

“Unless God reveals Himself, men do not know who He is...”

Introduction: The Attributes of God

This study is designed to develop a deeper sense of awe and wonder in our worship of God. It is in this arena of the attributes of God that we can have a foundation, a framework, that has been engineered by God Himself, to worship Him and express our love to Him.

The Revelation of God's Character to Man

We need to know how God has revealed Himself to us, because we need to know the true God... not a man made image of him, or even an image in our own imaginations. Our God is the one TRUE God, and we can trust his revelation of Himself to us to be truthful. This is how we begin to worship in spirit and in TRUTH. What are the ways in which God has chosen to reveal, disclose, and basically let men behold who he is and what he is like??

1. The Bible (the written Word of God)

2 Pet 1:19-20 “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

1 Thess 2:13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

Rom 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

John 10:35 “If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;”

1 Peter 1:23 “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

2. Jesus Christ (the Word of God incarnate)

Rev 19:13 “And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.”

Heb 1:1-3 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”

John 1:1-2 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.”

1 John 1:1-2 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us”

3. The Revelation of the Holy Spirit

1 Cor 2:9-10 “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Eph 3:5 “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”

Luke 10:21 “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

4. Creation

Rom 1:19-21 “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto hem. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

5. Visions, dreams, miracles

Num 12:6 “And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.”

Dan 5:12 “Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.”

Dan 5:5 “In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.”

Dan 2:47 “The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.”

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Num 22:28 “And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?”

6. Man’s Conscience

Rom 2:14-16 “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another, In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”

We begin to worship God in truth when we begin to announce, declare, and live out in our lives His character and His attributes and His nature. You cannot enter into intimate worship of God until you realize WHO He is. The only way we can know who is our God and what He is like is by what he has revealed about Himself.....and we can be assured that He is not a God who would lie to us about who He is.

John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Rom 3:4 “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”

2 Cor 1:18 “But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.”

1 Thess 1:9 “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”

1 John 5:20 “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

Thinking Rightly About God

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Our idea of God defines who we are, not only individually, but as a nation, as a culture, and as mankind. Why is it crucial for us to think rightly about God??

1. Our worship of God is only as deep as our thoughts of God:

Worship is pure or base depending on the worshipper’s attitude about God-- high thoughts of God will produce worship that is deep and rich while low thoughts of God will produce shallow worship that is not even worthy of the God it is ascribed to. It is safe to say that we are a REFLECTION of what we believe to be true about God. If our conception of God is low, then our spiritual life and our spiritual act of worship will never rise above that. In fact, our true conception of God is most of the time hidden behind creedal statements of faith and doctrinal positions, but it is in our heart of hearts where communion with God takes place that the place of decision takes place. We will never grow and be conformed to the image of God as long as our image of God is substandard. It is painful thing to ask sometimes and get to the root of the matter to discover what we actually believe about God.

2. Our thoughts of God keep the building of the Church upright:

A right conception of God is to worship as the foundation is to the temple. When it is inadequate or off center, the whole structure has the danger of collapse sooner or later. Almost every error of doctrine, every aberrant teaching, and every failure to apply Christian ethics properly can probably be traced to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.

Psalms 11:3 “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

3. The Gospel loses its power without a right concept of God:

All the problems of our modern day world, if they were to confront us together at one time, are not even comparable to the problem of God that overwhelms man: that God *is*, what God *is like*, and what we as His creations must *do* about Him. The man who comes to right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand worldly problems, because he immediately sees that those things cannot concern him for very long. Even if we are relieved of the burden of our modern day-to-day problems, the one mighty single burden of eternity will always press down upon us to the point of crushing us more so than all the problems of the world combined. That mighty burden that falls upon man is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably. When a man’s conscience tells him that he has done none these things, but has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in heaven, the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear. Enter the light of the gospel-- it can break the yoke of bondage, set prisoners free, and open the eyes of the blind. But unless the weight of the burden is felt, then the Gospel can have no meaning to a man. Until a man sees a vision of God high and lifted up, there will be no woe and no burden. Low views of God destroy the gospel.

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4. **Idolatry has its roots in a wrong conception of God:**

One of the most hated things of God to which the human heart is prone is the act of idolatry. Idolatry is libel on God’s character. An idolatrous heart assumes God is other than who He is. It substitutes for the true God another God that is mad after its own human likeness. This “god” will always conform to the image of the one who created it and will be kind or cruel, generous or mean, base or pure according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges. A god that is birthed in a sinful heart that is fallen will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God.

Psalms 50:21 “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou **thoughtest** that I was altogether such an **one as thyself**: **but I will reprove thee**, and set them in order before thine eyes.”

We must be careful that in our pride we accept the idea that idolatry means bowing before a physical idol that is carved out of wood or stone. Kneeling before a visible object to worship is idolatrous just as much as a wrong concept or notion of God is idolatrous. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It beings in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.

Romans 1:21 “Because that, when they **knew** God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became **vain in their imaginations**, and their foolish **heart** was darkened.”

It was in the heart and the mind where idolatry took place-- before they actually made the images that looked like men and birds and animals. We must come to realize that wrong thoughts of God ARE idolatrous, as much as bowing down to an actual idol. If you imagine something falsely about God and act as if it were true, then you have committed idolatry....

The Incomprehensibility of God

Just as it is crucial in the understanding of a triune God to first establish the fact the God is one, so to it is crucial that at the outset of a study of His attributes that we establish the *incomprehensible* nature of God. The problem in describing God is that the question of “What is God like” cannot be answered except to say that God is not like anything--- that is, He is not *exactly* like anything or anybody. It is in the effort of inspired men to express the inexpressable-- a description of the God of heaven-- that a great strain is placed on the language of Scripture. The language that describes a world above nature written by minds that are a part of nature caused the writers of the Bible to us many “like” words to make themselves understood.

Isa 6:1-5 “In the year that king Uzziah died **I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple**. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. **And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke**. Then said I, **Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**”

Rev 1:12-19 “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks **one like unto the Son of man**, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white **like wool**, as white as snow; and his eyes **were as a flame of fire**; And his feet **like unto fine brass**, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice **as the sound** of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance **was as the sun shineth in his strength**. **And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.**”

Rev 4:2-11 “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And **he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald**. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast **was like** a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O

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Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Just as Jesus used parables to relate spiritual lessons by using things that were of the natural world, so also the Spirit acquaints us with things that lie beyond our field and view of understanding by saying that *this* thing is *like* something we already know about. In passages where men of the Bible are faced with the presence of the God of the Bible, these men struggle to explain and describe what they have seen....Isaiah said that he was “undone” in the presence of the Lord: in other words, he was coming apart at the seams, he was experiencing personal dis-integration. In God’s presence our reality, our integrity, our everything becomes shattered. Take Ezekiel’s vision of God as well: the closer he approaches God, the less sure are his words. His description of God is the **appearance** of the **likeness** of the **glory**....Ezekiel could not even describe the Lord himself, just His glory. We dare not believe that when God says he created man in his own image the we start to thing “in the *exact* image”. We cannot make man a replica of God without losing the absolute uniqueness of God. Ezekiel said the throne was “the *appearance* of a throne”, and He that sat upon it, though like a man, was so unlike one that He could only be described only as “the *likeness* of the *appearance* of a man.”

Ezekiel 1:5-28

“Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces; and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake .”

In the understanding of the attributes of God, it is critical that we do not think of creature and Creator as alike in essential being-- that would rob God of most of His attributes and reduce Him to the status of a creature. It is to rob Him of His infinitude: there cannot be two unlimited substances in the universe. It is to take away His sovereignty: there cannot be two absolutely free beings in the universe, for sooner or later two completely free wills must collide. His attributes required that there be but One to whom they belong. There is always an infinitely high wall that separates that-which-is-God from that-which-is-not-God. When we try to imagine what God is like we must of necessity use that-which-is-not-God as the raw materials for our minds to work on. What we visualize God to be, He is not, for what we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God.

Job 11:7-8

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?”

Matt 11:27

“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

Luke 10:22

“All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.”

John 7:27

“Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.”

Job 5:8

“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number:”

Psalms 145:3

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.”

Rom 11:33

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

Eph 3:8

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;”

Something True of God...

“Unless God reveals Himself, men do not know who He is...”

If what we conceive God to be He is not, how then can we think of Him? If He is indeed incomprehensible, then how can we acquaint ourselves with Him?? Zophar the Naamathite asked if he could find out about God by searching....our Lord said that no man knoweth the Father but Him, and to WHOEVER the Son will reveal Him. Paul even says in 1 Corinthinas that God can be known only as the Holy Spirit performs in the seeking heart an act of self-disclosure.

Matt 11:27 “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

1 Cor 2:10-12 “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; **that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.**”

How can we acquaint ourselves with One who eludes all the straining efforts of mind and heart? We must understand that understanding God was never based on the intellect of man, or the desire of man, or the will of ourselves to reach God. It was, is, and always will be the effort of God to reveal Himself to man that allows us to get a glimpse- imperfect that glimpse may be-- of who God is and what God is like. What is God like? If by that question we mean “What is God like in Himself?”, then there is NO ANSWER. If we mean “What has God revealed about Himself that the reverent reason can comprehend?”, then there is an answer both full and satisfying. For while the name of God is secret and His essential nature incomprehensible, He in condescending love has by revelation declared certain things to be true of Himself. These we call His attributes....

Sovereign Father, heavenly King,
Thee we now presume to sing;
Glad thine attributes confess,
Glorious all, and numberless.
Charles Wesley

God’s attributes can be are far from a dull study of theological knowledge. They hold powerful truths that can open up a freshness in our relationship with God. We need to be reminded as the Peter wrote...

2 Peter 1:12 “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you **always in remembrance of these things**, though ye know them, and be **established** in the present truth.”

James 1:6 “But let him ask in faith, nothing **wavering**. For **he that wavereth** is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”³⁴

Eph 4:14 “That we henceforth be no more children, **tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”

We dare not waver in what we believe about God. Therefore, we will use the word attribute to simply mean whatever may be correctly ascribed to God.

An attribute of God is simply whatever God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself.

How many does God have?? Who knows and who cares.... the important part is that we can behold some of them as He has seen fit to reveal them to man. If an attribute is something true of God, it is also something that we can conceive as being true of Him. God, being infinite, must possess attributes about which we can know nothing. An attribute, therefore, is a mental concept that is an intellectual response to God’s self-revelation... it is an answer to a question, the reply God makes to our interrogation concerning Himself: What is God like?? What kind of God is He? How can we expect Him to act toward us?? We have seen already HOW God has answered our questions through revelation.