

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

Lesson #1 – Introduction ²³⁰¹

“The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped. - - - Something more than a theoretical knowledge of God is needed by us. God is only truly known in the soul as we yield ourselves to Him, submit to His authority, and regulate all the details of our lives by His holy precepts and commandments. *‘Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord’.* (Hos 6:3) *‘If any man will do the will, he shall know.’* (John 7:17) *‘The people that do know their God shall be strong.’* (Dan 11:32)”
A. W. Pink; from *The Attributes of God*; p. 7

I. Introduction

In this class, we will explore in substantial detail the attributes of God. Most students who have not made a study of this topic will discover a strange array of truths that may initially cause them some consternation. There will be 24 lessons in this class. An Introduction and 23 lessons on the various attributes of God.

Problem Statement: We should understand that there is danger in not knowing who the God of Scripture is. We worship God as we understand Him to be. If we misunderstand who He is as revealed to us by Scripture, we may err in some small but important ways in our worship.

It is possible that without effective Scriptural teaching and/or study that we might err in significant ways and **that our very worship may in fact be a form of idolatry in worshipping another god, one of our own making!**

We will pursue this study and test all claims by the Scriptures. We might be shocked and perplexed, but we will come to know the person and attributes of **a strange and wonderful God who will amaze and astound us!**

To worship a general god without knowledge of which god (which attributes) can be a form of idolatry. We must not be idolaters in our worship of Him! Most Christians know some of God’s attributes because of various teachings, preachings, singing of great hymns, etc. but without a systematic study with serious contemplation of who God is, our knowledge of God can be a weak, confused set of facts that create a weak faith and doubt. There is no more central knowledge essential to a deep faith than knowing the particulars of **who the true God of Scripture is!!**

An example of our weakness in defending our God:

“Atheist Christopher Hitchens argues that it is sick that God condemns people to an eternal hell? How does such a belief square with an all-loving, all-good God? And why would an all-powerful God sit by and allow evil, suffering, and pain to continue? If any father failed to rescue his children from excruciating pain and suffering, we would indict him for cruelty. Yet we give our heavenly father a pass.”
found in **Frank Turek’s**, *Stealing From God*, p. xvii

What is wrong with this argument by Christopher Hitchens??? Has he made some serious errors?

Our goal in this class is to grow in the knowledge of our God. To be sure, it is to know imperfectly and incompletely because we are but creatures living with extreme limitations.

Nevertheless, what God has chosen to reveal to us about Himself is that which we must seek to know about Him.

With this new knowledge of God, we can defend our faith and our God against the ignorant arguments of atheists. They get away with these false arguments because many Christians do not know where the errors are in the atheistic arguments, because they do not know who their own God is.

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

With regard to the Trinity, which we will study later in this series, God is described as “One” in essence and “three” in persons. A dictionary definition of *essence* is “1. The quality or qualities of a thing that give it its identity; the intrinsic or indispensable properties of a thing.” God’s attributes do constitute His *essence*. All three of His persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have exactly the same attributes or essence. They are “One” in their attributes. They are “One” in their essence. They have the same purpose, they have conformity of desire, they work towards the same purpose. They share the same attributes, but they are different persons and have different, but perfectly compatible functions.

Here are some verses pertinent to this goal of knowing God:

Isa 55:6-9 *Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ⁸For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.* NASU*

***NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are quoted from the New American Standard Updated (NASU) version throughout this course.**

Speaking of the mysteries of God’s ways and His knowledge, **Job replies with:**

Job 26:14 *Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him! But his mighty thunder, who can understand?*

Isaiah replies with:

Isa 1:15-18 *“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”*

Why Study the Attributes of God? Three principle reasons. They are:

1. To avoid committing idolatry.
2. To be able to address the really tough questions of life.
3. To have a “certain hope” rather than an idle hope in this life.

We will systematize God’s attributes into 2 different sets of categories that will help us to organize these attributes in our own minds. These sets of categories are:

1st We will organize His attributes into 3 categories. They are:

1. His existential attributes – inherent in His very nature.
2. His relational attributes toward His creations.
3. His relational attributes – how He interacts with humans.

These 2 relational attributes are still about how God relates to external persons and things.

2nd We will see that His attributes can also be organized in 2 other categories. They are:

- His “communicable” attributes – attributes which we are exhorted to adopt as saints. and
- His “incommunicable” attributes – attributes which we are not exhorted to adopt as saints.

Note: The line between these 2 categories are sometimes blurred and difficult to understand. This categorization is an attempt to identify those attributes that belong primarily to God and not to we creatures.

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

II. Difficulties and Strategy: During this course, all questions are able to be asked, but without arrogance, pride, or argument, always with seriousness of purpose, which purpose is to be closer to God by understanding who He is and worshipping Him only.

We will not arrive at concise understandable answers to every question because in the end, God is beyond our experience and beyond our understanding in this life. In the next life we will spend an eternity learning of Him, comprehending His glory, and praising His attributes and works.

You should know that:

1. I won't be able to answer all your questions satisfactorily.
2. We will raise new questions that may trouble you.
3. You will be uncomfortable with some of the discussion of who the God of Scripture is.
4. We will always strive to rely on the Scriptures for our answers and rest on God's self-revelation.
5. You will be enriched in your understanding of the nature of the One True God of Scripture.

III. Our Plan of Study:

We will study one or two attributes of God each week. The two attributes discussed in a given week are often closely related to each other or may seem to conflict.

I. We will define each attribute.

II. We will discuss the logic and importance of that attribute.

III. We will discuss the Scriptural basis of that attribute.

IV. We will discuss such things as:

- 1st - How that attribute relates to other attributes.
- 2nd - Why that attribute is important to our faith.
- 3rd - Confessions or Creeds that address that attribute.
- 4th - Heresies that deny that attribute.

We will also present "Some Important Quotes" about that attribute.

Some Important Quotes

As the difference is indeed great between the knowledge of God which His saints have in this life and that which they shall have in heaven, yet, as the former should not be undervalued because it is imperfect, so the latter is not to be magnified above its reality. True, the Scripture declares that we shall see "face to face" and "know" even as we are known (1 Cor 13:12). But to infer from this that we shall then know God as fully as He knows us is to be misled by the mere sound of words, and to disregard the restriction of that knowledge that our finiteness necessarily requires. There is a vast difference between the saints being glorified and their being made Divine. In their glorified state, Christians will still be finite creatures, and therefore, never able to fully comprehend the infinite God.

Arthur W. Pink; from *The Attributes of God*; p. 114

But the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful strivings to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His Word. Because we are unable to acquire perfect knowledge, it would be folly to say we will therefore make no efforts to attain to any degree of it. It has been well said that, "nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity" (C. H. Spurgeon).

Let us quote a Little further from this prince of preachers: "The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-contentment, and go on our way with the thought, 'Behold I am wise.' But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, 'I am but of yesterday and know nothing.'"

Arthur W. Pink; from *The Attributes of God*; p. 112

Yet the kind of community small groups create is quite different from the communities in which people lived in the past. These communities are more fluid and more concerned with the emotional states of the individual. Some small groups merely provide occasions for individuals to focus on themselves in the presence of others. What's more, the social contract binding members together asserts only the weakest obligations. Come if you have time. Talk if you feel like it. Respect everyone's opinion. Never criticize. Leave quietly if you become dissatisfied. Families would never survive by following these operating norms. Close-knit communities in the past did not, either...

A majority of small-group members say they joined because they wanted to deepen their faith and that their sense of the sacred has been profoundly influenced by their participation. But small groups are not simply drawing people back to the God of their fathers and mothers. They are dramatically changing the way God is understood. God is now less of an external authority and more of an internal presence. The sacred becomes more personal, but, in the process, also becomes more manageable, more serviceable in meeting individual needs, and more a feature of the group process itself... The deity of small groups is a God of love, comfort, order and security. Gone is the God of judgment, wrath, justice, mystery and punishment. Gone are concerns about the forces of evil. Missing from most groups, even, is a distinct interest in heaven and hell, except for the small heavens and hells that people experience in their everyday lives.

. **Robert Wuthnow**; *How Small Groups Are Transforming Our Lives*; Christianity Today; 2/7/94

I really believed I had God all figured out, so I was content to cruise through my spiritual life, taking the path of least resistance, even as I prepared for the ministry. Everything in my life seemed predictable and routine. Although I was gaining much head knowledge about God, I pursued Him only halfheartedly and allowed myself to be beguiled by a world I had once forsaken. Using various worldly endeavors to put myself through seminary enticed me to dabble with the world once more.

Then, unexpectedly, I ventured upon a subject in God's Word that confronted me, convicted me, and challenged me like no other truth I had ever encountered. It was a topic so vast, so towering, and so dominant that it overshadowed everything in my life. My heart was gripped as it had never been before. My soul was stunned as I studied it intensely for the very first time. The subject? God.

Steven J. Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, p. 22