

“WHAT IS GOD REALLY LIKE?”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

February 3, 2013, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: Psalm 102:25-27; Romans 11:33-36; I Timothy 1:17; Ephesians 5:1

Introduction.

Last week I said to make an image of God is idolatry and a lie. Even to have mental images of God as anything like us at all is false. But failure to think about God in the right way is also idolatry and the sin of idolatry leads to all kinds of other sins. We must think about God rightly.

Job 42:7 And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

This evening we want to see God rightly. When Moses boldly asked God to reveal to him God’s glory, God answered by revealing some of His attributes. Like Moses we come asking to see God’s glory, His glory revealed in His attributes, each one like a shiny ray of sun emanating from the essence of God’s glory.

Or in the words of Thomas Watson, “God’s glory lies chiefly in his attributes which are the several beams by which the divine nature shines forth.”

Belgic Confession, Article One.

“We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God –

eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.”

How do you describe the indescribable? How do you speak of the unspeakable? It’s my privilege tonight to begin to explore with you things that are too great to understand, to search out the unsearchable riches of God.

You may remember I gave you a homework assignment last week. I said look carefully at the list of nine/ten attributes and see if you can find the difference between the first six and the last three. Did anyone figure it out?

In an attempt to describe the various aspects of God’s character categories have been developed and one of the most common ways of classifying God’s attributes is the one we find in the Belgic Confession.

Article One divides the attributes of God between the incommunicable attributes of God and the communicable attributes of God.

Big words, what do they mean? Well in simplest terms you all know what a communicable disease is, it’s a disease that can be passed on, it’s catchable. There are diseases that can’t be

passed on, like Parkinson's or Multiple Sclerosis. And there are diseases that can be shared from one person to another like the flu.

Incommunicable attributes of God are attributes God does not share with others.

Communicable attributes of God are attributes God does share with others.

Incommunicable attributes of God.

These incommunicable attributes of God are what make God uniquely God and set Him apart from all the rest of creation and us creatures. God is personal but He is nothing like other personal beings. He suffers none of our human limitations.

Eternal (unlimited or infinite with respect to time)

God is eternal, without beginning and without end, from everlasting to everlasting. God was and is and is to come. He is without limit with respect to time. He is transcendent over time. He is outside of the succession of moments that we experience. We do not know any other existence than that which is measured by the hands on a clock and the pages of a calendar.

God exists in one eternally present moment. His existence can't be divided into past, present and future; or beginning, middle and end. He always is. For God eternity is not like arrows pointing in opposite directions.

All God's attributes are eternal. He is not one way in the OT and another way in the NT. His love is an eternal love, His grace is an eternal grace, His wrath and justice are eternal.

Psalm 90:1-2, 4, 10, 12 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

In response to this attribute we must learn to number our days and realize how short and fleeting life really is.

Incomprehensible

Can God be known? Yes and no. To the extent that He reveals Himself yes, but no, He can never be fully known by finite creatures. Our knowledge of God is all derived from Him. Even what we know we know imperfectly. We can only touch the hem of His robe. As Scripture says:

I Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Job 11:7-9 "Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
9 Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.

Isaiah 40:28 his understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How
unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

If we could fully comprehend God, He would not be great, and He would not be worthy of our
worship.

In response to this attribute we must humble ourselves before God and learn not to lean on our
own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Invisible

This is similar to what we said last week about God being spiritual. In His true and essential
nature He cannot be seen and will never be seen. Strange isn't it, we can know God but we can't
see God. God is personal and real but spiritual and invisible.

I Timothy 1:17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory
forever and ever. Amen.

I Timothy 6:15-16 he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of
lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever
seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

What about those times people saw something of God? Moses saw God's back; Isaiah saw
God's glory; Paul saw something in the third heaven.

These are divine condescensions when God accommodates Himself to us and descends to our
level to make Himself known in some small way that we can understand. No one has ever seen
God's essence, just some form suited to our ability. We will study Jesus' humanity later.

No human thought or imagination can ever come close to adequately representing Him.

In response to this attribute we must learn to live and walk by faith and not by sight.

Unchangeable (immutable)

God is from everlasting to everlasting the same, the same yesterday, today and forever. God is
the same in the OT as He is in the NT.

Malachi 3:6 “For I the Lord do not change.

James 1:17 ... the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Psalm 102:25-27 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,

27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

A common image of God's immutability in Scripture is of a rock.

Psalm 18:1-2 I love you, O Lord, my strength. 2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 62:6-7 He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

7 On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

God is unchangeable in His counsel.

Psalm 33:11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

So what about Genesis 6:6 when God says He was sorry for ever making man? God accommodates Himself to us and our language. When God is pictured as changing His plans or going a different direction it is in the context of His dealings with us. His purposes from all eternity are eternally fixed and certain.

In response to this attribute we can be certain that God is reliable, trustworthy, consistent, and faithful. He is not capricious or impulsive or vindictive. He's not moody or unpredictable.

Infinite (unlimited with respect to space)

In reference to time God's infinity is His eternity.

In reference to space God's infinity is His immensity.

God is limitless. He is unfathomable, without measure. Everything about God is unlimited, His power, His love, His wealth. This may be the attribute that is most difficult for our minds to grasp. How do you grasp something too big to grasp? We cannot use weights and measures and sizes to comprehend God.

God exists in a mode of being utterly foreign to us and completely unlike anything we can know. God is utterly transcendent, meaning above and beyond and outside of all His creation and yet He is absolutely present in His creation. There is no where that He is not.

God is not contained in one place nor limited to one place. He is everywhere present, dwelling in all creation but not bound by creation. This is God's omnipresence.

Acts 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Jeremiah 23:23-24 “Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.

We cannot flee from His presence or hide from Him.

Psalm 139:7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

So many foolish people talk new age kind of talk about the god within us. This is the practice of Hinduism and some aspects of Buddhism. They meditate on themselves to find and worship that god who dwells within you as you. So you end up worshiping yourself. In the 1970's it manifested itself in the US as Transcendental Meditation.

From this attribute we must learn that our God is too small, our thoughts of Him too small. Or as one author put it, our God is too skinny. God's personal presences fills all the vastness of the universe and completely transcends it and is not bounded by it.

Almighty

Luke 1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God.

God has power and since God is infinite, His power is unlimited. Nothing is too great or too much for God. There is nothing He can't do that is consistent with His nature. No, God can't sin, God can't tell a lie, God can't cease to exist. And God can't make a rock so big He can't lift it. God can do anything and everything that is consistent with His character and nature.

He is omnipotent, all powerful, completely sovereign, in control of all things.

I Timothy 6:15 he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

There is nothing too hard for the Lord. When He tells a 90 year old woman she will have a baby, she does (Genesis 18:14). When He tells a nation of people He will deliver them across the Red Sea, He does it.

God can make the sun stand still, He can make the sun go dark over Egypt but not over the land of Goshen, He can make water come out of a rock, He can make the Red Sea part and dead people come to life.

Matthew 19:26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Q.27. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty - all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

Q.28. HOW DOES THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CREATION AND PROVIDENCE HELP US?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

Q.1. WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT, IN LIFE AND IN DEATH?

A. That I am not my own, but belong - body and soul, in life and in death - to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

In response to this attribute we trust His ability to do anything and trust He is never limited. His promises are secure, He will do everything He has said. This may be God's most comforting attribute, we can rest secure in His powerful, loving arms.

Application and conclusion.

This is what we believe with all our heart concerning God and this is what we confess with our mouth.

These attributes are not just of some great God, they are the attributes of our God, our eternal Heavenly Father. He is personal, and He has personal concern and care for us, He is with us always and He exercises all His attributes on our behalf.

God has placed each one of us right where we are at this moment in life in this place by His wisdom and power for His glory and for our benefit.

“An unknown God can neither be trusted, served nor worshipped”

(A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 7).

As we grow in our knowledge of God may our awe of Him lead to richer worship, deeper faith and greater trust.