

Who is God?

Lesson #2 – *The Father*

Lesson Objectives

- Define the word attribute, and understand why attributes are important to the study of God.
- Understand and describe the following attributes of God.
 - Holiness
 - Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence
 - Justice
 - Grace & Mercy
 - Immutability
- Describe how God's justice can co-exist with His mercy and grace.

Lesson

1. Attribute Defined

1.1. Definition

- *“A quality or characteristic of a person, place, or thing.”*
- When conducting a study of the attributes of God, we are studying the qualities that define who God is. As we have learned in the previous lesson, the scriptures reveal the attributes of God so that man can know who He is, what His will is, and how to come to know Him. Said another way, the attributes of God are those characteristics and qualities that are so fundamental to His nature that it is impossible to know Him apart from His attributes. When we study God, we must direct our study to His attributes in order to know Him for who and what He is. When we do not set out to learn of God's attributes, we risk defining God by our standard, rather than the standard of the scripture which describe His attributes for us.
- By way of example, if our understanding of God was such that He was not limitless in His power, knowledge, and presence, then we in fact would not know Him at all. Rather, we would have a case of mistaken identity, and though we might think we know Him, we in fact do not.
- It bears our notice here that the study of the attributes of God could (and should) fill our entire lives, and will continue through the unending days of eternity. Therefore, this lesson cannot possibly present all of His attributes. Additionally, those attributes that will be considered will only be introduced. Studying the attributes of God is an infinitely worthwhile endeavor and one that should bring amazement, excitement, awe, thankfulness, and humility to His children.

1.2. Importance of a proper understanding of the attributes of God

- The attributes of God are just that...His attributes. They are not attributes that have been attributed to Him by men. God and His attributes are not the creations of man's

imagination. Man did not create God, but rather God created man. It is the creator that reveals knowledge to the created, and not the other way around. Though men have often claimed that there is no God and that religion is nothing more than an imaginary system created by the “weak-minded”, the fact remains that God has revealed Himself to us through the sources studied in the first lesson (nature, the scriptures, the Spirit, and personal experience).

- The unfortunate truth however is that man has attempted to create God in his own image rather than realizing he himself has been created in the image of God. Many people’s religious beliefs start with man and work their way to God. Christianity (if true) starts with God and works its way to man. For man to truly understand and know who he is, he must have an understanding of who God is. Even those attributes that we cannot fully understand must be understood through faith. If God’s attributes are not studied, respected, and remembered, it will not be long before He will be forgotten for who He really is.

2. The Attributes of God

2.1. Holiness

Rev 4:8 (KJV)4:8 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.

- The holiness of God is often confused with His righteousness. While God is indeed righteous (Just), holiness and righteousness are not the same thing. The holiness of God speaks to His sacred nature. By sacred is meant consecration, or *separation*. God is separate. He is unlike anything else in the entire world. All created things, be it man, the mountains, or far distant galaxies have in common that they have been created by God. However, God has no creator. He has no beginning and He has no end. He is altogether outside of time.
- Many have attempted to make Satan out to be God’s opposite. This idea though can lead to a less than complete understanding of the holiness of God. It is true to say that God and Satan *want* different things, but Satan is no more God’s opposite than a broken vessel is the opposite of its maker. Furthermore, there is often an inferred sense of equality between opposites. Yet God has no equal. Satan is a created being of God. Satan is not God’s equal in power, knowledge, or presence. In the book of Job we see that Satan is called before God as a subject of God, not as an equal.
- Likewise, as has been presented in these lessons already, God is not like man. Men often attribute human characteristics to inanimate objects or animals. This is referred to as anthropomorphism. It occurs when we project human thoughts or feelings on animals. In a similar fashion, one of the greatest hindrances to knowing God is the tendency of man to assume that his thoughts are the thoughts of God. However, the scriptures (as a primary source of our knowledge of God) tell us just the opposite.

Isa 55:8 (KJV)

55:8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

- The seeds of a great many eternally fatal ideas are planted in the garden of anthropomorphism. Because most men would not send another man to Hell for just one sin, he allows himself to believe that God wouldn't either. Because we think that we are a good person, we think God thinks that too. Because we think our nation is righteous, we allow ourselves to believe that God thinks we are as well. Because we get by with sin among other men, we think we get by with it with God too. On and on the examples go. At the root of it all however is the mistaken tendency of man to believe that what he thinks, God must think. And what he believes, God must believe. *This reality is why it is so imperative that God's people examine the scriptures to understand who God is.* We must not allow ourselves, or those we love, to lose the understanding of the holiness (separateness) of God.

2.2. Omniscience, Omnipresence, and Omnipotence

- These three attributes are likely among the first attributes that come to mind when we think of God. There is nothing that God does not know, there is nowhere that God is not present, and there is nothing that He would do, that He cannot do. Considering these attributes, the lost should tremble in fear and the child of God should rest in perfect peace.
- Scriptures that refer to God's omniscience

Job 37:16 (KJV)

37:16 Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?

Ps 139:4 (KJV)

139:4 For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

Isa 46:9-10 (KJV)

46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me,

46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

- Scriptures that refer to God's omnipresence

Jer 23:23-24 (KJV)

23:23 *Am* I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?

23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

Ps 139:8 (KJV)

139:8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*.

1Kgs 8:27 (KJV)

8:27 But 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 builded?

- Scriptures that refer to God's omnipotence

Jer 32:17 (KJV)

32:17 Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee:

Jer 32:27 (KJV)

32:27 Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

Rev 19:6 (KJV)

19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

2.3. Justice

- The Justice of God involves His judgment against sin. Anything contrary to the will and command of God is sin. That sin, in turn, will be punished because God is a just God. Unlike a human judge however, no sin is overlooked by the justice of God. Rather He is *always* just in *all* His dealings with man. In order for that to be the case, then all sin must be dealt with in the same way. Upon delivering the commandment regarding the fruit in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve, God spoke of the judgment that would be laid to their charge if they disobeyed, which was death. While men typically think of death as an end, the better interpretation is that death is a separation. Sin separates us from God because God will judge every sin, and the wages of sin (all sin) is death (separation).

Rom 6:23 (KJV)

6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Of the attributes of God that have been neglected, His justice is perhaps the one most ignored in modern Christianity. To many within mainstream Christianity, God looks more like a benevolent grandfather or Santa Clause than the righteous and just God of Heaven and Earth. Today's prosperity preacher will tell you how much God loves you and wants you to be happy. Yet he will not balance that out by telling you of God's justice. The moral decay in our society, which causes men to look the other way at sin, has negatively influenced our understanding of this key attribute of God. Because men are not held accountable by other men, they have begun to believe that God doesn't hold them

accountable either. However, in Ecclesiastes we are told that God will not ignore the sins of man.

Ecc1 8:11-13 (KJV)

8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

8:12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

8:13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his days*, *which are as a shadow*; because he feareth not before God.

- The steady decline in the understanding of God’s justice has opened the door to many false concepts of salvation. Repentance is overlooked when there is no sense of the justice of God and His righteous judgment against man as a sinner. Yet where there is no repentance there is no salvation. Indeed, man cannot even love God with any depth unless he first understands how much he has been forgiven. Without an understanding of God’s justice, man doesn’t understand his sin. The Lord teaches this concept in Luke 7:47 when he stated that “...to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” [KJV].
- There is a great irony in the attempt to speak of God as only a loving God without also speaking of His justice and judgment. By not speaking of His justice, the path to loving God is blocked because that path to the love of God is one of repentance for our sin which we have committed against Him. It can be said then that we cannot understand God’s love until we first understand His justice.

2.4. Mercy & Grace

- These two attributes are often used interchangeably but they are each separate attributes.
- Mercy is the *withholding of punishment* that is *justly deserved*. A judge is said to be merciful when he either reduces or suspends a sentence which is called for by the law. In salvation, the mercy we are extended from God is that we escape the just punishment of hell for our sin.
- Grace is the *giving of a benefit* which is *undeserved*. It can be seen then as somewhat the opposite of Mercy. Mercy is deserved punishment that is withheld, and grace is undeserved benefit that is given. In salvation, the grace we are extended from God is ultimately a home in Heaven which no man deserves. No man deserves it, because as is

clearly taught in the book of Romans and elsewhere in scripture, all have sinned against God.

2.5. Immutability

- The immutability of God refers to the fact that He never changes.

Jas 1:17 (KJV) 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

- The attribute of immutability is foundational to all correct belief and practice. If God changed, there would be no standard by which we could judge right from wrong. We would not have certainty with regard to His will. However, because God does not change, we can be certain of right and wrong, and the way of life and death.
- It can also be said that man in his nature does not change. Since the sin in the Garden, man has been a sinner. Because God does not change, and man does not change, then it can be determined that the way of salvation has always been the same. Jesus has always been the way of salvation as the sacrifice that satisfied the justice of God, and He always will be. People looked forward to Him for 4,000 before Christ came, and we have been looking back for 2,000. Yet, all are looking to Christ.

2.6. How Justice can abide alongside Mercy and Grace

- Many have wondered how we can describe God as both just, and merciful and gracious at the same time. On the one hand is God's justice, demanding punishment for sin. On the other hand is God's mercy and grace, providing an opportunity to escape the punishment for sin. The question is then asked how each of these attributes can be found in the same God. If God is just, how can He look past and forgive sin? How could a righteous and just judge withhold punishment for a crime? The answer is that the Lord Jesus Christ came and paid the penalty of the law and satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. Recalling the separate persons of the Trinity discussed earlier, we see how these attributes can co-exist in God. In Acts 20:21 we are told how the way of salvation involves God's justice (repentance) and his mercy and grace (faith in Christ).

Acts 20:21 (KJV)

20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Only by repenting for sin and having faith in Christ will one ever find salvation. It's not enough to do one and not the other. Repentance and faith have been referred to as the "*inseparable graces*", in that you can't fully do one without accomplishing the other. The coexistence of God's justice alongside His mercy and grace is part of the wonderful mystery of the Gospel, upon which the angels desire to look.

1Pet 1:12 (KJV)

1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Conclusion

- This lesson barely begins to scratch the surface of an in depth study of all the attributes of God the Father. It is a blessed thing to be able to open the word of God and allow Him to reveal Himself to us. Had He not revealed Himself, we would all be in darkness. We thank God that He has made himself knowable, and not shrouded in mystery.