

Introduction to the Attributes of God

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Worthwhile relationships are based on knowledge. When we meet someone for the first time, we do not consider that we really know that person until we have the opportunity to learn more about that person, such as his or her history, personality, likes, dislikes, and desires. As we come to know more about a new acquaintance, we better understand how to carry on a relationship with that person. In the same way, a vibrant relationship with the triune God must be rooted in a firm understanding of who He reveals Himself to be in His Word. In this message, Dr. Steven J. Lawson presents an overview of God's defining attributes and invites us to pursue a more intimate and worshipful relationship with Him.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Exodus 15:11-13; Psalm 55:8-9; Psalm 89:5-8

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To provide definitions and examples of divine attributes
2. To discuss the ways in which these attributes describe the triune God
3. To show how theology affects life and worship

QUOTATIONS

It is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.

—John Calvin

This is eternal life, that we may know the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, in the power and by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In his presence is life and joy forevermore, not simply for us, but for others beyond, for those yet to believe and for those not yet born, for generations to come and beyond that for eternity.

—Robert Letham

LECTURE OUTLINE

- I. The Importance of a Right Understanding of God
 - A. It has been said that what comes into a person's mind when he or she thinks about God is the most important thing about him or her.
 - i. High views of God lead to high and holy living, worship, evangelism, and service.
 - ii. Low views of God lead to a low and base way of interacting with God, self, and others.
 - B. This teaching series will seek to promote a high view of God by examining fifteen of God's attributes.
 - i. By gaining an accurate understanding of who God is, Christians become better equipped to understand themselves and the world around them.
 - ii. Because every area of one's life and worldview is influenced by one's understanding of God, it is essential to understand His defining attributes.
 - C. An *attribute* refers to a quality or characteristic that belongs to a person.
 - i. God's attributes define and describe who God is.
 - ii. Although we cannot understand the full depth of God's character, this teaching series will explore some of the main characteristics of God that are mentioned in Scripture.

- II. God's Distinct Attributes: An Overview
 - A. God is *self-existent (a se)*: He has life in Himself and depends on no one.
 - B. God is *spiritual*: He does not have a material body and is transcendent.
 - C. God is *sovereign*: He rules over all things with absolute control.
 - D. God is *holy*: He is pure, blameless, and flawless in all of His being.
 - E. God is *omnipresent*: He is boundless, present in all places at once.
 - F. God is *omniscient*: He knows all things.
 - G. God is *omnipotent*: He is all-powerful.
 - H. God is *immutable*: He never changes.
 - I. God is *truthful*: He speaks accurately and authoritatively.
 - J. God is *wise*: He enacts His perfect will by the highest ends and means.
 - K. God is *good*: He deals bounteously with His creatures.
 - L. God is *gracious*: He freely bestows salvation on undeserving sinners.
 - M. God is *loving*: He demonstrates selfless love for His children.
 - N. God is *foreknowing*: He has known and loved His people from eternity.
 - O. God is *righteous in wrath*: He loves purity and punishes impurity.

III. Divine Attributes in Proper Perspective

- A. Some of God's attributes are called "incommunicable attributes," and others are called "communicable attributes."
 - i. God's incommunicable attributes, such as immutability and omniscience, belong to Him alone.
 - ii. God's communicable attributes, such as love and wisdom, find their fullest expression in Him but can also be displayed on a smaller scale by His human image-bearers.
- B. God's attributes are not independent of one another but are interconnected.
 - i. These divine attributes are present in the entire Godhead; they are possessed by all three persons of the Trinity.
 - ii. Each of these attributes has always belonged to God and will always belong to Him.
 - 1. God neither gains nor loses attributes.
 - 2. Those who claim that God is different in the Old and New Testaments misunderstand the nature of divine attributes.
 - iii. Each attribute characterizes every other attribute.
 - 1. Complex beings have separate, identifiable parts, but simple beings do not.
 - 2. Because God is a simple being, it is impossible to divide Him into parts, so as to separate His goodness from His wisdom or His wrath.
 - 3. Instead, each attribute describes the others; for example, God's holiness is immutable, omnipotent, and eternal.
- C. God's attributes have crucial implications for our day-to-day lives.
 - i. This is not a purely academic or intellectual subject.
 - ii. Rather, an accurate understanding of God is foundational if we desire to know Him, serve Him, and become like Him.
 - iii. Only when we know God can we truly worship Him.
 - iv. Knowledge of God keeps us anchored as we minister in His name and proclaim His truth to others.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The attribute that best describes God's kind and generous dealings with believers, unbelievers, and inanimate creation is His _____.
 - a. Goodness
 - b. Omnipotence
 - c. Grace
 - d. Sovereignty
2. Some of God's attributes apply exclusively to the Father, while others mainly describe the Son or the Spirit.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. God's communicable attributes are His qualities which _____.
 - a. Can only belong to God
 - b. Are unknowable apart from special revelation
 - c. Are most easy to describe to others
 - d. God demonstrates perfectly but humans can share imperfectly

4. Each of God's attributes is _____.
 - a. A separate part of God
 - b. Unrelated to the others
 - c. Eternally part of God's character
 - d. Only found in the Godhead

5. God is better described as a simple being, rather than as a complex being.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is a person's belief in God important? In what ways do these beliefs shape other areas of a person's life?
2. How does a biblical understanding of God's attributes impact the way that you perceive yourself and other people?
3. As Dr. Lawson observes, our theology determines our doxology. Consider some of the different approaches to worship that you have seen in churches today; what are the different views of God that undergird these views of worship?
4. Of the attributes of God mentioned in this message, which one is the most familiar to you? Which of these are you most curious to learn about?