

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Knowability of God

Lesson #1

Out of all the subjects you can study in the world, there is no greater subject than God. The formal term for studying God is “Theology Proper.” The word “theology” comes from two words, “*theos*” meaning God, and “*ology*” to study. This is the first lesson in a series called “The Attributes of God.” In this series we will look at various characteristics of the one true God as taught in the Bible, seek to understand those characteristics, and how they apply to the lives of Christians.

In this lesson we will focus on what might be called “The Knowability” of God. It is actually not an attribute of God, but is a good starting point. Some have said that God cannot be known. This first lesson combats that error and shows that while God can’t be known perfectly, He has made himself know both in creation, Jesus Christ, and the Word of God. Before we look at the “Knowability” of God, we will first ask, and seek to answer the question, “Why study the attributes of God?”

I. GOD WANTS US TO KNOW HIM BECAUSE

- A. Gives God glory
- B. Gives us perspective on life
- C. Gives us meaning in life
- D. Gives us direction in life
- E. Gives us purpose in life
- F. Gives us answers to life
- G. Gives us eternal life

II. SOME OF THE SCRIPTURAL REASONS FOR STUDYING GOD

- A. I Chron. 28:9 -- “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.
- B. Jer. 9:23-24 -- Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth;

for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.

- C. Hos. 4:1, 6 -- Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land.6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.
- D. Hos. 6:3-6 -- “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; And He will come to us like the rain, Like the spring rain watering the earth.” 4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud And like the dew which goes away early. 5 Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. 6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
- E. John 17:3 -- “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
- F. Eph. 5:1 -- Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
- G. II Thess. 1:6-9 -- For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, . . .
- H. I John 5:20 -- And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

III. **APPLICATION FOR REASONS FOR STUDYING THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

- A. The most obvious application is that we were created to know and glorify God. We cannot glorify God unless we first come to know Him and believed that He exists (Heb. 11:6).
- B. The second most important point of application for studying the attributes of God, relates to the first. As we learned from **Jn. 17:3** above, eternal life is not merely living forever in heaven with Jesus Christ, the saints of all the ages, and holy angels. Yes, that is part of it, but eternal life is knowing God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We come to know Jesus Christ when we realize we are sinners before an infinitely holy God, that God being just must punish ever sin, but that out of love for mankind God sent His son to die on the cross, bearing

our sin, so we through faith in Him could receive the free gift of eternal life.

I. DEFINITION OF KNOWABILITY

The Knowability of God is God's revelation of himself to man. The Knowability of God is often not considered an attribute of God but one of the works of God. God, in eternity past because He is self-existent, was known only by himself. Apart from His self-knowledge, God can only be known when He creates other beings and grants them knowledge of himself. When He does this, He then is to some degree, "knowable." Knowability is usually considered under the topic of revelation, but because of its importance to the attributes of God we are considering it here.

II. THE PARADOX OF GOD'S KNOWABILITY

God Cannot be Fully Known	God Can be Partially Known
Job 11:7-8 "Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? 8 "They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?"	I Jn. 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.
Psa. 145:3 Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.	Jn. 17:3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

III. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

A. Types of Knowledge

1. Innate Knowledge

a. Rom. 1:19 -- because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

b. Rom. 2:14-16 -- For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

"It is important to note that theologians divide the knowledge of God into two categories. The first category is "innate" knowledge or the knowledge of God we have within ourselves. The second category is "acquired" knowledge or the knowledge of God we gain from outside ourselves." Louis Berkhof *Systematic Theology* pg. 35

2. *Acquired Knowledge*

- a. I Chron. 28:9 -- “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.
- b. Hos. 6:3 -- “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; And He will come to us like the rain, Like the spring rain watering the earth.”

B. Types of Revelation

1. *General Revelation*

- a. Psa. 19:1-2 -- The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.
- b. Rom. 1:20 -- For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

2. *Special Revelation*

a. Theophanies

- (1) Gen. 18:1-2 -- Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth. (see vss. 13, 17, 20, 26)
- (2) Exod. 3:2 -- 2 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

b. Direct revelation

- (1) Josh. 20:1 -- Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying . . .
- (2) Acts 8:26 -- But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)

c. Christ

- (1) John 1:18 -- No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.
- (2) Heb. 1:1-2 -- God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

d. Scripture

- (1) Psa. 119:160 --The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.
- (2) John 17:17 -- “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

C. What Believers and Unbelievers Can Know About God

1. Unbelievers

- a. Matt. 7:21-23 -- “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’
- b. Rom. 1:21 -- For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- c. I Cor. 2:14 -- But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

“Knowledge of such a Being [God] cannot be gained by study alone. It comes by a wisdom the natural man knows nothing of, neither can know, because it is spiritually discerned. To know God is at once the easiest and the most difficult thing in the world. It is easy because the knowledge of the holy God is a free gift to men who are open to receive it. But this knowledge is difficult because there are conditions to be met and the obstinate nature of fallen man does not take kindly to them.” A.W Tozer *The Knowledge of the Holy* pg. 115

2. Believers

- a. Matt. 11:25-26 -- At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.
- b. Matt. 13:11 -- Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.
- c. Acts 16:14 -- A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

IV. ERRORS CONCERNING THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

- A. Error -- We can't know God at all because God is infinite and we are finite, He is Spirit, and we are physical.
- B. Error -- We can fully know God through the scriptures.
- C. Error -- We can come to know God unto salvation by looking at nature.
- D. Error -- We can come to know God unto salvation through our rational thought processes.
- E. Error -- We can come to know God unto salvation by looking at evidence like science, history, or creation.

V. APPLICATION OF THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

- A. How does what we have learned in this study apply to evangelism?
 - 1. The methods we use for evangelism.
 - 2. When people reject the gospel.
 - 3. When people accept the gospel.
 - 4. When people don't understand the gospel.
- B. How does knowing God relate to pleasing God?
- C. How does knowing God relate to obeying God?
- D. How does knowing God relate to worshiping God?