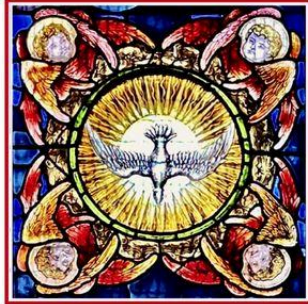


CATECHETICAL CLASSES



THE BASICS OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

CHRIST THE SAVIOR ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

What Do We Know About God? God's Attributes

In the Orthodox Christian tradition, God is the ultimate reality, the source of all beings, The Creator of all things visible and invisible, and the goal of human existence (**Theosis**). To comprehend God is to understand the meaning of life itself.

While we can never fully grasp the divine essence, the Orthodox Church offers a rich tradition of theological reflection on God's attributes. While understood as aspects of God's nature, these attributes are not separate from God but rather integral to God's being.

God's Existence

The Orthodox Church affirms the existence of God as a fundamental truth. This is not a philosophical proposition to be proven but a foundational article of faith. The existence of God is revealed in creation, in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition (in the human conscience), and in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We call it Divine Revelation.

Understanding Divine Revelation

In simple terms, **Divine revelation is when God makes Himself known to us.** It is His way of showing us who He is, helping us know Him more fully and savingly. Through this, we can learn to believe in Him and honor Him in the right way..

God has given this revelation for everyone because it's something we all need, and it has the power to bring salvation to all people. But here's something important to understand: not everyone can receive this revelation directly from God. Why? Because of human weaknesses and imperfections – we all have flaws that can make it hard to fully understand God on our own. To help us, God chose certain people, whom we call "prophets" and "apostles" to carry and share His message. These people delivered God's message to everyone willing to listen and receive it.

Throughout history, people like **Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and other Prophets** were the first to receive parts of God's message. But it was **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God, who brought the message to earth in its fullest form. He spread it through His **Disciples and Apostles**, ensuring that it would reach people everywhere.

The Apostle Paul says, in the beginning of his Epistle **to the Hebrews**:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb. 1,1-2)

The same Apostle writes as follows **to the Corinthians**:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God (1 Cor 2, 7-8,10).

The Evangelist John writes in his Gospel:

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1,18).

Jesus Christ himself says:

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matt. 11, 27).

Some might wonder if we can know anything about God without His special revelation.

The answer is yes – we can learn a bit about God just by looking at the world around us. For example, when we see the beauty and complexity of nature, we get a glimpse of His greatness. But this natural knowledge is incomplete. It prepares us and helps us grow in faith, leading us toward the fuller understanding that God's direct revelation offers.

“For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20)

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17,26-28).

With regard to faith in God, it is preceded by the idea that God is, which idea we get from the things that have been created. Attentively examining the creation of the world, we perceive that God is wise, powerful, and good; we perceive, also, his invisible properties. By these means, we are led to acknowledge him as the Supreme Ruler. Seeing that God is the Creator of the whole world, and we form a part of the world, it follows that God is also our Creator. On this knowledge follows faith, and on faith adoration. (Basil. Magn. Epist. 232.)

Attributes of God

Divine attributes are the attributes of God that distinguish God from all created beings, inherent in all Persons (Hypostases) of the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are one Divine being.

We can only speak of the attributes of God, but not of His essence. We know these attributes of God from what has been revealed to us.

Remember that whatever you think God is, He is not that. God is not definable. To define God would mean to limit Him, to see or to know His “borders” and His “boundaries.” The following list of attributes (qualities, or characteristics) are not the definitions of God. They cannot limit God in any way.

God Himself is one and simple. He is All-perfect. The human mind, due to natural (and sinful) limitations, is not able to embrace the fullness of Divine perfection in a simple act of thinking, therefore we think about God's attributes, considering His all-perfection from different sides. Different attributes characterize different aspects of Divine perfection. Subjectively, many such sides can be distinguished; we say that the attributes of God are countless. The Orthodox Church distinguishes only some of them, without determining their number.

Traditionally, the essential attributes of God are presented in the form of two groups:

Group 1 includes the attributes of God in general and the essential attributes of God as a Spiritual person (spiritual attributes) in particular;

Group 2 includes apophatic (αποφατικός - from ancient Greek “negative”) and cataphatic (καταφατικός means “affirmative”) attributes.

The apophatic or negative way stresses God's absolute transcendence and unknowability in such a way that we cannot say anything about the divine essence because God is so totally beyond being. The Apophatic group of God’s attributes includes attributes that we cannot describe using positive terms and expressions:

God is Spirit

God is a Simple Spirit. Simplicity means God is not made up of parts; He is not a composite or a compounded being. He is simple and indivisible; all that is in God is God. By nature, He is above not only any plurality but even singularity. In God there are no internal contradictions.

God is Spirit (John 4:24)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor 3:17)

The Orthodox Church also affirms the **unity of God**. **This does not mean that God is a single, impersonal force** but rather that **God is a single, personal being**. The Trinity, while a mystery, does not contradict the unity of God but rather reveals the fullness of God's being (*we will talk about the Holy Trinity later*).

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:29-30)

"For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." (1 John 5:7)

God is Eternal

God is eternal, existing outside of time. This does not mean that God is merely timeless but rather that God is the source of time itself. God's eternity is a consequence of God's infinite power and being. God is absolutely independent of the conditions of time, His existence has no beginning and will never have an end.

Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak, You will change them, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will have no end. (Psalm. 102:25-27)

"Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." (Psalm 89(90):2)

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable." (Isaiah 40:28)

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." (1 Timothy 1:17)

God is Holy

Holiness belongs to God, only God is holy by His nature. We can be holy only through partaking of God's holiness.

God is holy, set apart from all that is sinful or impure. This holiness is not merely an attribute of God but rather the essence of God's being. God's holiness is the source of all that is pure and good in the universe. Holiness is the presence of higher spiritual values, joined to purity from sin.

Angels constantly testify to the holiness of God by ceaselessly crying out Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory! (**Is. 6:3**)

He shall judge the world in righteousness (**Ps 9:8**)

The Lord will render to each one according to his deeds, For there is no partiality with God. (**Rom 2:6, 11**)

"But as he who called you is holy, so you also must be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (**1 Peter 1:15-16**)

"Around the throne were twenty-four elders, seated, clothed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads." (**Revelation 4:4**)

God is Love and All-Good

Love is the image of Divine being. The fact that God is loving is already a consequence of this Triune Divine love. God's love extends to the world. God loves His creation immeasurably more than the most loving people love their most beloved creations;

God is supremely good. This goodness is not merely an attribute of God but rather the essence of God's being. God's goodness is the source of all that is good in the universe.

The all-perfect God is absolutely good in Himself; in relation to creatures, this property is manifested in the fact that He is ready to give and does give them as many blessings as they can accommodate by their nature and state, wishing them only good;

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Ps. 103:8)

God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (John 4:16)

"The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all his works." (Psalm 145:9)

"Why do you call me good? None is good but one, God." (Mark 10:18)

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:8)

God is infinite

God is not limited or constrained by any boundaries or borders; He does not depend on anyone or anything in His being; He is not limited by the conditions of finite, created being, He immeasurably possesses all possible perfections; He does everything He wants and how He wants; He has no need of anything;

God is original - He is an eternally existing All-perfect God, absolutely independent of anyone or anything in His existence. In the whole world, only God is self-sufficient, He is Life Himself; God is absolutely free in His being, His thoughts, desires and decisions; no one and nothing can hinder His freedom;

God is immutable - God, being infinite, is absolutely independent of the conditions of space.

God is All-Knowing (Omniscient)

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (**Heb 4:13**)

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (**Ps 139:16**)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! (**Rom 11:33**)

God knows absolutely everything and in a flawless, perfect way. He possesses infinite knowledge. This knowledge is not merely intellectual but rather a perfect understanding of all that is. God's knowledge is the source of all truth and wisdom.

God knows from eternity all His actions, all His goals, and the best means to achieve the goals; He knows how to use these means in the best way, He knows the results of all His actions.

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise; you understand my thought from afar. You discern my path and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether." (**Psalms 139:1-4**)

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I declare the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'" (**Isaiah 46:9-10**)

"If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things." (**1 John 3:20**)

God is All-powerful (Omnipotent)

God can do whatever He wants, whenever and however He wants, and without the slightest difficulty, no one and nothing can hinder His actions. This power is not a force external to God but rather an expression of God's infinite being. God's power is the source of all creation and providence.

"Ah, Lord God! You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." (Jeremiah 32:17)

"Great is our Lord, and mighty is his power; his understanding is beyond measure." (Psalm 147:5)

"Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready." (Revelation 19:6)

God is Unchanging

God is unchanging. This does not mean that God is static or inactive but rather that God is beyond the possibility of change. God's immutability is a consequence of God's perfect goodness and power.

"For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed." (Malachi 3:6)

"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 of turning." (James 1:17)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

God is Incomprehensible

While we can affirm God's existence and unity, we must also acknowledge the limits of human understanding. God is infinitely transcendent, beyond the grasp of human

reason. This incomprehensibility does not mean that we cannot know anything about God but rather that our knowledge is always limited and imperfect.

"God is mighty in power and judgment, and no one can question his deeds." (Job 37:5)

"To whom will you compare God? Or who is like him?" (Isaiah 40:18)

"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." (1 Timothy 1:17)

God is All-perfect

God possesses the fullness of all possible perfections without measure.

Therefore, the attributes of God are not merely abstract concepts but rather the foundation of our understanding of God and the world. By contemplating these attributes, we can come to a deeper appreciation of God's infinite love, wisdom, and power. Ultimately, the knowledge of God is not merely intellectual but rather a transformative experience that leads to a life of holiness and communion with the divine.