

The Intellectual Attributes of God

Knowledge, Wisdom, Truthfulness, and Faithfulness

A Teaching Lesson · Seminary-level content, high-school-level clarity

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Big Idea: This lesson begins the communicable attributes — perfections of God that are reflected in us, His image-bearers, in a limited, creaturely way. We look at four “intellectual” attributes: God’s knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness. God has these perfectly and infinitely; we can have them truly but only in a small, dependent measure.

Memory Verse: *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” — Romans 11:33 (ESV)*

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PART ONE

Teaching Outline (Leader Notes)

With this lesson our study turns a corner. Up to now we have mostly studied God's incommunicable attributes — perfections like aseity, eternity, and omnipresence that belong to God alone and are NOT shared with creatures. Now we begin the communicable attributes: perfections that God truly shares, in a limited and creaturely way, with human beings made in His image. This lesson introduces that whole category, and then studies the first group — the intellectual (or “mental”) attributes: knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness. Part One is your full teaching material; Part Two is a handout to copy for students.

I. Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between incommunicable and communicable attributes.
2. Connect the communicable attributes to being made in God's image.
3. Define God's knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness.
4. Give at least one Bible passage for each of the four.
5. Describe how each attribute is reflected — and how it should grow — in us.

II. What Are “Communicable” Attributes?

Communicable here does not mean “good at talking.” It comes from the idea of “communicating” or sharing something. Theologians divide God's attributes into two groups to help us think clearly:

Incommunicable	Perfections God does NOT share with creatures — e.g. aseity (self-existence), eternity, infinity, omnipresence. Only God can be these. They mark how He is completely unlike us.
Communicable	Perfections God DOES share, in a limited, creaturely way — e.g. knowledge, wisdom, truth, love, goodness, justice. We can reflect these because we are made in His image.

An important caution: The line between the two groups is not a hard wall. Even the “shared” attributes belong to God in a way infinitely beyond us. God does not merely know MORE than we do — He knows in a different, higher way altogether. So even communicable attributes are ours by reflection, never by equality.

III. The Key Idea: The Image of God

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’... So God created man in his own image.”

— Genesis 1:26–27 (ESV)

The reason we can reflect God's communicable attributes at all is that we are made in His image. Because God knows, we can know. Because God is wise, we can be wise. Because God is truthful and faithful, we can be truthful and faithful. Every good version of these traits in us is a faint mirror of the God who made us. Sin has cracked and dirtied that mirror, but in Christ it is being renewed "in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10).

Teach this pattern for all four attributes: God has it perfectly and infinitely; we have it truly but partially and dependently; and in Christ we are meant to grow in it more and more.

IV. The Four Intellectual Attributes

Now we look at each of the four, in turn. For each: what it means in God, a key verse, and how it is reflected in us.

1. Knowledge — God knows all things

In God: God knows Himself and all things perfectly, completely, and all at once. He never learns and is never surprised (Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:20). His knowledge is the foundation of truth itself.

Reflected in us: We can truly know — God, ourselves, and His world — but our knowledge is small, learned bit by bit, and often mistaken. We are called to grow in the knowledge of God (2 Peter 3:18), which is the aim of all real learning.

2. Wisdom — God always chooses the best ends and means

In God: Wisdom is knowledge rightly used. God's wisdom means He always brings about the best goals in the best ways — to His own glory and His people's good. "To the only wise God be glory" (Romans 16:27). His wisdom is seen supremely at the cross, which looked foolish but was God's deepest wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

Reflected in us: Wisdom is more than being smart; it is skill in godly living. We do not manufacture it — we ask God for it (James 1:5), and true wisdom "begins" with the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 9:10).

3. Truthfulness — God is the true God who cannot lie

In God: God is the "true God" (Jeremiah 10:10) — real as opposed to false idols — and He is truthful: everything He says is completely reliable. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). He is the standard and source of all truth; Jesus is "the truth" (John 14:6).

Reflected in us: Because our God is true, His people are to be truthful — speaking the truth, hating lies, and living with integrity (Ephesians 4:25). Truthful living reflects the character of the God we serve.

4. Faithfulness — God always keeps His word

In God: Faithfulness is God's truthfulness kept over time. He always does what He has promised; He never abandons His people or breaks His covenant. "Great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23); "he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Reflected in us: We are called to be faithful — dependable, keeping our word, loyal in our commitments — because we serve a faithful God (1 Corinthians 4:2). Human faithfulness is a small echo of God's covenant-keeping love.

V. The Pattern at a Glance: In God, and Reflected in Us

This table ties the four together and shows the shape of every communicable attribute — perfect in God, partial in us.

Attribute	In God (perfect, infinite)	In us (true, but partial)
Knowledge	Knows all things at once; never learns.	Know truly, but little; learn bit by bit.
Wisdom	Always the best ends by the best means.	Grow in wisdom by asking God (James 1:5).
Truthfulness	Cannot lie; the source of all truth.	Called to speak truth and hate lies.
Faithfulness	Always keeps His every promise.	Called to be dependable and keep our word.

The master pattern: God HAS these perfectly; we RECEIVE them partially; in Christ we GROW in them. That is how every communicable attribute works.

VI. Common Confusions (and How to Answer Them)

“If God shares these attributes, are we a little bit like God — or even gods?”

No. Being made in God’s image means we RESEMBLE Him, not that we share His divine nature. A painting can reflect the painter without being the painter. Our knowledge, wisdom, truth, and faithfulness are real reflections, but always creaturely and dependent. The gap between Creator and creature never closes.

“What’s the difference between truthfulness and faithfulness — aren’t they the same?”

They are closely linked. Truthfulness is about God’s WORDS being reliable — what He says is always true. Faithfulness is about God’s ACTIONS over time — He does what He said, keeping His promises across the years. Truthfulness is reliable speech; faithfulness is reliable follow-through. Both flow from one trustworthy God.

“If wisdom is a gift from God, why do I still have to study and think hard?”

Because God usually gives His gifts through means, not around them. He grows our wisdom as we read His Word, seek counsel, learn from experience, and pray. Asking God for wisdom and working hard to gain it are not opposites — they go together. We depend on Him AND we apply ourselves.

VII. What the Church Has Taught

- **The Reformed tradition** developed the incommunicable/communicable distinction to help believers see both how God is utterly unlike us and how He truly shares His character with His image-bearers.

- **Herman Bavinck** grouped these as “attributes of God’s intellect,” showing that God’s knowledge, wisdom, and truth are all one in His simple being, yet meaningfully distinct for us.
- **The Reformed and Baptist confessions** confess God as “most wise... the fountain of all... truth,” whose knowledge is “infinite, infallible” (Westminster and Second London Baptist Confessions, ch. 2).

The phrase to memorize: **God has these perfectly; we reflect them partially; in Christ we grow.**

VIII. The One-Sentence Guardrail

God’s knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness are His own infinite perfections, which He shares with us in a limited, creaturely way as His image-bearers. We reflect Him truly, but never become His equal.

IX. Why This Matters for Us

- **It gives dignity to the mind.** Learning, thinking, and seeking wisdom are not worldly distractions — they reflect the God who made us to know and understand.
- **It shapes our character.** Because our God is truthful and faithful, His people are called to be people of truth and dependability — in our words and our commitments.
- **It drives us to depend on God.** We ask Him for wisdom and knowledge, knowing our own is small. Growth in these attributes is a gift we receive, not a trophy we earn.
- **It anchors our trust.** Because God is perfectly truthful and faithful, His promises are rock-solid. We can build our lives on a God who cannot lie and never fails.

PART TWO

Student Handout

God's Intellectual Attributes — Knowledge, Wisdom, Truthfulness, Faithfulness. Fill in the blanks and follow along as we work through the lesson together.

The Big Idea

Some of God's perfections He shares with us, His image-bearers, in a small and creaturely way. These are the communicable attributes. Today we look at four "mental" ones: knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness. God has them perfectly; we reflect them partially; in Christ we grow.

Two Kinds of Attributes

Incommunicable	God does NOT share these — self-existence, eternity, infinity. Only God.
Communicable	God DOES share these (in part) — knowledge, wisdom, truth, faithfulness.

Why We Can Reflect Them: The Image of God

- **Genesis 1:27** — God made us "in his own image."
- **Colossians 3:10** — in Christ we are being renewed "in knowledge after the image of [our] creator."

The Four Attributes

Attribute	In God	In us
Knowledge	Knows all things at once.	Know truly, but little.
Wisdom	Always the best way.	Ask God for it (James 1:5).
Truthfulness	Cannot lie.	Speak truth, hate lies.
Faithfulness	Keeps every promise.	Be dependable; keep our word.

Key Verses

- **Psalms 147:5** — "His understanding is beyond measure." (Knowledge)
- **James 1:5** — If anyone lacks wisdom, "let him ask God." (Wisdom)
- **Hebrews 6:18** — "It is impossible for God to lie." (Truthfulness)
- **Lamentations 3:23** — "Great is your faithfulness." (Faithfulness)

Truthfulness vs. Faithfulness

- **Truthfulness** = His WORDS are always reliable.
- **Faithfulness** = His ACTIONS always keep His word over time.

Fill in the Blanks

1. Attributes God does NOT share are called _____ (e.g., eternity).
2. Attributes God DOES share are called _____ (e.g., wisdom).
3. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him _____ God. (James 1:5)
4. "Great is your _____." (Lamentations 3:23)

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that you are made "in God's image"? How does that affect how you see yourself?
2. What's the difference between being smart and being wise? Which do you want more?
3. Why can you completely trust God's promises? Which attribute makes them sure?
4. Where do you need to grow in being truthful or faithful this week?

One Sentence to Remember

God has these perfectly; we reflect them partially; in Christ we grow.

This Week

Memorize Lamentations 3:23. Pick ONE of the four attributes to grow in this week — seek knowledge of God in the Word, ask Him for wisdom, tell the truth even when it's hard, or keep a promise you made. Ask God each morning to make you more like Him in that one way.

Sources & Further Study

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Key passages and classic sources referenced in this lesson:

- Scripture: Genesis 1:26–27; Psalm 147:5; Proverbs 9:10; Jeremiah 10:10; Lamentations 3:23; John 14:6; Romans 11:33; Romans 16:27; 1 Corinthians 1:24–25; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:10; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 6:18; James 1:5; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 3:20.
- Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics vol. 2 — the communicable attributes and “attributes of God’s intellect.”
- Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology — the incommunicable/communicable classification.
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), ch. 2; Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 2; Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God (knowledge and wisdom of God).