The Attributes of God

Philippians 3:7—10

Robert D. Pace

(Question) I'll begin this message by asking a question: What is in your "Bucket List"? Are there five or six desires you'd like to fulfill before dying? For me, there's only one item in my Bucket List. I'd like to take a trip around the United States in a luxury 40-ft bus, several captain's chairs, a sofa, a bedroom, a bathroom, and a driver. I'd like to see the wonders of this great country that we live in.

Now, let's take everything that you and I have placed in our Bucket List and compare it with one Biblical aspiration. And regardless of your physical condition or financial welfare, this is one item any Christian can attain. **It's the aspiration of "knowing God."**

There is not one place on the planet, not one of the Seven Wonders of the World, not even visiting the most fascinating galaxy in the universe, which could surpass the unending exploration of God, his character, and nature.

(Quote) Listen to the words of a twenty-year-old preacher named Charles Spurgeon:

> It has been said by someone that 'the proper study of mankind is man.' I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's [people] is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the Word, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his "Father."

Isn't that amazing? A twenty-year-old made that statement with the eloquence of a seasoned scholar.

I want you to notice one of the Apostle Paul's main prayers. Although the members of the Church of Ephesus were its original recipients of Paul's prayer, under the Holy Spirit's anointing, Paul was also praying for us! It's recorded in **Ephesians 1:17,**

> *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,* ***so that you may know him better****."*

The incomprehensible God invites us to learn and discover his nature. **Jeremiah 9:23—24 says:**

> This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, (24) but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

I want to ask you: How well do you know God? I'm sure everyone here knows the story of Christ's death on the Cross. The Plan of Salvation is the most wonderful story to be told. Yet, there is more to be told about Jesus and his death on the Cross for our pardon of sin. Who Jesus is and what he offers is worthy of our deepest study.

If everything a carpenter knew about construction was limited to using a hammer, everything would get pounded into shape. The carpenter needs to understand all the tools of his trade. This is why I am challenging you to make the aspiration of knowing God and his son, Jesus Christ, your chief ambition and lifelong pursuit.

(Transition) Let's return to our opening text and consider what Paul wrote about knowing.

The Aspiration to Know God

In Philippians, Paul said he counted everything as *"loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus."* When you study Paul's life, you understand the sincerity of this desire because he was consumed with Christ. In fact, it's interesting that in the first two chapters of Philippians Paul expressed seven wishes regarding Christ: He desired to "know" Christ, "win" Christ, "magnify" Christ, be "conformed" to Christ, be "found in" Christ, "rejoice in the day of Christ," and "live forever" with Christ. Paul passionately pursued his Lord!

(Definition) What exactly did Paul mean in Philippians 3:10 when he expressed his desire to *"know" Christ*? When Paul wrote that Greek word *know,* he knew its meaning. Its etymology translates like this: "**To know Christ in a great variety of applications and with many implications; to know by experience; to find out and discern; to know him in a multifaceted manner."** Paul wanted to know Jesus as fully as possible.

(Transition) Moses had a profound experience with God in Exodus chapters 33—34. And I want you to notice how Moses responded to God's self-revelation of his glory.

Moses Requests to See God's Glory

In Exodus 33 and 34, Moses stood before God and dared to request to see his glory—something that would reveal God's greatness. And he was undaunted by Moses' petition. He was glad to answer it and even culled out a place for Moses to witness it. It's often called the "cleft of a rock." The story is recorded in Exodus 34:6—7. (ESV)

> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, (7) keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

God could have answered Moses in numerous ways:

He could have said, "Moses, do you see the stars? They are but faint twinkles of my glory," but that wasn't God's response.

Or, the Lord could have pointed out the beauty of a sunset painted with a hundred hues, but the Lord didn't say that.

He could have taken Moses upon the wings of angels and soared with him through the galaxies, showing him the planets and worlds beyond the reach of our telescopes, but he didn't do that either.

There are many ways God could have described the weight of his worth, but did you notice how God revealed it to Moses? He chose to define his glory through a self-revelation. A revelation comprising eight statements about his character and nature. Let's investigate these acclamations:

1. First, notice that God declared his name to Moses. And in order to emphasize its unparalleled glory, he uttered it twice. He declared himself to be "The LORD, the LORD." This proclamation meant he was the One, True, Supreme Being who had no equal! Praise God that there is no God but Jehovah. (This is most certainly matchless glory.)

2. Second, God then testified to his mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is an *act of God*. It is not feeling sorry for another, nor is it mere sympathy. Mercy involves a purposeful, intentional, deliberate act. So, in what ways does God's intentional mercy manifest? It manifests when he extends protection, provision, guidance, and presence toward his creatures. I want to give four passages that identify God's mercy:

> The first is found in Lamentations 3:23—24. "Because of the LORD's great *love* [same Hebrew word as *mercy*] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." The wondrous meaning of this passage tells us that God's mercy cannot be exhausted. He is infinite in this virtue.
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> Ephesians 2:4 says, "God... is rich in mercy."
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> David said 1 Chronicles 21:13 that the Lord's "mercy is very great."
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> Micah 7:8 says God "delight[s] to show mercy."

3. The third aspect of God's self-declaration to Moses regards the glory of his *grace*. He lets us know in verse 6 that he is a wondrously gracious God. And grace is something none can live without! What is grace? It is his free, undeserved gift of benevolence. As sinners, we do nothing to deserve grace; he simply bestows his goodness upon us from the depths of who he is—and he is gracious!

4. Next, God said he is "slow to anger." In other words, he is ever-patient with us. I am so glad God doesn't zap us every time we stumble or commit a grievous sin.

5. **Fifth, the Lord then made a pronouncement of his "steadfast love" to Moses.** God is not fickle. He is steadfast! God has perfect, unwavering, unquenchable love toward you.

6. **Next, coupled with super-abounding love, God also told Moses that he was "steadfast in faithfulness."** He is absolutely reliable, trustworthy, and just. He never changes!

7. **Seventh, God told Moses that he "forgives iniquity and transgression and sin."** The word *forgive* describes how God totally removes the guilt of our sin." Isn't it wonderful that our Lord wants to be known for this quality? He intervened through his only begotten Son to cleanse and renew us.

8. **But lastly, God cautioned Moses that his glory also deals with the judgment of sin.** He said in verse 8 that he "will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." His holiness demands the judgment of sin! And this is why he sent Jesus into the world—to deal with the judgment of sin.

These eight self-proclamations only begin to describe God's glory. And we will continue learning about God's glory even after a million years in Heaven.

(Transition) Now, I want you to consider what Jesus said about this.

Jesus Asks the Apostles Who He Is

(Bible Example) Did you know Jesus thought it important for people to know who he was? In Matthew 16, Jesus gathered his Apostles on a mountain and asked, "Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

Why is this important? Because our eternal destiny hinges on what we think of Jesus.

An attribute of God is any quality or characteristic that is ascribed to God that defines his nature. We can understand God and his attributes in one of three ways: through creation, through Revelation, and, most importantly, through his Written Word.

I want to continue this lesson by posing a question: Why is it important to study God's attributes? There are several answers to this question:

1. Studying God's attributes increases our faith. When we learn of the perfection of God's nature, it anchors our souls and builds trust.

2. Studying God's attributes reveals the perfection of His Being.

(Illustration) There are times when we focus on an object far away. From a distance, it appears beautiful, creating a desire to draw closer. But as we draw closer, we notice its flaws. But not so with God; the closer we draw to God, the more magnificent he appears.

3. Studying God's attributes brings us joy. The Psalmist said: "In his presence is fullness of joy."

The Bible doesn't provide a comprehensive list of God's attributes. Notice what Job admitted after he encountered God: **"Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him!"** (26:14).

(Transition) Thus, let's proceed by investigating three classifications of God's Attributes:

Classifications of God's Attributes:

A. God's Moral Attributes

The holiness of (Exodus 15:11)

The love of God (John 3:35; 17:24)

The righteousness of God (Psalm 145:7)

The perfection of God (Psalm 50:10; HEB:6:18)

The faithfulness of God (1 Corinthians 10:13)

The goodness of God (Mark 10:18)

The truthfulness of God (John 14:6)

Merciful (1CH 16:34)

Gracious (EPH 2:7)

The forgiveness of God

The kindness of God

The compassion of God

The long-suffering of God

The justness of God

B. God's Intellectual Attributes

The omniscience of God (Job 37:16). This means God knows every aspect of our lives.

The wisdom of God (1 Timothy 1:16-17). He knows the perfect way in every situation.

The incomprehensibility of God (Job 11:7-9). This is passive, but it discloses his greatness in every way that cannot be fathomed by anyone.

The impassable nature of God. (Means he is not overwhelmed by emotion or grief. Though he passionately loves, he is never overcome by his passions. He is self-controlled.)

The fellowship of God. (He communes with his creation.)

C. Sovereign Attributes

God is Sovereign, which means, "He does whatever he pleases" and is answerable to none (Psalm 115:3).

God is omnipotent (Matthew 19:6)

God is omnipresent (Jeremiah 23:23–24)

God is immutable (James 1:17)

God is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17)

God is self-sufficient/existent (John 5:26)

God is infinite (Job 11:7-9)

God is the Creator (Genesis 1 & 2)

God is the Sustainer (Hebrew 1:3)

God is the Consummator (Revelator 21:12-15)

God decrees (Psalm 2:7; Acts 17:26-31)

God is invisible (John 4:23-24)

God is free

God is One

God is transcendent

(Insight) Despite this partial list of 34 characteristics of God, Job 26:14 says: "Behold, these are the fringes of his ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him!" Throughout eternity, men and angels will continue to discover the wonder of God's character.

(Transition) Our final point illustrates how God can transform those who dare to draw near him and investigate his glory:

Knowing God Discloses How God Can Work For Your Good

Notice the people who drew near God and the transformation it brought:

1. Moses at the "Burning bush" discovered God: "I Am Who I Am."

2. Abraham at Mount Moriah discovered God, Jehovah-Jireh, as his Provider.

3. Jacob at Bethel discovered the God who blesses.

4. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, thrown into the fiery furnace, discovered God's ability to miraculously deliver.

5. Jonah discovered the God of forgiveness.

6. Gideon, hiding in a winepress, discovered God as the Captain of our Salvation.

7. The 12 Apostles, intimately acquainted with God through Christ, discovered the saving, healing, forgiving, loving, all-wise, etc., nature of God.

Conclusion

These are reasons it is imperative to know God. Seek him today. He has a revelation of Himself that can transform you.

(**Illustration**) Imagine the cosmos: known for its beauty, expanse, and orderliness, it stirs our curiosity night after night. Even without a telescope, our nocturnal gazing is delighted as the heavens twinkle and shimmer. There are times when we focus on an object far away.

From a distance, the object appears beautiful and creates within us the desire to draw nearer. But as we draw closer, we notice its flaws. Imagine looking through the Hubble Telescope at a planet millions of miles away. But not so with God. The closer we draw to God, the more magnificent He appears.

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