears to people (Ex. 16:7-10; Isa. 6:3; Eph. 1:12-17; Heb. 1:3). It is His presence in all His sovereign power, righteousness, and love. Sometimes the Bible describes the glory of God as a physical manifestation. Sometimes it is a spiritual perception as in a sense of tremendous awe before God. We see the glory of God when we are deeply impressed with a sense of His presence and power.

God's wisdom is His perfect awareness of what is happening in all of His creation in any given moment. This includes His knowledge of the final outcome of His creation and of how He will work from beginning to ending of human history (Job 11:4-12; 28:1-28; Ps. 139; Rom. 11). It also includes His ability to know what is best for each and every one of His creatures. Sometimes this is called His omniscience.

God's power is His ability to accomplish His purposes and carry out His will in the world. He can do what needs to be done in any circumstance (Job 36:22-33; Isa. 40:10-31; Dan. 3:1-30; Matt. 19:16-26; 1 Cor. 1:18-25). This is sometimes called His omnipotence.

God's righteousness expresses itself in many ways (Ex. 2:23-25; Josh. 23:1-16; Ps. 71:14-21; Isa. 51:5-8; Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 3:5-26). He is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. He is faithful, constant, and unchanging in His character. He works for the right, seeking to extend righteousness and justice throughout the world. He defends the defenseless, helpless, victimized, and oppressed. He opposes evil through personal expressions of His wrath, anger, judgment, punishment, and jealousy. He sits in present and eternal judgment on those who do evil.

His attributes show that God is able to accomplish His will. Nothing can limit Him except limits He places on Himself.

God at Work in His World God is not an inert being far removed from the world. God is the personal God who cares about and works in the world He created. Creation was His first work but certainly not His last.

God works as Redeemer to save the sinful, rebellious human creatures and to renew His fallen creation. He makes salvation possible. His love makes Him a saving kind of God. He redeemed Israel in the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 1-15); through the prophets He promised a Messiah who would save His people, and in Jesus Christ provided that salvation (John 3:16). Redemption in Christ completes creation, carrying out the purposes of God and making final, complete salvation possible.

God works in history. The sovereign God exercises His lordship or ownership of the world by continuing to work in His world and through His people. God allows people the freedom to be themselves and make their own free choices but works within those choices to accomplish His eternal purposes. This is called God's providence. God has not predetermined all the events of human history; yet He continues to work in that history in ways we do not necessarily see or understand.

God works toward and in the end time to fulfill His eternal purposes. God will one day bring His purposes to fulfillment, bringing history to a close and ushering in eternity. The sovereign, absolute Lord will accomplish His will in His world.

God as Trinity Finally, God has revealed Himself as Father and Creator, as Son and Savior, and as Holy Spirit and Comforter. This has led the church to formulate the uniquely Christian doctrine of the Trinity. New Testament passages make statements about the work and person of each member of the Trinity to show that each is God; yet the Bible strongly affirms that God is one, not three (Matt. 28:19; John 16:5-11; Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6). The doctrine of the Trinity is a human attempt to explain this biblical evidence and revelation. It is an explicit formulation of the doctrine of God in harmony with the early Christian message that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). It expresses the diversity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in the midst of the unity of God's being. See Christ; Holy Spirit; Trinity.

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