



# “Getting to Know God”

## Section 2: What Can We Know About What God Is Like?

### Unit 2.1: Analyzing His Attributes



#### I) Approaching an Absolute Being

- So far in this study, we have acknowledged that God is the starting point of all truth as the Creator of the universe. And the truth of God, uniquely revealed in Holy Scripture, is that He is one eternal, spiritual being made up of three individual persons including the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This was our answer to the *what* (nature) and *who* (personhood) of God. Now, we turn our attention in Section 2 towards finding out more about the *character* of God by asking, “*What is God like?*”
- To understand what God is like, we must take a closer look at the Bible to get a holistic picture of the Lord’s unique characteristics. We often call these characteristics of God His divine **attributes**, but because God is an absolute being, we need to begin this section by emphasizing that that these attributes are not only reflective of *how God acts* but more specifically about *who God is*. As A.W. Tozer states clearly in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “*The divine attributes are what we know to be true of God. He does not possess them as qualities; they are how God is as He reveals Himself to His creatures. Love, for instance, is not something God has and which may grow or diminish or cease to be. His love is the way God is, and when He loves He is simply being Himself*” (p. 16).

#### II) God is Great, God is Good

- When we consider the divine attributes of God, there are several different ways that Christians have historically approached this topic. The first approach is to make distinctions between the “**greatness**” of God and the “**goodness**” of God. The “**greatness**” of God refers to His natural characteristics in relation to time and space (His size, power, and presence), and the “**goodness**” of God refers to His moral characteristics that reflect His perfect righteousness (His love, grace, mercy, justice). These two categories of God’s greatness and goodness are both discussed at great length throughout Scripture. **Psalm 145:3** proclaims, “*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.*” This highlights the distinctive natural characteristics of the Lord that often transcend our human understanding and are deemed unsearchable. And **Psalm 119:68** proclaims, “*You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.*” This passage supports Tozer’s assertion that all attributes of God are not primarily about what He does, but more importantly come from the fabric of who He is.

#### III) The Gifts and the Giver

- A second approach to exploring the divine attributes of God is to classify them by which characteristics are either unique to Him alone, or ones that He has generously chosen to share with human beings made in His image. The categories used in this approach are called God’s “**incommunicable**” and “**communicable**” attributes. Incommunicable attributes are defined as characteristics of God’s nature that He has chosen not to share with or communicate to His creatures. Conversely, communicable attributes are characteristics that He has chosen to share with us through His great love to be a reflection of His glory to the rest of the world. A passage that perfectly illustrates both the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God is found in **Exodus 3** when Moses encounters God at the burning bush. In the beginning of the chapter 3, God expresses to Moses that He has heard the cry of His people enslaved in Egypt and wants Moses to set them free. These feelings of tender mercy that God has towards Israel and His direct communication with Moses are relational attributes He shares with humanity. However, as Moses asks God who should he should tell the people he was sent by, God responds in verse 14 by telling Moses He should be referred to as the great “**I AM WHO I AM.**” This unique name for God represents an exclusive attribute that He alone possesses as an eternal present tense Creator who stands outside the time and space boundaries of His creation.

#### IV) To Reflect and to Revere

- In the next few units we will focus on this second approach of discerning which attributes are unique to God, and which ones have been shared with humanity. As we do so, we need to consider some underlying reasons why God would choose to share some aspects of His character while withholding others. First, He **shares** certain aspects of Himself because He wants to be *reflected* and *imitated* by humans made in His image so we can be a witness and a blessing to the world. On the other hand, God **withholds** certain aspects of Himself because He wants to be *worshipped, glorified, relied on, and trusted*. These exclusive characteristics of God keep Him firmly on the throne, as He remains eternally set apart from all created beings.

#### V) Our Dignity and Our Duty

- The primary proof that God has shared certain attributes with human beings is found in these foundational words from **Genesis 1:27**: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Therefore, as human beings made in God’s image, we need to recognize that when our Creator shares divine attributes with us, we are entrusted with great *privileges* and *responsibilities*. First, our main privilege is that because we bear the image of God, every human being has an inherent *dignity*. As *The Baptist Faith & Message* states in Article III on *Man*: “**The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.**” In addition to this privilege, however, we also have a great responsibility to honor God’s image by glorifying Him through every action of our daily lives. As **1 Corinthians 10:31** proclaims, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

#### VI) The Purpose of His Kingdom Plan

- To get a big picture perspective of God’s decision to both share and withhold attributes of Himself with humanity, we need to consider what Scripture reveals about His plan for an eternal kingdom. Going back to the Garden of Eden, **Genesis 1:28** states that God commanded human beings to “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*” In other words, His plan was for human beings under His kingship to procreate so the Garden of Eden would eventually spread to all four corners of the earth with people reflecting His shared attributes and bringing Him endless glory. However, Adam and Eve sinned and were kicked out of the garden for rejecting God’s kingdom plan by seeking to acquire an exclusive attribute of God’s divine knowledge through eating the forbidden fruit. This tragedy is why humanity needs Jesus Christ. We need Christ because He not only redeems and restores God’s image in human beings, but He also welcomes us back into an eternal garden in the New Jerusalem where we will be able to reflect and glorify God as faithful image bearers for all of eternity.

#### VII) Seeing Through the Stains of Sin

- Until Christ returns to complete God’s eternal plan of kingdom redemption, we are forced to view the image of God in humanity today through the stains of sin. We as human beings are in a state of **total depravity**, which means that our sinful nature has in some way contaminated every single divine attribute that the Lord has shared with us. As **Jeremiah 17:9** says about our very nature, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” And Paul captures the miserable reality we face as a result of our fallen nature in **Romans 3:12** when he states, “*All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*”

#### VIII) A Search that Leads to a Savior

- So, as we meditate on God’s shared image with humanity and how it has been damaged by sin, let us consider the following four progressive truths about Christ who both reflects and restores God’s image as the Messiah who is Himself both God and man and is bridging the gap between the two:
  - a) Christ is the image of the perfect, invisible God: (**Colossians 1:15-17**)
  - b) Christ is the image of the ideal, visible human being: (**Hebrews 4:15**)
  - c) Christ is restoring the broken of image of God in humanity: (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)
  - d) Christ is returning to create a redeemed earth filled with God’s redeemed image: (**Revelation 21-22**)