

We are beginning a series on the attributes of God. I first preached this series here twelve years ago, but many of you were not with us then. It is one of the difficult things in ministry today, to not have the stability of a congregation that stays with one's teaching over a long period of time. This makes it necessary to review essential teaching, and this series is perhaps one of the most essential. Who is God? After all, that is the foundation of truth, of right and wrong. It's no wonder our society is moving toward relativism as it has forgotten or rejected who God is. Relativism accepts the original lie, "You shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). If we can decide right or wrong for ourselves, we do what we want. We become the ultimate authority in our own minds.

**Commented [notes1]: Genesis 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> • For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

I'm not going to begin with the question of the existence of God because it has become overwhelmingly evident. It is only the hardhearted fool who insists that the complexity of living organisms is an accident of nature (Psalm 14:1). We know too much today to make such a fallacious statement. With our knowledge of the complexity of the so called "simple cell" (a term no longer in use), it clearly takes more faith to believe life is an accident than it takes to believe in God. Science has discovered the miraculous information systems that direct and correct the various complex functions within every cell. Let us end the origins argument once and for all by acknowledging that information comes from intelligence. Programming comes from a designer. Enough said!

**Commented [notes2]: Psalm 14:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

We are going to take about ten weeks for a brief introduction to the nature of God as revealed in His Word. It is holy ground (1Chronicles 16:10)! It is the highest subject a person can contemplate. It is a subject that should affect all our thinking and be considered in every situation we face. C.H. Spurgeon wrote in a sermon on Malachi 3:6 "The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with' in them we feel a kind of self-contentment, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold, I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, "I am but of yesterday and know nothing."

**Commented [notes3]: 1 Chronicles 16:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> • Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!

To know God is not just the knowledge of His character, though that is the subject we are looking at in this series. To know Him is to surrender our will into His loving hands. It is to love Him with all our heart (Deuteronomy 10:12). Jesus said that it is life eternal.

**Commented [notes4]: Deuteronomy 10:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> • "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

*you have sent.* John 17:3 It is to know Jesus, who is the manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). That is why I will often refer to Jesus to describe the nature of God as we go through this series.

**Commented [notes5]: Colossians 1:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> • He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Jeremiah told us that the LORD said that the only thing truly worth boasting about is knowing God. <sup>23</sup> *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."* Jeremiah 9:23-24 Wisdom, power, and wealth are what the world boasts about. God tells us those things don't count in His eyes (Proverbs 21:30). The only thing God sees that man can boast of is understanding and knowing the LORD and the expression of His attributes. I hope you heard those verses because they will change your whole perspective on life. There is only one thing in which man should pride himself, understanding and knowing God.

**Commented [notes6]: Proverbs 21:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> • No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD.

Understanding and knowing sound like two things, but they must be together as one. Jesus said eternal life is to know God, but we can't know Him without understanding a few things about Him. You don't know your spouse until you understand what causes him or her to act the way he or she does. The same is true with God. **His nature is the source of His actions, and He will never act in a way that inconsistent with His unchanging character** (Malachi 3:6). We will be focused on understanding His character, but in the process, many of us will begin to know God more intimately.

**Commented [notes7]: Malachi 3:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> • "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Let me just take the attributes Jeremiah mentioned as an example. When you are convinced that God is a God that practices steadfast love, you can't help but love Him in return (1 John 4:19). The more you recognize His design for your life as an expression of that love, the more deeply grateful you are for your relationship with Him. That causes us to desire to see His hand at work all around us as additional revelations of His steadfast love. The more we see, the more we can see, and the more we want to know Him. When it comes to God, understanding leads to knowing and is inseparable from it.

**Commented [notes8]: 1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • We love because he first loved us.

Scripture has numerous expressions of people not knowing God and the consequences of that condition. Jesus said that the world does not know God, but His disciples do (John 17:25, 10:14). Jeremiah emphasized the problem with Israel was that they did not know God. <sup>22</sup> *"For my people are foolish; they know me not;"* Jeremiah 4:22a *...for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD.* Jeremiah 9:3b <sup>6</sup> *Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.* Jeremiah 9:6 It's not that man is uninformed (Romans 1:19). These Jews knew their history. It is a refusal to know Him so we can go our own ways and live out our hearts' lusts. It's a choice. Throughout this series you will have a choice, to take the understanding and revelation of Scripture, and let it take you on to

**Commented [notes9]: John 17:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> • O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.

**Commented [notes10]: John 10:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> • I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

**Commented [notes11]: Romans 1:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

knowing God more intimately or to refuse to know Him. The reason we would refuse, is that **there is an abandonment that comes with love.** I'm not speaking of selfish love that looks for what it might gain from another, but agape love that sees the intrinsic value in the one that is loved, and when it comes to God, the value is immeasurable.

We use the expression, "to fall in love." It implies you can't help yourself. There is no way to stop. As we look into the attributes of God you'll begin to fall, but you can stop yourself. Then again, you can jump off the edge with your arms out trusting Him as He catches you in His embrace (Luke 15:20).

You may remember the 50s song, *To Know Him Is To Love Him* by the Teddy Bears. "Just to see him smile makes my life worthwhile." It is true of God. But there will always be those who refuse to know Him lest they fall in love and lose themselves in the wonder of who He is. But Jesus warned that if we do not lose our life, we will never find it (Matthew 10:39).

Moses was a man who became eager to abandon himself to God. He realized that if he was to know God, he needed to know the ways of God. <sup>13a</sup> *Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.* Exodus 33:13a "Show me now Your ways, that I may know You." When we see how God acts in the world, we understand His character. He always acts in ways that are consistent with His nature (Titus 1:2). So when we see His actions we can learn of His nature that prompted the action. When we see mercy, we know He is merciful (Psalm 116:5). When we see judgment, we see that He is just and has limits to His mercy (2 Thessalonians 1:6). When we see the goodness and the provision of creation, we know that God is good (Psalm 73:1). And so in seeing the ways of God, we learn of the attributes of God.

It does take revelation, however. Moses asked God to show him, or reveal to him, the ways of God. His ways aren't always obvious. Sometimes we misunderstand them. We may interpret the death of some loved one as the judgment of God when God was sparing the person from something that would have been devastating to them (Psalm 57:1). What we thought was judgment was really mercy, and so we need revelation. The main source of that revelation for us today is something Moses didn't have. We have the Scriptures, the life of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 1:1-2).

There are promises to those who know God. <sup>10</sup> *Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!* Psalm 36:10 Those who know God can count on His steadfast love, which is one of the most commonly mentioned attributes of God. Is there anything greater that one could ask than for the steadfast love of Almighty God to be with them? Those who know God can count on that attribute being manifest over everything in their life. It may be painful at

**Commented [notes12]: Luke 15:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> • And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

**Commented [notes13]: Matthew 10:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> • Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

**Commented [notes14]: Titus 1:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> • in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

**Commented [notes15]: Psalm 116:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> • Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

**Commented [notes16]: 2 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> • since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

**Commented [notes17]: Psalm 73:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

**Commented [notes18]: Isaiah 57:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;

**Commented [notes19]: Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,  
<sup>2</sup> • but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

times, but we can rest in the fact that it is love. This verse is the Old Testament version of Romans 8:28 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Those who know God, love God, and so the promise is the same.

The goal of the Apostle Paul's life was to know Jesus, for in knowing Him, Paul would know God. <sup>7</sup> *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* <sup>8</sup> *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ* <sup>9</sup> *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—* <sup>10</sup> *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* <sup>11</sup> *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.* Philippians 3:7-11 Paul let go of everything that would give him status, favor, respect, and comfort in this life for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He let go of all worldly esteem and through faith accepted the righteousness from God that depends on faith for several reasons. The first is the greatest. "That I might know Him!" Paul understood that knowing God is the only thing of value. He understood God's words through Jeremiah that declared knowing God to be the only thing of which we can boast (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Just think of it, in heaven, will you be telling anyone how much money you had in the bank? Will you esteem your degrees or position in your company? Will it matter what size your business was or how attractive you were? Everything in eternity will be about knowing God. In fact, that is the LORD'S description of the kingdom of God. <sup>34</sup> *And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" Jeremiah 31:34

The kingdom of God has come to those who know Him. To know His attributes and trust in their unchanging nature means we can rest in Him. We can have the peace that passes understanding in every situation. We can experience the kingdom of God today. It results in a change in our life. Those who Jesus welcomes into His joy are those who He knows, for they know Him. They are faithful to express His attributes to others. Those who do not know Him, as Jeremiah wrote in the verses I read earlier, are the ones that go from evil to evil, practice oppression, and use deceit.

When we began the study in Romans I told you of the lives it had changed and how it could transform us. That is because it helped us to know God better. Now we are starting an equally life transforming series because we are going to look intensely at God's attributes, one at a time. As we behold each attribute, you'll be challenged to let

**Commented [notes20]: Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> • Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,

<sup>24</sup> • but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.

go and fall into the embrace of accepting that truth about God. You'll stand at a crossroad of choosing to believe the revelation of Scripture or keep your old mindset (Romans 12:2). And then you'll be tested to see if you believe it as you face the situations of each day. Your faith will be challenged and stretched (Hebrews 11:6).

As with every sermon in this series, I want to end this message by looking at Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). He said that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is our example in everything. So what does Scripture declare about Him knowing God? Jesus said, <sup>29</sup> *I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.* John 7:29 Jesus told to his critics, <sup>55</sup> *But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.* John 8:55 Once again we see the contrast between knowing God or not knowing Him. In light of the Old Testament passages we read earlier about those who didn't know God, you can get an idea how harsh this sounded.

Jesus uniquely knows the Father like none of us ever will. He has spent eternity with Him and is one with the Father (John 1:1). Yet Jesus reveals the Father to those He chooses. <sup>27</sup> *All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* Matthew 11:27 My hope in the weeks to come is that you will choose to be chosen. In other words, I pray that you will open your minds and hearts to the revelation of God in the Word. Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). He revealed the Father in His words and actions, so I'll be closing each attribute with how it was revealed in Jesus.

Let us, with the apostle Paul, set everything else aside for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. May we fall in love with Him more deeply as we come to know and understand just who He is. We'll see the greatness of His heart (Ephesians 3:18-19). We'll try to fathom the vastness of His love. We'll be invited to abandon our fears and fall into His arms (Isaiah 40:11).

This is the season when many travel for vacation. I encourage you to not miss one of the sermons in the series. Sign up to receive them on-line, or watch for them to come up on vimeo/paulwallace/videos.com or my web site, bible-sermons.com. Let's prepare our hearts in prayer this week, and all through this series, to see God more clearly than we ever have before.

#### Questions

- 1 Why is the world moving to relativism?
- 2 Why is the origins debate over?
- 3 Go over Spurgeon's quote.
- 4 What can we boast about?
- 5 What is the link between understanding and knowing?
- 6 Why don't people know God?

#### Commented [notes21]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> • Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

#### Commented [notes22]: Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> • And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

#### Commented [notes23]: Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> • looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

#### Commented [PW24]: John 14:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

#### Commented [notes25]: John 1:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> • In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

#### Commented [notes26]: John 1:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> • And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

#### Commented [notes27]: Ephesians 3:18-19 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> • may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
<sup>19</sup> • and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

#### Commented [notes28]: Isaiah 40:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> • He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

- 7 How did Moses ask to know God?
- 8 What was Paul's goal in life?
- 9 What does everyone have in common in the kingdom of God?
- 10 How will every sermon in this series end? Why?