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## Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture

Sherene Nicholas Khouri  
*Liberty University*, [cnkoula@liberty.edu](mailto:cnkoula@liberty.edu)

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## Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture

### Abstract

John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture*, Baker Academic, 2021. ISBN 9781540961259. 336 pages. \$29.99.

Peckham's latest book, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* is a study in theology proper, which deals with God's nature and attributes. Peckham clearly sets forth the main elements of the divine attributes by explaining God's Aseity, immutability, qualified passibility, omnipresence, eternity, omniscience, foreknowledge, omnipotence, providence, faithfulness, and omnibenevolence. He also dedicates a chapter to the doctrine of the Trinity and ends the book with a quest for covenantal theism.

### Keywords

Divine attributes

### Cover Page Footnote

PhD in theology and Apologetics- projected defense 2022.

John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture*, Baker Academic, 2021 (ISBN 9781540961259), pp. 336, pb \$29.99.

John C. Peckham is professor of Theology and Christian Philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. Peckham received the Daniel A. Augsburg Excellence in Teaching Award in 2016. Peckham has written several books: *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil*, published by Baker Academic, 2018. *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method*, published by Eerdmans, 2016. *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*, published by IVP Academic, 2015.

Peckham's latest book, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* is a study in theology proper, which deals with God's nature and attributes. Peckham clearly sets forth the main elements of the divine attributes by explaining God's Aseity, immutability, qualified passibility, omnipresence, eternity, omniscience, foreknowledge, omnipotence, providence, faithfulness, and omnibenevolence. He also dedicates a chapter to the doctrine of the Trinity and ends the book with a quest for covenantal theism.

Regarding Divine immutability, Peckham introduces the concept of qualified impassibility. God voluntarily engages in back-and-forth covenantal relationship with creatures (63). Therefore, God is passible in a qualified sense, meaning God is voluntarily passible in relation to the world. God freely created and freely opened himself up to being affected by this world in a way that does not diminish or collapse the creator-creature distinction (64). So, God does not change with respect to his essential nature and character, but He experiences the kinds of relational changes such as being pleased or angered by creatures (71).

Regarding God's omnipresence and eternity, Peckham acknowledges that it is better if we consider God not essentially corporeal than to consider him incompatible with corporeality. Since God is spirit (John 4:24), He is not restricted to bodily form or physical characteristics, but He may take bodily form wherever He wants. God might be incorporeal and not be restricted to any spatial location or physical form. He can take on physical form and act in a particular location without needing physical form to so act (90).

Regarding God and time, Peckham presents two views: the Christian tradition of God being timeless (atemporal) and being temporal. The former means there can be no succession of moments in God's life. God is outside the timeline of the human world. The latter means God has past and future, and successively acts and interacts within the flux of time. Peckham believes that there is no biblical warrant for divine timelessness even though it was the standard traditional view. Divine timelessness entails that the past and the future are as real as the present, which opposes presentism (the present actually exists). This view entails if presentism is true, then divine timelessness is false (99).

Against the open theism belief, Peckham affirms that God knows the future decision of human beings, and God's foreknowledge does not affect the libertarian free will of human beings. Knowing that God is eternal does not require to know how God is eternal (129). The same idea applies to divine foreknowledge. Moreover, the writer presents model of God's providence of sovereign love. God's foreknowledge allows him to know the free decision of human beings, including all instances wherein creatures freely will against God's ideal will. God looks into the future and takes into account all the free decisions. He plans his own actions accordingly to bring about the most preferable outcome available, given the decision of human beings—God's remedial will.

In chapter six, Peckham presents what he calls the theodicy of love. He attempts to show that God grants people their free choice because freedom is necessary for love relationship. Allowing people to practice their freedom, will result in willing and choosing what God does not will or what He wants to apply in his creation. Also, the devil and his minions oppose God's moral government and possess some jurisdiction to work within specified limits. These ideas suggest that a cosmic conflict governed by rules of engagement exists. Gods' covenant is ruled by some rules: laws of nature that God ordained as a prerequisite to the maximal flourishing of creatures. Additional rules may be introduced after evil originated, which cannot be contravened without breaking his promises. Peckham suggests a theodicy where that God might seem hidden or not interfering because He may be morally restricted from temporally preventing some specific evils because doing so would violate the rules of engagement in the cosmic conflict.

Peckham dedicates chapter seven to the doctrine of the Trinity. Following the Athanasian Creed, he affirms that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Peckham understands the divine person to be "a subject with self-consciousness, reason, and will" (253), and he advocates for social Trinity.

The writer does not see biblical warrant to believe that the Sonship of Jesus is the evidence of his eternal generation. Likewise, he does not see a biblical warrant for the eternal procession of the Spirit (237). Peckham does not rule out the possibility of the eternity of the Son and the Spirit, but he does not see a biblical warrant for it. Peckham instead prefers to describe the imminent relations between the divine persons as eternal relations of love rather than relations of origin.

## Analysis

Peckham starts his introduction by revealing his intention at the beginning of the book. He aims to provide answers to core questions about the nature and the attributes of God by focusing on key divine attributes and their biblical warrant. He does not provide his own belief away from the Bible. Instead, he is careful to ground his study in biblical revelation. Evangelicals would appreciate his approach, however, some of them might not agree with his conclusions.

Peckham does not treat the topic from a historical theology perspective; however, he does not neglect to mention and quote the early fathers and their positions on several divine attributes. He does a great job showing the historical position and how the current positions differ today. However, he keeps his historical engagement to the minimum and adds references and content footnotes. He engages more with recent quality work by biblical theologians, such as N. T. Wright, Thomas McCall, William Lane Craig, Fred Sanders, and John Walton.

Peckham has done extensive research by including many relevant resources in his study. However, on the topic of open theism, Peckham used Gregory Boyd, *Open-Theism View*, as the main source for the open theism argument. In the footnote, he cites Clark Pinnock, but he does not quote or paraphrase him. His defense would be stronger if he had included other open theists scholars, such as William Hasker.

The Trinity is related to the doctrine of God, but it is not one of God's attributes. However, it seems that Peckham added this chapter in order to link it to the attribute of divine love. After exploring the biblical warrant of the doctrine of the Trinity, the writer moves to answer the question "is the core Trinity doctrine coherent?" Despite the urgency and the importance of this question, this section needed more space and attention. For example, the difference between "the

father (the Son, and the Spirit) is God” in the sense of identity and the Father (the Son, and the Spirit) is God in the sense of predication is not clear.

The book is highly academic in its topics and language. Theologians, seminary students, and pastors would highly enjoy it. Peckham’s dialectical style is concise, direct to the point, and easy to grasp. He did a great job explaining both sides of the argument, answering objections, and formulating his models of the divine attributes. This book makes an excellent contribution to the Christian understanding of the nature of God that Christians believe in, worship, and pray to.

Sherene Khouri, Lynchburg, Liberty University, [cnkoula@liberty.edu](mailto:cnkoula@liberty.edu)