LEGACY CHURCH

The Nature of God

A Position Paper of Legacy Church

Introduction

To speak of God is to speak of the most important subject a human being can address. Everything else we believe flows from who we believe God to be. Our understanding of salvation, of humanity, of sin, of history, and of hope is ultimately shaped by our understanding of God Himself. If we get God wrong, we get everything wrong.

This paper is not a repeat of our position on the Trinity, which we address in a separate document. Rather, it is an exploration of what kind of God we confess. It is one thing to affirm that God exists in three persons. It is another to understand what Scripture reveals about His character, His capacities, and His ways. The church has historically described these realities through what are often called the attributes of God, the qualities and perfections that belong to Him alone and that define who He is.

Scripture presents a God who is not distant or vague, but one who has revealed Himself with striking clarity. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and present everywhere. He is holy, loving, just, and sovereign. He does not change. He cannot be manipulated, diminished, or surprised. And He is, as Scripture repeatedly insists, worthy of all glory, worship, and allegiance.

This paper seeks to trace the church's historic understanding of these attributes, grounding them in Scripture and applying them to the life and faith of Legacy Church.

I

Old Testament Foundations

The Old Testament does not offer a philosophical system for understanding God. It offers something better: a living account of who God is as He acts, speaks, and relates to His people. From the opening words of Genesis to the closing visions of the prophets, God's character is displayed with clarity and consistency.

The God Who Is

When Moses asks God His name, God responds with four Hebrew letters that have no equal in human language: *YHWH*, often rendered "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This name is not merely a label. It is a declaration of God's self-existence and independence. He does not derive His being from anything outside Himself. He simply is. Everything else that exists does so because He willed it. He owes His existence to no one and depends on nothing. The theologians would later call this *aseity*, the quality of being entirely self-sufficient and self-originating.

This is why the Old Testament treats idolatry with such gravity. To worship a created thing as though it were God is not merely wrong, it is absurd. The prophets mock the nations for bowing before wood and stone while the living God thunders from heaven (Isaiah 44:9-20). The God of Israel is not one god among many. He is the only God there is.

Omnipotence

The Old Testament introduces God as El Shaddai, God Almighty, a name tied to His unlimited power. There is nothing He cannot do that is consistent with His nature. When Sarah laughs at the promise of a child in her old age, God responds: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). The answer assumed is no.

Jeremiah, surveying the full scope of creation, declares: "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" (Jeremiah 32:17). Job, stripped of everything and confronted by God's voice from the whirlwind, can only respond: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). God's power is not potential. It is active, sovereign, and unstoppable.

Omniscience

God's knowledge is without limit or gap. He knows all things, past, present, and future, actual and potential, public and hidden. The psalmist meditates on this with a mixture of wonder and reverence: "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" (Psalm 139:1-2). There is nowhere to go to escape His gaze, and no thought that escapes His awareness.

The prophetic literature depends entirely on this attribute. When Isaiah speaks of events centuries before they occur, or when God declares "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10), it is because He stands outside of time and sees all of history as present before Him. His foreknowledge is not a calculated prediction but a perfect and immediate knowledge of all things.

Omnipresence

God is not located in any single place. He fills all things without being contained by anything. "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!" (Psalm 139:7-8). This is not pantheism, the idea that everything is God. It is the biblical teaching that God is present everywhere, fully and personally, while remaining distinct from His creation.

Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, acknowledges that even the highest heavens cannot contain God (1 Kings 8:27). The temple is not God's home in the sense that He is confined there. It is the place where He has chosen to make His presence known to His people. His presence cannot be captured or bounded by any structure, no matter how magnificent.

Holiness

No attribute receives more emphasis in the Old Testament than God's holiness. When Isaiah sees the Lord seated on His throne, the seraphim cry out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The threefold repetition is not accidental. In the Hebrew literary tradition, it is the strongest possible form of emphasis. God is not merely holy. He is holy beyond any comparative category.

Holiness in God means He is utterly separate from all that is sinful, corrupt, or impure. He is not holy because He follows a higher standard. He is the standard. His character is the definition of moral perfection, and everything that falls short of it is, by definition, sinful. This is why encounter with the holy God is never casual in Scripture. Isaiah cries out "Woe is me!" (Isaiah 6:5). Moses removes his sandals (Exodus 3:5). The people tremble at Sinai (Exodus 19:16). Holiness is not a quality to be admired from a distance. It is a reality that exposes and undoes everything in us that is not aligned with God.

Love and Justice

The God of the Old Testament is not merely a God of power and holiness. He is a God of covenant love. The Hebrew word *hesed* appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament and carries the meaning of loyal, steadfast, covenant-keeping love. This is not a sentimental affection but a committed, purposeful love that holds fast even when Israel is unfaithful. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

Alongside this love stands God's justice. He is not a God who looks the other way. "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Love and justice are not in tension in God. They flow from the same perfectly ordered character. His love drives Him to rescue, and His justice drives Him to make things right.

Sovereignty and Immutability

God reigns over all of history with absolute authority. Nothing occurs outside His governance. "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). His sovereignty is not reactive. He does not adjust His plans based on human decisions. He governs all things, including human decisions, without violating human responsibility.

And He does all of this without ever changing. "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). God's immutability is the foundation of all covenant faithfulness. He does not evolve, improve, regret, or reverse course. What He was, He is. What He promises, He fulfills. The same God who called Abraham is the God who calls us today.

II

New Testament Understanding

The New Testament does not revise the Old Testament's portrayal of God. It deepens and clarifies it, particularly through the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is described as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). To see Jesus is to see what God is like in human form.

God Is Spirit and Light and Love

The apostle John offers three of the most profound statements about God's nature in all of Scripture. "God is spirit" (John 4:24), meaning He is not made of matter, not confined by physical limitation, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), a declaration of His perfect holiness and moral purity. And "God is love" (1 John 4:8), not merely that He loves, but that love is essential to who He is. These are not three separate Gods but three facets of the one God who has revealed Himself fully in Christ.

The Unchanging God

The New Testament reinforces divine immutability with equal clarity. James writes that God is the "Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). The writer of Hebrews applies Psalm 102 directly to the Son: "You are the same, and your years will have no end" (Hebrews 1:12). Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The God who acted in history is the same God who acts now. His character, His promises, and His purposes do not shift with time or circumstance.

God's Unsearchable Greatness

Paul, meditating on the depths of God's wisdom and knowledge, breaks into doxology: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). This is not an admission of ignorance but an acknowledgment that God is greater than any category we can construct for Him. He has revealed Himself truly, but never exhaustively. His nature exceeds our full comprehension, and that is precisely why He is worthy of worship.

A Brief Note on the Trinitarian Nature

The New Testament presents the attributes of God as belonging equally and fully to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The omnipotence that creates worlds, the omniscience that knows all things, the holiness that consumes impurity, and the love that sends a Son to die, these are not divided among three persons but shared fully in the one divine nature. A fuller treatment of this is found in our separate position paper on the Trinity. Here we note only that the attributes we confess are Trinitarian in their source and expression.

III

Early Church (First 300 Years)

The earliest Christians did not inherit a ready-made theological vocabulary for God's attributes. They inherited a living faith, a set of Scriptures, and the witness of the apostles. As they encountered Greek philosophical culture and faced heresies that distorted the biblical portrait of God, they were compelled to articulate with precision what they had always believed and worshiped.

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD)

was one of the first to engage Greek philosophy on the question of God's nature. In his *First Apology*, he insists that the God of Scripture is unlike the gods of Greek mythology. He is not capricious, morally compromised, or limited by the world. God is eternal, unchangeable, and the source of all that is good. Justin affirms that God "remains ever the same and is not moved by any change," anticipating the church's later language about divine immutability.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202 AD)

wrote against Gnostic heresies that posited a distant, unknowable God and a lesser creator deity. Against these, Irenaeus insisted that the God who created the world is the same God who redeems it, and that He is perfectly good, all-powerful, and fully present in His creation. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes that God "contains all things, and is Himself contained by no one." God is not one being among many but the boundless, self-sufficient source of all existence.

Tertullian (c. 155-220 AD)

contributed significantly to the church's developing language about God's attributes. He was among the first to articulate God's immutability with philosophical precision, arguing that any change in God would imply imperfection, either that He lacked something before the change or diminished after it. For Tertullian, God is perfectly complete in Himself and therefore cannot change. He also emphasized God's justice, insisting that a God who does not punish sin would not be truly good.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD)

brought the church into sustained dialogue with Greek philosophy, particularly on the question of God's transcendence. While drawing on Platonic categories, Clement always brought them under the authority of Scripture. He affirmed God's omniscience, writing that "nothing escapes God's knowledge, not even the thoughts of men," and insisted on God's holiness as the foundation of the Christian moral life. For Clement, knowing God rightly was inseparable from being transformed by Him.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

stands as perhaps the most influential voice in the early church on the nature of God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine opens with one of the most celebrated prayers in Christian history: "You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." This is not merely devotional language. It reflects a deep theological conviction that God is the highest good, the only truly satisfying object of human longing, and the source of all existence. Augustine developed a rich account of God's simplicity, the idea that God's attributes are not separate parts of Him but are all fully identical with His one divine being. God does not merely have love, power, and holiness. He *is* love, He *is* power, He *is* holiness, in one perfectly unified nature.

Across these early voices, a consistent portrait emerges. God is self-existent, unlimited in power, knowledge, and presence, perfectly holy and good, unchanging in character, and the sovereign ruler of all things. The church did not invent these convictions. It articulated what Scripture had always taught.

IV

The Reformers

The Protestant Reformers inherited the classical Christian doctrine of God and largely affirmed it, while recovering its connection to Scripture and the life of the ordinary believer. Their concern was not primarily philosophical but pastoral. They wanted Christians to know the God of the Bible, not merely the God of the philosophers.

Martin Luther's theology was shaped by what he called the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus*, the hidden God and the revealed God. Luther recognized that God in His full majesty is beyond human comprehension. We cannot approach Him on our own terms. But God has mercifully revealed Himself in Christ, and it is there, in the Word and in the cross, that we truly know Him. This prevented Luther from treating God's attributes as abstract doctrines and kept them anchored in the living encounter with Scripture and grace.

John Calvin opened his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a foundational claim: all wisdom consists of two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. For Calvin, knowing God is not one subject among many. It is the foundation of all true knowledge. Calvin wrote extensively on God's sovereignty, providence, and immutability, insisting that the God who governs all things does so with perfect wisdom and perfect goodness. His account of God's sovereignty was comprehensive: nothing falls outside God's governance, and yet God is not the author of evil. Calvin also emphasized the *accommodated* nature of biblical language about God, the idea that when Scripture speaks of God regretting, relenting, or being angry, it is using human language to describe divine realities in ways we can grasp. These are not signs of divine change but divine condescension to our understanding.

The Reformed confessions produced during this period, including the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Belgic Confession, contain some of the most precise and comprehensive statements about God's attributes in church history. The Westminster Confession describes God as "most holy, most free, most absolute," working "all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory." These documents represent the Reformation's effort to give the people of God a clear, stable, and scripturally grounded understanding of who God is.

V

Mainstream Western Christianity

The classical Christian understanding of God's attributes, often referred to as classical theism, has been the dominant position across Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant traditions for nearly two thousand years. At its core, classical theism holds that God is self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, perfectly holy, immutable, and eternal. This has not been a peripheral concern but the foundation upon which all other theology rests.

In recent decades, however, several movements have proposed significant revisions to this historic understanding.

Open Theism, which emerged primarily within certain evangelical circles in the late twentieth century, argues that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge of future free human choices. Proponents such as Clark Pinnock and Gregory Boyd argued that a genuinely relational God must be open to the future in the same way humans are. While seeking to honor human freedom and the relational nature of God, open theism departs significantly from the historic Christian confession of divine omniscience and represents a meaningful break from the nearly universal teaching of the church across two thousand years.

Process theology, influenced by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, goes further, proposing that God Himself is in process, changing and developing alongside the world. In this view, God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense but persuades rather than controls. Process theology has found some acceptance in liberal Protestant circles and certain academic contexts, but it represents a fundamental departure from the biblical and historic understanding of who God is.

In popular culture, distortions of God's nature have also proliferated. The prosperity gospel tends to portray God primarily as a means to human flourishing, domesticating His sovereignty and subordinating His holiness to His role as a provider of blessing. A therapeutic Christianity, common in many churches, emphasizes God's love in ways that strip it of its moral content, presenting a God who affirms rather than transforms. Neither of these reflects the God of Scripture.

In contrast, the broad stream of historic orthodox Christianity, across its many traditions, has maintained that God's attributes are not negotiable. They are not culturally constructed or philosophically adjustable. They are revealed realities that the church receives, not invents, and that form the non-negotiable foundation of Christian faith and life.

VI

Key Scriptures on the Nature of God

> Exodus 3:14
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> *"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'"*

> Isaiah 6:3
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> *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

> Psalm 139:7-10
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> *"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."*

> Isaiah 46:9-10
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> *"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"*

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

> 1 John 1:5
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> *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

> 1 John 4:8
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> *"Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

> James 1:17
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> *"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."*

> Romans 11:33
>
> *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"*

> Hebrews 1:3
>
> *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."*

VII

Legacy Church Position

At Legacy Church, we believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A fuller account of the Trinity is given in our separate position paper on that subject. Here we confess what kind of God we worship, the attributes and perfections that belong to Him and that define who He is.

We joyfully affirm the Nicene Creed as a faithful expression of the historic and biblical confession of the Triune God, and we stand in continuity with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church across the centuries in our understanding of His nature.

His Attributes

Omnipotent

God is all-powerful. There is nothing He cannot do that is consistent with His nature. He created all things by the word of His power and sustains all things by His will. No force, no circumstance, and no creature can thwart His purposes or diminish His strength.

Omniscient

God knows all things perfectly and completely, from eternity past to eternity future. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows the thoughts of every heart, the number of every hair, and the end from the beginning. His knowledge is not acquired but inherent to who He is.

Omnipresent

God is fully present everywhere at all times. He is not divided among locations but wholly present in every place. There is nowhere we can go that is outside His reach, and no moment in which He is absent from His creation.

Perfectly Holy

God is wholly set apart from all that is sinful, corrupt, or impure. His holiness is not a quality He possesses alongside others but the moral foundation of all that He is. Everything He does flows from and reflects this perfect moral purity. He cannot sin, cannot be tempted by evil, and cannot look on wickedness with approval.

Perfectly Loving

God is love. Not merely that He loves, but that love is essential to His nature. This love is not sentimental or indulgent but holy, purposeful, and steadfast. It is most fully displayed in the giving of His Son for the sins of the world, and it never contradicts His holiness or justice.

Perfectly Just

God is righteous in all His ways and just in all His judgments. He does not overlook sin, nor can He. His justice is not a failure of love but an expression of His perfect moral character. Because He is just, sin must be addressed. Because He is love, He has addressed it in Christ.

Sovereign Over All

God reigns over all of history, all nations, all circumstances, and all things. His sovereignty is not merely theoretical but active and comprehensive. Nothing occurs outside His governance. He works all things according to the counsel of His will, and His purposes will not be frustrated.

Immutable

From eternity past to eternity future, God remains unchanging in His character, plans, and promises. He does not grow, evolve, improve, or diminish. What He has revealed Himself to be, He always has been and always will be. This is the foundation of all our confidence in His promises.

Why This Matters

The attributes of God are not abstract doctrines for theologians to debate. They are the foundation of a life of faith. Because God is omnipotent, we can trust Him with what is beyond our power. Because He is omniscient, we can be honest before Him without fear of hidden things. Because He is omnipresent, we are never alone. Because He is holy, we are called to holiness ourselves. Because He is loving, we are secure. Because He is just, sin will not have the last word. Because He is sovereign, history is not chaos. Because He is immutable, He will be tomorrow exactly who He is today.

God alone is worthy of all glory, worship, and allegiance. Not because He demands it arbitrarily, but because He is, in Himself, the most glorious, most good, most beautiful, and most worthy being that exists. All worship that is rightly directed finds its end in Him. All that is truly good in creation is a reflection of His goodness. And one day, when all things are made new, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He alone is God.

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