# Basic Christian Theology

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## Theology: The Doctrine of God (1)

1. **The Names of God**

   a. **Yahweh** (YHWH, יהוה) – The most common name for God in the Old Testament, occurring over 6000 times, only absent from Esther and the Song of Songs. The name comes from a form of the Hebrew verb, "haywah," which means "to be." In Greek, it's known as the "tetragrammaton" because it only contains four letters. In ancient Israel, this name was so revered that it was never spoken orally, only spelled out. In Scripture, God's name is identified with the word "LORD" (all caps).

      - **Exodus 3:14** – "*God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*"

      - **John 8:58** – "*Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'*"

      - **Quote**: "The name…proclaims his eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, sovereign reality—that supernatural mode of existence that the sign of the burning bush had signified….the bush, we might say, was God's three-dimensional illustration of his own inexhaustible life" (Packer, 42).

   b. **Other names**: God has revealed other names that describe his nature and attributes, and how God relates to his people. "***Adonai***" (Lord or Master, stressing God's ownership over creation; "kyrios" in Greek, which was used for Jesus); "***Elohim***" (generic term for "god," but used for God in the Bible); "***El Shaddai***" (God Almighty, God the All-Sufficient, indicating God's ability to keep his covenant promises and help people with all needs); "***El Roi*** "("the God who sees," who understands our needs); "***El Olam***" ("the everlasting God"); "***Yahweh-Tsabbaoth***" ("The Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Armies," God is always victorious); "***Jehovah Jireh***" ("The Lord will provide," God works through providence); "***Jehovah Shalom***" (The Lord is Peace, providing peace through life's difficulties); "***Jehovah Tsidkenu***" ("The Lord is our righteousness," giving believers a right standing through Christ).

2. **The Incommunicable Attributes of God**

As God has revealed himself through the words of inspired Scripture, we learn details about God's nature, character, and abilities. These details are called the "attributes of God," and they can be understood through God's words, actions, decisions, and events. It's important to note that since God is triune (one God, three persons), each of God's attributes are present in each person, and they are permanent, meaning that they can't be gained or lost.

John Feinberg noted, "Since God's being is pure spirit and hence invisible, without his attributes there would be little we could know about God, and it would be difficult to conceptualize him at all" (*No One Like Him*, 223).

There are two ways that theologians categorize the attributes of God: Incommunicable (what God doesn't share with humans) and Communicable (what God shares with humans).

a. Spirituality: God's spirituality indicates that he is not composed of matter and does not have a physical nature, but is purely spirit. Therefore, we should not think of God has having a particular size or dimension, but as a spiritual being. God is completely unlike anything else in creation.

    - John 4:24 – "*God is spirit…*"

    - 1 Timothy 6:16 – "[God] *who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.*"

b. Aseity: God's aseity (Latin: "from himself") refers to God's self-existence or independence. It means that God doesn't need anyone or anything outside of himself in order to exist or to have joy. In other words, God doesn't depend on anyone else for anything. He is not limited in the ways of creation (energy, time, resources, people, etc.). From eternity past, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed in perfect love, communication, and fellowship.

    - Acts 17:24-25 – "*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*"

    - John 5:26 – "*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*"

c. Immutability: God's immutability (constancy) means that God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises.

    - Psalm 102:25-27 – "*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a*

*garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.*"

- Malachi 3:6 – "*For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.*"

- James 1:17 – "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*"

d. Eternity: God's eternity (infinity) indicates that he has no beginning and no end, and sees all of time equally. Unlike humans, time has no effect on God. He never began to exist and he will never cease to exist. Time doesn't change his being, purposes, or promises. God never learns new things or forgets things, for time does not add or subtract from his knowledge. God sees all of time as we know it as one moment, rather than a succession of moments.

- Job 36:26 – "*Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable.*"

- Revelation 1:8 – "*I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*"

- Psalm 90:4 – "*For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night*" (cf. 2 Peter 3:8).

e. Omnipresence: God's omnipresence is his ability to be in all places at all times. In other words, there is no place that he cannot act and no place that he cannot be found.

- Jeremiah 23:23–24 – "*Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.*"

- Psalm 139:7-10 – "*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 take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*"

f. Omniscience: God's omniscience is his ability to know all things – past, present, and future. As God does not live in human history, but is infinite, he sees all things at once, knowing all things at once. Since he is Creator and Lord over all, he knows everything about creation—including everything about us.

- Job 37:16 – "*Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge…*"

- Psalm 139:1-2 – "*O 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.*"

- 1 John 3:20 – "*For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.*"

- 1 John 1:5 – "*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*" (the word "light" suggests both moral purity and full knowledge or awareness).

g. Omnipotence: God's omnipotence refers to God's unlimited power to do all according to his will. The word omnipotence comes from two Latin words, "omni-" (all) and "potens" (powerful), meaning "all-powerful." God has the power to do all that he decides to do, which corresponds with God's sovereignty (total control over history, always fulfilling his plans). However, omnipotence does not mean that God can do literally everything—he cannot sin, life, change his nature, or deny the demands of his holy character (Packer, 54).

- Genesis 18:14 – "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*"

- Jeremiah 32:17 – "*Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.*"

- Ephesians 3:20 – "*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.*"

- Matthew 19:26 – "*With God all things are possible.*"