

# God, the Mysterious Other

## The Non-Transferable Divine Attributes of God

In saying "Let Us make man in our image," our God didn't mean that we would be like Him in every respect. Father knows better than to turn over to the likes of us, these seven characteristics of absolute deity. We will never know (within our own nature) what these are like, but it is such a great, good thing that He does! Let your appreciation for the Lord soar as you gaze upon the Most High God.

**"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Exodus 15:11 ESV**

## We See in Part

So much can be known about God, though even that is only the merest fraction of knowledge.

There is a wonderful story about one of the twentieth century's greatest theologians, Karl Barth. He said that he had a dream in which he found himself entering a vast library in heaven. It was absolutely crammed with books and teeming with scholars from all the ages. He became aware that he was pulling a little child's red wagon filled with the many volumes of his own life's work.

About that same time everyone in the library turned towards him to see what he was bringing into heaven. For a moment there was silence while he wondered what they would think about all the serious things he had had to say about God. Then he knew: They all burst out laughing!



We only see in part. Sadly, we can be so blinded by pride that we don't even see how small a part it is. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't press in to understand all that we can, or that we never get anything right. We may succeed in getting a lot right from an earthly perspective, but even that will be seen to be pitifully little when heaven comes to earth and faith becomes sight. The good news is that even eternity will not be long enough to exhaust the full disclosure of the Mystery who is our Maker. Seekers of truth and lovers of God will never be bored!

These meditations on the "non-transferable" attributes of God are hardly meant to be definitive, much less exhaustive, especially since what God cannot share with us as a part of our likeness with Him, must forever bear an un-image-able strangeness, unimaginable for us to comprehend. Rather, let them carry your thoughts upwards into wonder, joy and praise.

## 7 Non-Transferable Attributes



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## 1. Holiness

Holiness is a word that attempts to describe the inconceivable purity of God. Strictly speaking, holiness is not an attribute of the Most High, so much as His essence: the triune God is holy. But what does this mean? Certainly, it means the very opposite of what we are: we are impure, unholy, sinful. In His holiness, God is wholly different from us, making it a fearful thing to fall into His hands, for our God's holiness is like a consuming fire, destroying anything unholy that draws near. Just as Peter recoiled from Jesus at first, our own lack of holiness can make us want to pull back from a close encounter with God. By faith we esteem God's scintillating purity, but by nature (fallen nature) we also fear it. At bottom we don't understand it. How can we? It is so entirely unlike us.

We are given clues, however, that enable us to envision the holiness of God. One is the innocence of children, especially infants in whom the sinful influence has not had time to gain much ground. One friend, helping at a nursery, said that she became enrapt gazing into the eyes of a baby, seeing and sensing such a purity of love streaming out of the infant towards her. Suddenly, she experienced the overwhelming love of God that was pouring into her through the baby. It thrilled her, filled her, then unnerved her. She couldn't bear up under the intense intimacy of peering into eyes so wholly devoted to her in love. God's holiness is like that. Even angels (at times) cannot bear to look upon it.

**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"** Isaiah 6:1-3 ESV

## 2. Infinite/Eternal

The Word says that God placed eternity in our hearts. Good thing He put it there—our minds simply cannot take this one in. The attempt to do justice to the vastness of interstellar space defeats all but poets and artists. To the dry calculations of science must be added some expression of the heart, for mere words and numbers fall flat. Yet, even our stupendously enormous universe has its limits. At its outermost limit it is still expanding. Into what? Nothingness? Primeval darkness? Or taking into account the equally vast age of this cosmic explosion, we press our minds in vain to imagine what could have been present billions of years ago, before our Lord first decreed that there be light.

From that light both space and time now form the continuum in which we are inextricably bound. Yet beyond all space and time, all matter and energy, is One who is Eternal and Infinite, unbounded by the worlds He created, unlimited by the flow of time He set in motion. He always is, He always was, He always will be. Can you place that inside your mind without it exploding? Then hold it in your heart, instead, as a very comforting understanding that there is nothing in your life that is bigger than your God. And rest assured that He has more than enough time on His Hands to come to your rescue at any time.

**"There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty. The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.** Deuteronomy 33:26-27 ESV



### 3. Self-Existent/Self-Sufficient/Sovereign

It is often observed —usually when someone has been humbled by a failed attempt to rule their world—that God is God “all by Himself.” He doesn’t need our help or our advice. His idea of the perfect system of government is neither a democracy, nor a republic, but a benevolent dictatorship with Him in charge. Our Sovereign Lord is Self-existent and Self-sufficient, something we try to be, but can’t. This puts us at a disadvantage when it comes to impressing the Lord with our many reasons why He needs to do things our way, but it should be grounds for eternal rest, if only we could just die to self and let Him be God in our place.

The originating sin of original sin came about when Adam and Eve fell into thinking that they could become “as God.” We need always keep in mind that our likeness to our Maker and Redeemer doesn’t extend that far. As created beings we are forever dependent upon the grace of our Creator to keep us in life (we are not self-existent), to supply our needs (not self-sufficient), and to lead us into all truth (not sovereign in knowledge). He is asking us—considering His eminent qualifications as Parent—to “die” to the god-project and become like little children instead. He guarantees that if we do, we will enter the kingdom of joy and peace He has prepared for us.

**And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:2-4 ESV**

### 4. Transcendent/Immutable

Once we give up trying to change God (by talking Him into our way of thinking), we end up discovering that it is a very good thing indeed that He is unchangeable. He is already getting everything right, already knows everything that can be known, can’t possibly make a mistake in anyone’s life and never, ever sins. Besides, He is overwhelmingly, supremely happy. His joy over the way His work is progressing knows no bounds: His love will triumph in the end! What need is there to change? And since He is immutably “fixed” on forgiving, loving and saving us, what could we possibly want changed?

Admittedly, all of this unchanging goodness is going on behind the veil of God’s unearthly transcendence. He reigns from heaven’s invisible heights, hidden from our probing, anxious eyes. To bridge the gap He has pledged Himself to us in His Word and tucked Himself inside us, but there is no escaping the fact that we have to trust ourselves to Someone who primarily lives in regions of “unapproachable light,” utterly beyond our vision. We do get to see “in part” down here, but the major part of what we’d like to see is hidden from us. That’s where our eyes of faith come in.

**He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15-16 ESV**



## 5. Omniscient

Now we are moving into the familiar realm of the Big O's —omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence—what we typically think of when we think of God. Let's don't let familiarity with these concepts breed complacency, as in "Omniscient? Oh yeah, I've got that one. It means God knows everything." Is it really that simple? Let's pick up that thought and see where it leads us. Jesus said the Father knows every hair on our head and every sparrow that falls to the ground. If that's what it means, then I can handle it. There is room in my mind for this, because it sounds like something I could also know, if I wanted to take the time to count hairs and sparrows.

Let's zoom further out into time and space for a moment. By scientific estimate the universe is about 16 billion years old. God knows every one of those milliseconds as if it were happening now. There are about 100 billion galaxies with an average of 100 billion of stars each. God not only knows and calls every star by name, He knows where every atom and molecule is and has been and is going to be. He knows us the same way. We have billions of cells (He knows them all). We have 1500 thoughts per minute (He knows them all). We have a past we've largely forgotten, a future yet to experience and a present we don't understand. Yet, His knowing of each one of us is perfect. Now multiply that by the billions!

**Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Psalms 139:1-6 ESV**

## 6. Omnipotent

You may have heard people say, when explaining some bizarre event, that "God is all powerful. He can do whatever He wants." No, He can't. That's our idea of power! God isn't all powerful in that way. There are many things that He can't do. Whether He can't do them because He refuses to do them, or because it is entirely contrary to His nature, or because He can't find it in Himself to do it, is debatable. What's clear is that there are "limits" on His omnipotence. For instance, He emphatically states that He does not lie, change His mind, or act unjustly. Although this clearly is a limit on what God can do, it is also a sign of His tremendous power: we lie and do wrong to get out of trouble or to get what we want. He doesn't have to (nor would He want to).

Most tellingly, God cannot or will not "force" salvation on anyone. The Father desires "all" to be saved, but this is something that even He cannot make happen. There is a mystery here of free will and love. It hurts to read the Old Testament prophets and feel the anguish of how God's heart was rent by faithless Israel. He wanted Israel to love Him—for His sake or theirs, it matters little. The pain is immense, as it could only be with a Heart so great. The Lord has the incomprehensible power required to create an entire universe out of nothing. He can still perform the most outrageous miracles. He overturned the power of sin and death by His own death and resurrection. For all that He cannot "make" us love Him. Oh, but how powerful it is when we do.



**Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." Revelation 19:6 ESV**

## 7. Omnipresent

Lance Wallnau has been popularizing the phrase “Jehovah Sneaky” to describe God’s crafty ways of accomplishing some of His purposes. Nowhere is this more evident or more needed than with the mere fact of His omnipresence. God cannot help being everywhere at once: He created absolutely everything, sees into everything, and sustains everything. How could He possibly stay out? If He truly departed from any part of His creation all light would be extinguished, all life would flicker out, all reality would become false: nothing would be left but the primordial “darkness.” Yet, this ineradicable necessity creates a genuine problem for one of His creatures—us!

But wait a minute. Aren’t we the ones who are always pining away for a feeling of His presence or a true glimpse of His glorious features? Yes, but we are also the ones who, like Adam and Eve, are hiding from Him in guilt and fear. In fact, without the “cover” of His apparent absence, we would all be oppressed by the inescapable intrusion of His presence. Don’t believe me? Just imagine Jesus being fully and visibly present with you—all the time. Even in the shower. Even... well, let’s just say, it could get kind of embarrassing, not having any sense of privacy. But it would also feel very confining: you literally couldn’t have a thought of your own not immediately commented upon by Him. As it is, He gives us just enough sense of His presence to lead us on without overwhelming us. Best to leave that blend to Him.

**Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ...If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. Psalms 139:7-8, 11-12 ESV**

## More Divine Discoveries

**Intimate Friend: Transferable Divine Nature** The funny thing is how we are so bent on trying to be like God when it comes to being all-knowing, all-controlling, and everywhere at once in our own little worlds. We race past the true God-likeness waiting for us every day! At any moment we can enter into His divine nature, whenever we settle down and let Him be God in our place. As we abide in Him, the amazing transfer happens. When John writes that in heaven we will be like Him, this is what he means.

**The God of Grace** It is a good thing that our God is a God of grace. We need grace more than the air we breathe! Our need for God to supply us everything necessary for life and right living is endless, because we will certainly need Him to go on supplying all things to us throughout the endless reaches of eternity. Yet, this is apparently what God loves to do: give freely. He gives without measure, without reserve, apparently without our qualification and often without our cooperation. He gives until there is no need left to fill, and then He overfills—just to make sure that our joy begins to match His.



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