

# God and His Attributes

## Lesson 2: God's Attributes



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ENRICHING THE SOUL

# God's Attributes

- Theologians have divided the attributes of God into two main categories:
  - 1. The affirmative attributes الصفات الثبوتية
  - 2. The negative attributes الصفات السلبية

# God's Attributes

- **1. The affirmative attributes** are also called *الصفات الجمالية* 'the attributes of beauty'.
- These are the attributes of perfection that we ascribe to God's essence and actions
- They include attributes like oneness, knowledge, power, life, awareness, wisdom, sustenance, and truthfulness etc.

# God's Attributes

- **The affirmative attributes** are further divided into two subgroups:
  - 1. **God's inherent attributes** الصفات الذاتية are the attributes we can understand just by studying God, without looking at His relation to anything
  - 2. **God's relational attributes** الصفات الفعلية are the attributes we can understand only after analyzing God's relation to His creatures. For instance, He is not a "creator" until He has made something, though He does have the knowledge and power to create before He creates.

# God's Attributes

- **The negative attributes** are also referred to as الصفات الجلالية 'the attributes of majesty'
- These are the attributes of imperfection and limitation that we negate from God and are beneath His majesty.
- These attributes include partnership, physicality, visibility, etc

# God's Attributes

- The Holy Quran alludes to this classification:

تَبَارَكَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

*“Blessed is the Name of your Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Honor.”* Quran 55:78

# God's Attributes

- The phrase **ذِي الْجَلَالِ** refers to His attributes of **جلال** whereby we negate all imperfection from Him
- The word **وَالْإِكْرَامِ** refers to His attributes of **جمال** whereby we ascribe to Him all qualities of perfection and beauty.

# God's Attributes

- The most emphasized inherent attribute of God is His “oneness”
- Some theologians have mentioned approximately 13 aspects of tawhid



# God's Attributes

- **1. The Oneness of His Essence** توحيد الذات
- Story from the Battle of the Camel

إن أعرابيا قام يوم الجمل إلى أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام فقال يا أمير المؤمنين أتقول ان الله واحد قال فحمل الناس عليه قالوا يا اعرابي إما ترى ما فيه أمير المؤمنين من تقسيم القلب فقال أمير المؤمنين دعوه فان الذي يريد الأعرابي هو الذي نريده من القوم

# God's Attributes

- A Bedouin approached Imam Ali during the Battle of the Camel and asked, "Do you say that God is One?". The Imam's companions objected to him, saying: "Is it the proper time for such talks? Don't you see that the Commander of the Faithful is busy in handling the affairs of the war?" Thus they attempted to take him away from Imam and hinder him from continuing his talk. However the Imam said: Let him speak, what this Bedouin is seeking is the very thing we demand from these people whom we are fighting with

# God's Attributes

يا أعرابي إن القول في أن الله واحد على أربعة أقسام فوجهان منها لا  
يجوزان على الله عز وجل ووجهان يثبتان فيه

“O Bedouin! To say that God is one has four (possible) meanings, two of which are not permissible concerning God, the Mighty and Majestic, and two of which are established concerning Him.”

# God's Attributes

فاما الذان لا يجوزان عليه فقول القائل واحد يقصد به  
باب الاعداد فهذا ما لا يجوز لان ما لا ثاني له لا يدخل  
في باب الاعداد إما ترى انه كفر من قال ثالث ثلاثة  
وقول القائل هو واحد من الناس يريد به النوع من الجنس  
فهذا ما لا يجوز عليه لأنه تشبيهه وجل ربنا عن ذلك  
وتعالى

# God's Attributes

- "As for the two which are not permissible concerning Him, (the first is) the saying of him who says 'one' and has in mind the category of numbers. Now this is not permissible, for that which has no second does not enter into the category of numbers. Have you not seen that he who says that He is 'the third of three is of the unbelievers?"
- And (the second is like) the saying of him who says (concerning a man), 'He is one of mankind', meaning that he is one kind within the species . This is not permissible because it is a comparison, and our Lord is greater than that and high above it."

# God's Attributes

وأما الوجهان اللذان يثبتان فيه فقول القائل هو واحد  
ليس له في الأشياء شبه كذلك ربنا وقول القائل انه عز  
وجل إحدى المعنى يعنى به أنه لا ينقسم في وجود لا  
عقل ولا وهم كذلك ربنا عز وجل

# God's Attributes

- "As for the two meanings which are established concerning Him,
- (the first is) the saying of him who says, 'He is one, there is no likeness unto Him among things.' Such is our Lord.
- And (the second is) the saying of him who says, 'Surely He, the Mighty and Majestic, is single in meaning , intending by that that He is not divided by existence, the power of reason, or imagination. Such is our Lord, the Mighty and Majestic."

# God's Attributes

- How can we know He is one?
  - If all existing things were created by more than one being there would be large discrepancies in their structure, function, properties, and the laws that govern them
  - No such discrepancy is observed
  - The unity in creation reflects the oneness of the Creator.
  - Conclusion: only one being must have created all things



# God's Attributes

- An infinite being is one by definition
- It is a logical impossibility to claim the existence of multiple infinite and unlimited beings.
- Whenever there are two entities, they have to have some similarity but at least some distinction that necessitates being called two and not one.
- Even if you perceive them as exactly the same they are different because they occupy different spaces.

# God's Attributes

- How can we know He is indivisible?
  - If a being is divisible it is dependent on its parts
  - God is independent and needless by definition
  - Conclusion: God cannot be composed of parts

# God's Attributes

- **2. The Oneness of His Attributes** توحيد الصفات
- The Oneness of God's Attributes has two meanings:
  - 1. God has no equal in His Attributes, because:
    - Firstly, the Attributes of God are of Him and no one has bestowed them upon Him.
    - Secondly, His Attributes of Perfection are infinite and limitless.

# God's Attributes

- 2. The Attributes of Perfection of God are identical with His Essence. That is, although they differ in terms of meaning (مفهوم), in terms of its external reality it is one.

# God's Attributes

لَمْ يَزَلِ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ رَبَّنَا وَالْعِلْمُ ذَاتَهُ وَلَا مَعْلُومٌ، وَالسَّمْعُ ذَاتَهُ وَلَا مَسْمُوعٌ، وَالْبَصَرُ ذَاتَهُ وَلَا مَبْصُورٌ، وَالْقُدْرَةُ ذَاتَهُ وَلَا مَقْدُورٌ.

“God, the Almighty and the Glorious, was our Lord even at a time when Knowledge was His Essence and there was nothing to be known, Hearing was His Essence and there was no audible thing, seeing was His Essence and there was no visible thing, and Power was His essence and there was nothing to overpower.”-  
Imam al-Sadiq

# God's Attributes

وَكَمَالُ تَوْحِيدِهِ الْإِخْلَاصُ لَهُ، وَكَمَالُ الْإِخْلَاصِ لَهُ نَفْيُ الصِّفَاتِ عَنْهُ.

“And the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to regard Him as Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes...”- Imam Ali

# God's Attributes

- **3. He is the sole Creator**

وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا

*“He who creates every thing and determines its nature in accordance with [His own] design”*

Quran 25:2

قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

*“Say: “God is the Creator of all things”*

Quran 13:16

# God's Attributes

- 4. He is the sole sovereign

• قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ  
وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذَلِّلُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

- *“Say: O God, Possessor of sovereignty, you give sovereignty to whom you wish and strip of sovereignty whom you wish.” Surah 3:26*



# God's Attributes

- **5. He is the sole manager of affairs**

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فَرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءٍ وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً  
فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أُندَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

*“who made earth level for you, and the sky like a dome, who sent down water from the sky and then by means of the water, brought forth of its fruits to sustain you. So do not make partners for him, when you know [all this].” Surah 2:22*

# God's Attributes

- **6. He is the sole being worthy of being worshipped**

أَلِلَّهِ مَعَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

*“Is there a god other God? He is exalted above their polytheism.” Surah 27:63*

the sentence *“lā ilāha illā Allāh”* reflects this level

# God's Attributes

- **7. He is the sole object of worship**

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

*“We sent a messenger to every people with the message, “Worship God, and avoid evil.” Surah*

*16:36*

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

*“You alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek help.” 1:5*

# God's Attributes

- 8. He is the only one to obey

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأَطِيعُوا أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

*“O You who believe! Obey God and obey his messenger and those invested with power over you.” Quran 4:59*

# God's Attributes

- 9. He is the sole source of help

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

*“You alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek help.” Quran 1:5*

# God's Attributes

- 10. He is the sole one to rely upon

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

*“Upon God alone must people rely.” Quran  
14:12*

# God's Attributes

- 11. He is the sole one to fear

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

*For those who fear their Lord despite his concealment [from them], there is absolution and great reward. Quran 67:12*

# God's Attributes

- 12. He is the sole source of hope

وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْأَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

*“Do not lose hope in the mercy of God. Only people who reject faith lose hope in the mercy of God.” Quran 12:87*

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# God's Attributes

- 13. He is the sole one to love

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ  
يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ

*“O you who have believe, whoever of you should revert from his religion – God will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him.” Quran 5:54*

# Polytheism

Considered the greatest and only unforgivable sin.

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

*“Behold, Luqman said to his son advising him "O my dear son! Do not associate partners with God for surely polytheism is a great injustice.” Quran*

*31:13*

# Polytheism

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ  
بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

*“God does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever he wishes.” Quran*

*4:48*

# Polytheism

- People were originally monotheists, then devolved into polytheism
- What causes people to believe in multiple gods?

# Polytheism

- **Materialism:**

– e.g. Israelites demanded to see the God of Moses in 2:55

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَى اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ  
وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

*And remember you said: "O Moses! We shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly," but you were dazed with thunder and lighting even as you looked on.*

# Polytheism

- e.g. this tendency led the Israelites to accept the golden calf as a god in 20:88

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِيَ

*Then he brought out (of the fire) before the (people) the image of a calf: It seemed to low: so they said: This is your god, and the god of Moses, but (Moses) has forgotten!"*

# Polytheism

- **Physical height confused with perfection:**
  - they thought the higher something is, the more lofty and perfect it is
  - the sun, moon, and stars were the “highest” things they knew
  - so they assumed them to be gods. See 27:24

# Polytheism

- **Corrupted beliefs in angels and jinn:**
  - the prophets had taught them about these creatures
  - they did not have direct access to them
  - they began to think they are children of God
  - they thought children of God would be able to intercede with God



# Polytheism

- eventually they began worshipping them as independent gods

وَجَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ الْجِنَّ وَخَلَقَهُمْ وَخَرَقُوا لَهُ بَنِينَ وَبَنَاتٍ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ سُبْحَانَ  
وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ

*Yet they make the Jinns equals with God, though God did create the Jinns; and they falsely, having no knowledge, attribute to Him sons and daughters. Praise and glory be to Him! (for He is) above what they attribute to Him! Quran 6:100*

# Polytheism

- **Corrupted belief in intercession:**
  - the prophets had taught them about intercession
  - they began to appoint their own intercessors
  - these intercessors eventually became gods

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ شَفَعَاؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

*“They serve, besides God, things that hurt them not nor profit them, and they say: “These are our intercessors with God.”. Quran 10:18*

# Polytheism

- **Misinterpretation of supernatural abilities:**
  - they witnessed Jesus give life to the dead and heal the sick
  - they witnessed 'Uzayr rise after being dead 100 years
  - because they could not explain these events, they assumed they were gods, sons of God

# Polytheism

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عِزِيرَ ابْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ  
بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهِئُونَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ

*“The Jews call 'Uzair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!” Quran 9:30*

# Polytheism

- **Divine right of kings**

- rulers claim divine right to legitimize their rule
- they then put themselves forward as intercessors
- over time they claimed to be a god

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى

- *“Saying, “I am your Lord, Most High” Quran 79:24*

# Polytheism

- **Hunger for power:**

- Some individuals sought to empower themselves by creating a god to whom they had special access

قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلَتْ لِي نَفْسِي

*" He replied: "I saw what they saw not: so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the Messenger, and threw it (into the calf): thus did my soul suggest to me." Quran 20:96*

# Polytheism

- **Inferiority complex:**

- impressed by advanced civilizations, they wished to assimilate their culture and with it their religious traditions

وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَوْا عَلَى قَوْمٍ يَعْكُفُونَ عَلَى أَصْنَامٍ لَهُمْ قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ

*We took the Children of Israel (with safety) across the sea. They came upon a people devoted entirely to some idols they had. They said: "O Moses! fashion for us a god like unto the gods they have." He said: "Surely ye are a people without knowledge.*

# Polytheism

- **Cultural pride:**

- religion is seen as a matter of cultural pride  
not a reflection of reality

وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا اتَّخَذْتُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا مَّوَدَّةَ بَيْنِكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

*And he said: "For you, ye have taken (for worship) idols besides God, out of mutual love and regard between yourselves in this life;"*

*Quran 29:25*