

The Attributes of God

By

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A kindergarten teacher told her student to draw a picture of something that was important to them. One little boy named Johnny began to work hard at his drawing. When the other students had finished and turned in their pictures, Johnny was still hard at work. So the teacher walked over to the boy, put her hand on his shoulder and asked, "Johnny, what are you drawing?" The young artist didn't look up, he just kept working with great determination and said, "God." "But Johnny," said the teacher, "no one knows what God looks like." Johnny answered, "They will when I finish this picture!"

This cute story brings up a good question. What is God really like? Agnostics and skeptics tell us that we cannot know if God exists, let alone what He is like. According to them if God exists He has hidden Himself from our sight and therefore we must remain in the dark about who He is and what He is like. The Bible on the other hand boldly states that God is—He exists. And we can know a great deal about Him.

In the gospel of Mark, chapter 12, Jesus Christ is asked a question about the first and greatest commandment. Let's listen in.

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together...asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is; "Here, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:28-30 NKJV)

This command is a life consuming command! We are to love God totally, completely, with all that we are. But how can you truly love God like this unless you know who He is and what He does. Thankfully we are not left in the dark about God.

The light of Scripture tells us that God has revealed Himself to us in three ways:

1. God has made Himself known in a general way through creation.
2. He has revealed His nature and character to us in the Bible.
3. God has given us a special revelation of Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

Creation Makes Known God

We will begin to examine the fact that creation makes known the existence of God by looking at Psalm 19.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Psalm 19:1-4)

The witness of the universe shows forth clearly and consistently, there is a Creator, there is a God. When you look up into the starry night sky or when you look at a sunrise on the ocean or the beauty of a forest a question comes to mind, "Where did all of this come from?" Psalm 19 tells us that every day and every night all over the world creation proclaims the glory of God its Creator. One of the great early scientists, Sir Isaac Newton, had this to say about creation,

"The most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and domain of an intelligent and powerful being."¹

Newton was correct! In fact modern science began as a result of seeing order in creation and realizing that this complex order could not happen by chance. There had to be a Creator. And since

¹ This quotation and the following two are from a book titled, The Creation Hypothesis, (Intervarsity Press. Pp. 270-293).

there was a divine design and order to creation it could be studied and understood. The New Testament reveals the same truth as Psalm 19, creation makes known a Creator.

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. **For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being seen by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, And their foolish hearts were darkened”.** (Romans 1:18-21) [my emphasis]*

Verse 20, tells us that creation makes known two invisible attributes of God, His eternal power and His Godhead. To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, and a humble heart creation proclaims there is a Creator and He is awesome in intelligence and power. But these verses from Romans also tell us that there are people who just cannot see this or who refuse to see it. They suppress the truth. They are fools who say in their hearts that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). And they teach that all of creation, even human life, came into existence by mere chance and progressed through the process of evolution.

And yet when push comes to shove many scientists who want to deny the existence of God readily admit the absurdity of their position. In fact two famous scientists of recent years, Francis Crick, who discovered DNA and Carl Sagan the famous cosmologist, have estimated that the difficulty of humans evolving by chance alone is 1 in 10 to the negative 2 billionth. Now I can't wrap my mind around that statement but I get the next one easily. Sir Fred Hoyle, the founder of the Cambridge Institute for Theoretical Astronomy, said,

“The chance that higher life might have emerged [though evolution] is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping

through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the material therein.”

Therefore, in reality, it takes a bigger leap of blind faith to believe that creation began by chance than it does to believe in the Creator! Every day the wonder and beauty of creation declares that there is a God and that He is powerful and glorious.

The Bible Reveals God's Nature and Character

Besides nature the Bible reveals God to us, specifically His nature and character. The Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah proclaims something wonderful about God to us.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.”(Isaiah 40:28)

The first thing that we learn about God from this verse is that He is everlasting. He is eternal. He has existed before all time and He will exist forever. When life is shaky, when changes in life come like a whirlwind, our all powerful, all knowing God is the same. He never loses heart. He never wearies. His understanding is infinite and unsearchable. But He does not stay above the fray of life. He is involved and strengthens His people.

He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:29-31)

What a glorious truth we learn here about God. The everlasting God, the Creator, the Almighty gives His people power and strength. Those who wait¹ on the

¹ The Hebrew word for “wait” literally means to twist or to intertwine. Just as single strands of rope braided together become stronger when united so the believer is

Lord find their lives renewed and borne up like on eagle's wings! God also has a perfect knowledge of us.

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell,¹ behold, 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, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light upon me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. (Psalm 139:1-12)

God knows our every thought. He understands the deep motives, fears, concerns and hurts of our hearts. There also is no place where God is not. If I fear that I am left all alone I am not for God is with me. If I am surrounded by people God is still there by my side. If I am in outer space or in the depth of the earth the Almighty is near. There is never, ever a time when God cannot hold me and lead me. What a comforting truth to hold in our hearts.

I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name

made stronger as he wrap his faith around the all powerful God.

¹The Hebrew word for "hell" is *sheol* and means the grave.

forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another,

And shall declare Your mighty acts. I will mediate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, And Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The LORD upholds all who fall, And raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked he will destroy. (Psalm 145:1-20)

This Psalm is a song praising God's great majesty and love. Here we learn that God is not just good but full of goodness. His blessings to His people are never given with a restrained hand. God is righteous always doing the right thing at the right time. His generosity towards us is never skimpy, it is super sized. The Lord is full of compassion. He understands our frailties and our needs. God is slow

to anger leaving us room to repent. The Lord God is good to all and His tender mercy, His loving kindness, is over all His works. Our God is a great King and His dominion endures throughout every generation. He cares enough to uphold and lift up all who fall. He is near to all who call upon Him in truth. And He will utterly destroy all the wicked.

This knowledge of God's awesome majesty and goodness is lacking in many people who call themselves Christians. This is one reason why our faith is often so feeble, Our worship weak and our impact on the world so diminished. Our knowledge of what God is like is too small, too limited. But believers in a big, gracious, righteous and loving God live big, love big, they serve without reserve, they give generously, and they are bold in their witness for Christ. The prophet Daniel said, "the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out *great exploits* (Daniel 11:32)." We also learn from the Bible that God is holy.

Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?

Who is like You, glorious in holiness,

Fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

In this song of Moses' we learn that God is glorious in holiness. Did you know that God is called holy more often than He is referred to as good, powerful, loving or anything else? God's holiness refers to His moral perfection. He is the sum total of all that is morally good and pure and beautiful. The core of His character is spotless and flawless. There is no microscopic trace of evil in Him at all. Here is how the apostle John portrays God's holiness.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)

There is no error or falsehood in God. His agenda is not hidden. His promise of salvation is not deceptive. His love is not hypocritical. And His judgments on the wicked will be absolute and full of justice. The apostle James wrote,

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:16, 17)

God is holy and pure and this never changes. He is never fickle or unsure. He never says one thing but means another. His blessings are always good and perfect and given at the right time. And because God is holy, full of light and unchanging, His moral laws are pure and righteous and in force yesterday, today and tomorrow. The Bible also informs us that *God is sovereign*.

Remember the former things of old, for I am God

and there is no other; I am God, and there is none

like Me, declaring the end from the beginning,

and from ancient times things that are not yet done,

saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all

My pleasure.' (Isaiah 46:9, 10)

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever. For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from

generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:34, 35)

God's sovereignty can be defined as the free exercise of His will. God is supreme over all and is Lord Almighty in fact as well as in name. When God declares His purposes and His plans He carries them out. When He makes a promise He fulfills it.

In the gospel of John we have a promise made by Christ concerning the believer being secure in the hand of God.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they

follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall

never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of

My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me,

is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them

out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.

(John 10:27-30)

Here is a comforting promise that all who believe in Christ for salvation are secure in that salvation, safe in the Father's hand. But how do we know that this promise is true? What gives us the assurance that no one will be able to snatch us out of God's hand? The answer is our solid knowledge of the power and sovereignty of God!

Some people think that our world is like a great stage play produced by God. As the curtain goes up all is lovely to behold. The characters are wonderful and beautiful. The set design is fantastic. And all goes well until the leading man steps on the leading lady's dress. She then trips over a chair and knocks over a lamp. He falls into a table which crashes into the stage set which brings the whole thing crashing down. And all the while God is running around back stage frantically trying to get

the show back on track. But nothing is further from the truth. God has not lost control. And there should be no truth more encouraging and comforting to us than the fact of God's sovereignty. It means that God rules and overrules in the affairs of our world. He is Master over creation. His plan of salvation will be fulfilled. He will make good on His Word!

We Have a Special Revelation of God in Jesus Christ

Finally, besides creation and the Scriptures, we have a special revelation of God given to us in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18)

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"

The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My

own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does

the works. (John 14:8-10)

All that Jesus said and all that he did unveiled to us the heart of God. In his sinless life Jesus portrayed God's holiness. In his teachings and his miracles Christ displayed the wisdom and power of God. And in his sacrificial death on the cross the Lord proved that God loves us individually, passionately and infinitely. When we see Jesus Christ we see into the heart of God. The one and only true God. God is someone that you can know. And in knowing Him we find life, everlasting life.

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