

God: What Is He Like? Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1352

INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of Knowing God

A helpful book on the nature of God is The Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961). In it Tozer said, "The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like" (p. 9). What mankind needs most is a proper understanding of God.

B. The Importance of Making God Known

Consequently, the most important message the church can give is the truth about God.

1. To those who deny the knowledge of God

Some people do not believe in God, and they are considered philosophical atheists. There are others who believe in Him but don't act like they do. They are in a sense practical atheists. They need to know that they can know God personally.

2. To those who distort the knowledge of God

Many people, including some Christians, have misconceptions about God. That's a serious matter because believing the wrong thing about God is essentially idolatry. The common understanding of idolatry is of bowing down to a small figure or worshiping in some ornate pagan temple. But idolatry is much broader: it is thinking anything about God that isn't true.

In its fullest sense idolatry is the creation of a god. But in a secondary sense it is the transformation of God into something that He isn't. In Psalm 50:21 God says, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such and one as thyself." Man has made God in his own likeness. So the essence of idolatry is entertaining thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.

REVIEW

I. GOD: IS HE?

II. GOD: WHO IS HE?

III. GOD: WHAT IS HE LIKE?

The only way we can know what God is like is to discover what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible. The revelation of God's nature falls into different categories of attributes, which are definitions of His character.

Attempting to Comprehend the Incomprehensible God is incomprehensible. He is infinite--there is no end to Him. So we start with the question, What is God like? not What is God? We couldn't begin to know exactly what God is. But we can find out what He is like because of what He has revealed to us and what we've observed.

However we're to beware of the danger of judging God by human standards. For example, when God's love doesn't behave like human love, we could conclude that He isn't loving. But that's making human love the absolute standard and making God's love measure up to that.

To define God in ways we can understand, we often have to state what He is not. For example, when we say that God is holy, we mean He has no sin. We have to see Him that way because we can't conceive of absolute holiness, whereas we're all too familiar with sin. We can't begin to understand the limitless nature of God without knowing that He doesn't have any limits.

God is infinite, and as such He probably has an infinite number of attributes. We will concentrate our study on just a few of them.

A. God Is Unchanging (Immutable)

LESSON

B. God Is Everywhere (Omnipresent)

God is infinite. There is no end to Him. His being fills up endless infinity. In Jeremiah 23:24 God says, "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" In 1 Kings 8:27 Solomon says, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!" God is before all things and after all things; within all things and without all things. He has no limits. Just as His wisdom and knowledge are unsearchable (Rom. 11:33), so is His presence.

1. Attempts to confine God

Throughout history people have tried to confine God.

a

) To the Temple in Jerusalem

Although Solomon correctly said that God could not dwell in the Temple--let alone heaven and earth--many of the people believed He dwelt in the actual structure. However, the Temple was simply the seat of His majesty on earth--the symbol of His presence, not the sole location of it.

b

) To the mountains

The Syrians worshiped the god of the valleys and assumed the God of Israel was the god of the mountains (1 Kings 20:23). They supposed Israel confined their religious activities to the mountains so they might be nearer to their God. Clearly mountains such as Mount Sinai, Mount Gerizim, and Jerusalem, which is situated on a plateau, played an important role in the worship of Israel. The prophets went up into the mountains to pray, as did Jesus. So a simple conclusion is that Israel worshiped only the God of the mountains.

c) To the heavens

Many professing Christians see God as confined to heaven. They imagine Him sitting on a brilliant throne way off in a celestial palace, but don't see him anywhere else.

2. Answers to major objections

a

) Wouldn't the sin in the world defile an omnipresent God?

Some argue that if God is everywhere, He must be impure because He would be defiled by the impure things that touch Him. Without a doubt God is in all places and in everything. As a holy God He enters the hearts of sinners to inspect and convict them of sin. He also is in hell to execute judgment, for Matthew 10:28 says He "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

But while God's essence is everywhere, He never mingles with any impurity. He is like the sun's rays. A sunbeam may fall on a manure pile in a field, but the manure pile can't defile the sunbeam. In the same sense nothing can defile God--He is unmixed with anything. Jesus came into the world and lived among sinners. Yet the apostle John said of Him: "In him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). He was among sinful men and women yet totally undefiled by them.

b) Doesn't the Bible say God is near to some and far from others?

Isaiah 55:6 exhorts people to call on the Lord "while he is near." Elsewhere the Old Testament says that Israel's rebellion caused God to be far from them (Prov. 15:29; Isa. 29:13). How can God be both near and far from people when He is everywhere all the time?

(1) His relational presence

It is important that we see the distinction between God's essence and His relation to people. He is everywhere in His essence, but only in certain places relationally. Specifically, He dwells in the

hearts of the godly. When we become Christians, Christ took up residence in us. He fills us with His fullness (Eph. 3:19). Likewise the Spirit fills us with His fullness (Eph. 5:18). Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in you [is your] hope of glory." But before He ever indwelt us relationally, His essence convicted us of sin and saved us.

Genesis 11:5 says, "The Lord came down [from heaven] to see the city and the tower." That doesn't mean that God left one place and came to another, but from the perspective of the people, God gave the city His immediate attention.

(2) His symbolic presence

The Old Testament tells us that God dwelt between the wings of the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant in either the Tabernacle or the Temple. Those were locations where God symbolically established the throne of His majesty. Today the throne of God is represented by the church, which is made up of believers. In the millennial kingdom the presence of God will be represented by Christ ruling on the throne of David in Jerusalem. In heaven He will be represented by the throne in Revelation 4-5. The symbol of God's presence is never the prison of His essence.

3. Applications for all people

a

) Believers

As Christians, how do we benefit from knowing that God is always present in our lives both essentially and relationally?

(1) Comfort

It's comforting to know that God is always present. No matter what trial you may have to endure, He is there. There are times when He doesn't seem to be near, but realize He's no further away than He's ever been. God's promise to you is, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). We know He means that because as we've learned, He can't lie.

Philippians 4:5-6 says, "The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing." I believe that is not referring to Christ's second coming, but to His present comforting ministry to us. He is present all the time.

A Christian can't ever be separated from God (Rom. 8:35-39). No one can be separated from the presence of God, and a believer can't be separated from a relationship with God. Enoch is an example of that unbroken fellowship. He walked with God on earth and one day God took him up to heaven (Gen. 5:24).

(2) Support

When God called Moses to proclaim His message and lead Israel out of bondage, Moses protested because of his lack of speaking abilities (Ex. 4:10). But God said, "I will be with thy mouth" (v. 12). That's a practical aspect of God's presence. He is present in support of our service.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:19-20). He is always there to support us in service to Him.

People often doubt they have the power to witness for Christ. Instead they want the pastor to do their witnessing for them. But the people have the same resource as the pastor. The power of God is present for all His people.

(3) A shield against temptation

Whenever Satan wants to tempt a Christian, he has to clear it with God (Job. 1:6-12; Luke 22:31). First Corinthians 10:13 says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make the way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Nothing will ever come a believer's way without his having the God-given strength to resist. Each believer is at a different level of maturity, and different temptations will have different results. What might cause one person to crumble you may be able to handle. But God meets every individual at his level to defend and strengthen him against temptations.

(4) A motivation to holiness

(a) Preventing impurity

To know God is always present makes us realize that everything we do, we do in His presence. When we sin, whether a sin of thought, word, or action, it is done in the presence of God. For the most part, people prefer to sin when someone isn't watching. We may not be so careful around our family or friends because they're already aware of our problems. But outside of them we become quickly embarrassed when caught. But realize this: whenever you sin it's as if you ascended to the throne room of God, walked up to the foot of His throne, and sinned right there. Whatever you do, you do in the presence of God. That's a sobering thought!

(b) Promoting integrity

i) David

David said of God, "Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Ps. 139:3). That kept him pure. When you are tempted to sin, remember that God is with you.

ii) Job

Job said, "Doth not he see my ways?" (Job. 31:4). That was the basis of Job's integrity.

Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him." In everything you do, realize He is there. That one fact alone will help you direct your paths.

Living the Christian life is simply living in the light of God's presence.

b) Unbelievers

(1) Psalm 21:8--"Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies." An evil man has no hiding place from God.

(2) Amos 9:2-4--"Though they dig into sheol, there shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out from there; and though they be hidden from my sight in the bottom of the sea, there will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them; and though they go into captivity before their enemies, there will I command the sword, and it shall slay them; and I will set mine eyes

upon them for evil, and not for good."

(3) Obadiah 4--"Though thou exalt thyself like the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, from there will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." The ungodly must realize that no matter how they try to run from God or avoid thinking about Him, they cannot escape His attention.

(4) Job 34:21-22--"[God's] eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

(5) Proverbs 15:11--"Sheol and destruction are before the Lord; how much more, then, the hearts of the children of men!" The thief steals because he thinks no one sees. The adulterer commits adultery because he thinks no one sees. The liar lies because he thinks he won't be caught. But God knows. Just because He is invisible doesn't mean He isn't present.

(6) Hebrews 4:13--"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

(7) Isaiah 65:12--God said, "Ye ... did evil before mine eyes."

(8) Proverbs 15:3--"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

C. God Is All Powerful (Omnipotent)

1. The extent of God's power

a

) God can do anything

There is nothing God can't do. There are no bounds to His energy. Job said, "If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong" (Job 9:19). One Hebrew name for God is El Shaddai (El refers to God; Shaddai means "almighty"). The psalmist said, "Power belongeth unto the Lord" (Ps. 62:11). And Revelation 19:6 says, "Halleluia! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

b

) God can do anything effortlessly

God can do one thing just as easily as He can do another. It is no more difficult for Him to create a universe than to make a butterfly. A.W. Tozer said, "Since He has at His command all the power in the universe, the Lord God omnipotent can do anything as easily as anything else. All His acts are done without effort. He expends no energy that must be replenished. His self-sufficiency makes it unnecessary for Him to look outside of Himself for a renewal of strength. All the power required to do all that He will to do lies in undiminished fullness in His own infinite being" (The Knowledge of The Holy, p. 73). Isaiah 40:28 says the Lord "fainteth not, neither is weary."

c

) God can do anything He wants

Psalms 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Although He can do anything according to His infinite ability and right, He will do only those things that are consistent with Himself. That's why He can't lie, tolerate sin, save an impenitent sinner, or punish an

innocent person.

The Potter's Right

People often question what God does. They don't understand that He can do anything He wants. Romans 9 illustrates God's sovereignty in showing mercy on those He has elected (Isaac and Jacob) while hardening others (Esau and Pharaoh). To the one who argues with God's right to make those distinctions, Paul said, "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay?" (vv. 20-21, NASB). Such power is frightening, but not so much when you remember that God is good.

2. The expression of God's power

a) Creation

Psalm 33:6 tells us that God spoke and the heavens were created. When we contemplate the power that exists in the created universe, or the power that man can generate through nuclear reactions, we have some idea of how great God's power is because it is greater than anything He ever made.

No one helped God. In Isaiah 44:24 He says, "[I] stretcheth forth the heavens alone; who spreadeth abroad the earth by myself." He willed them into existence, and they did so the instant He willed it so. Romans 4:17 says that God "calleteth those things which are not, as though they were." Once He does, they are.

b) Preservation

He who made the world "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3, NASB). A case is often made that if God never gets tired, why did He rest on the seventh day of creation? But God didn't actually rest. If He had, everything He made on the first six days would have fallen apart. God doesn't get tired. God was just as active on the seventh day as He was the other six, upholding everything He had made.

c) Redemption

Redemption may be a greater display of God's power than creation. There apparently was no opposition to Creation, but in redemption the devil had to be subdued, death had to be conquered, and sin had to be dealt with. Then God called to Himself a bunch of nobodies and made them

confound the mighty (1 Cor. 1:26-27). God used common people to go out into the world and spread the good news of His salvation. Within a short time they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

d

) Resurrection

God's power is visible in His ability to raise the dead. God has so much power that at the end of the age He will raise up from the dead every human being who has ever lived, both the righteous and unrighteous. John 5:28-29 says, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Revelation 20:11-15 refers to the Great White Throne Judgment, where all the ungodly are brought before God.

3. The experience of God's power

a

) By the believer

(1) The basis of our worship

Second Kings 17:36 says, "The Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship." We are to worship God because of His power.

(2) The basis of daily confidence

Whenever you begin to feel inadequate, you need to turn to Philippians 4:13, where Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." Because of His power we can live confidently every day. Since we are "filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19), we are "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (v. 20).

(3) The basis of resurrection hope

I look forward to being raised from the dead. The only thing that would interfere with that plan is if I get raptured first. My confidence in the resurrection is based on the power of God. First Corinthians 15:20 says, "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept." Then verse 52 says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." God gives us victory over death (vv. 54-57).

(4) The basis of comfort

When you begin to worry about your problems, realize there is nothing too great that God's can't handle. Psalm 121:1-2 says, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Since God made heaven and earth, He can certainly handle any problem you have.

(5) The basis of victory

Ephesians 6:10 exhorts us to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." In fighting the enemy you need God's strength. You are like a guard on watch. When the adversary comes, you're not supposed to fight him yourself--you tell the commander and he leads the battle. God can bring about the victory because "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Satan is a powerful enemy, but you can handle him because the victory is yours in Christ (1 John 3:8).

(6) The basis of assurance

Now that you are saved you will remain saved because God is powerful enough to keep you saved. The only way you could be removed from God's protective hand would be if someone more powerful than Him took you. But there isn't anyone more powerful than God.

(a) John 10:28-29--Jesus said of those who would follow Him, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

(b) Romans 8:33, 35, 38-39--"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?... What shall separate us from the love of Christ?... Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

(c) 2 Timothy 1:12--Paul said, "I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

(7) The basis of humility

It's easy to be proud if your thoughts aren't on God but on yourself. First Peter 5:6 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Apart from God's power you can accomplish nothing.

b) By the unbeliever

(1) 1 Corinthians 10:22--Paul asked the rhetorical question, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" Since God becomes jealous when people don't worship Him, they will incur His wrath (Rom. 1:18). A tragic future is in store for people who don't know God or Christ. The omnipotent God will ultimately confront them in judgment. And unless they are stronger than Him, they have no defense. But of course no man is stronger than God, who is his Creator.

(2) Job 9:4--"He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength. Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" The obvious answer is no one.

(3) 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9--"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

(4) Hebrews 10:31--"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

CONCLUSION

God's attributes create two different responses, depending on one's relationship to Him. To know that God is unchangeable, everywhere, and all powerful brings joy for the Christian. But the same attributes cause fear in the unbeliever. The issue isn't God's character; it's man's response to Him.

God desires worship. In Jeremiah 14:16 God promises punishment for those who don't come to Him. Yet in verse 17 He says, "Mine eyes run down with tears night and day." God is grieved because He loves sinners. When one repents and accepts the sacrifice of Christ on his behalf, God joyfully accepts him. And instead of God's attributes causing fear, they cause joy.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to A.W. Tozer, what is the most important message the church has to offer?
2. What is the essence of idolatry?
3. Why shouldn't we allow comparisons from the human realm to determine God's character?
4. Briefly explain the nature of God's omnipresence.
5. What have been some common misconceptions about God's presence?
6. What does 1 John 3:5 and Jesus' interaction with sinners illustrate about God?
7. How does God's relational presence differ from His essential presence?
8. Name some of the symbolic representations of God's majesty.
9. In what ways do believers benefit from God's omnipresence? Explain each one.
10. What should God's omnipresence clearly reveal to the unbeliever?
11. Briefly explain God's omnipotence.
12. Explain what is meant by the effortlessness of God's power.
13. In what ways do believers experience God's power? Explain each one.
14. What does God's omnipotence mean to an unbeliever?

Pondering the Principles

1. Perhaps one of the greatest applications of God's omnipresence is its motivation to holiness. When you have deliberately sinned against God's revealed will, what clouded your thinking? Did you rationalize your sin by supposing that God wouldn't judge your sin or that He didn't see your sin? We must allow God's presence to motivate us to lead holy lives. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 and list what God has done and the resulting principles that flow out of what He has done. For example, verse 11 declares what God has done to give us freedom, but verses 12-13 exhort us to limit that freedom.

2. The next time you need comfort, meditate on God's promise never to leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5). Also reflect on God's power (see Eph. 3:19-20). Rest in the confidence that God knows your situation and provides His strength so that you can endure it for your spiritual growth and His glory (see Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 5:10-11).

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