

Back to the Basics

Who is God and Why Should I Care?

I grew up near a small town in Western Kentucky. Both sides of my parents' family had lived there for over a hundred years and most people in town knew my mama so it was commonplace that people would stop and yack at her whenever she was out and about. It is said that my mama had the gift of gab. My wife has pointed out to me that that particular gift is hereditary...

I remember on one particular occasion I had travelled from Colorado where I was stationed back home to visit my folks with my first child, Cat, who was then 5 months old. Now, my mama never had any girls so a granddaughter was a BIG DEAL. Mama, Cat, and I were at the store when we ran across some lady mama knew and they started talking. After a few minutes, mama, who had gracious Southern manners, realized I did not know this lady so she introduced us. She said, and I quote, "This is my granddaughter, Catherine, and this is my granddaughter's father." It was at that moment I realized my new station in life. I had lost son status...

While this story is about a humbling experience for me, I tell it this morning to introduce you to the topic of introduction! When we introduce someone to another person, we generally do it by explaining who they are AND who they are to us. Now let's re-run that humbling scenario by including the introduction of

EVERYONE present. It should have gone something like this, “This is my granddaughter, Catherine, and this is my granddaughter’s father, and THIS IS OUR FATHER, GOD. He is infinite and perfect Spirit, a person, Who created and sustains the universe and all in it. He is actively involved in history and in people to bring the world to the destiny He planned for it from the beginning. Let me tell you more about God, this is what He is like...”

This morning I hope to accomplish two things. First, I would like to tell you about what God is like –His characteristics or attributes - and define some terms commonly used to describe these attributes. Then, I want to offer you five reasons it’s important to know God. My prayer is that this will help us better understand our Holy Father and be able to justify to others why it is critical to do so. I hope to do this in a manner which follows rule #3 of Handling the Scriptures that I covered in last week’s sermon, “Accurately handling the Scriptures means that the truth is explained so all can understand.”

I will use my mama’s revised introduction as the framework of God’s attributes I want to cover.

GOD IS: SPIRIT

John 4:24 in the Amplified Bible tells of how Jesus spoke to the woman at the well about God, “²⁴ God is a Spirit (a spiritual Being) and those who worship Him must

worship *Him* in spirit and in truth (reality).” The very basis of the second commandment is that God cannot be depicted: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.” (Ex 20:4). Baptists and most Protestants believe that aids to worship such as saints, statues, or relics are not aids but limits to a person’s concept of God. God is too great to be depicted. The only depiction that has been seen with human eyes is Jesus, God incarnate. God is spirit. His majesty cannot be described. He is in time and beyond time, in His creation and beyond it, immensely greater than history but involved in it. The OT frequently refers to God in human terms, a practice called anthropomorphic, meaning *in the form of man*. The Bible refers to God’s finger, His footstool, His eyes, His hand, and His face among others. These references are poetic or picturesque ways of speaking of God and do not mean that some parts of the Bible teach that God is physical and other parts teach that He is spirit.

GOD IS: PERSON

The Bible presents God as a Person when it discusses or assumes His behavior as a Person. He is conscious of Himself; He exercises thought and feeling; and He makes decisions. He is free; He relates to us in a personal way; and He acts in history. All of these characteristics are those of persons, not things or mystical

concepts. God created humankind in His image; ergo, if we are persons, He must be a person.

GOD IS: INFINITE

God's infinite nature can be described in five words:

Eternal: God has always existed; there has never been a time when He did not exist. Since humans think in terms of time, we cannot fully grasp this concept.

We must remember that God created time just as He created everything else.

Somehow, He is above and beyond time.

Immutable: The word means *unchanging*. God is the same yesterday, tomorrow, and forever (Ps. 102:27; Heb.13:8). This concept is confusing to some as they consider texts that indicate that God “repented.” At least thirteen times the OT pictures God as changing His mind. All of these texts describe God as changing His course of action in response to attitudes or actions of people. Never did God change His direction, alter His goal, violate His holiness, or act capriciously. In fact, we can have confidence in God because He will, for example, withhold promised judgment if people repent. God's immutability guarantees that He will save as He said He would; He will punish sin as He promised He would; He will move this world toward the destiny He planned for it before the beginning of time. His nature never changes.

Omnipresent: This word means that God is everywhere at all times. There is never a time when His presence does not extend to all that is. Psalms 139: 7-10 tells us,

“Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.”

Wherever we are, at any time, God is there. Elijah chided the prophets of Baal that their god perhaps had gone on a journey, and so they would have to wait until he returned before he could hear their prayers. No worries – our God is always here.

Omniscient: This word means that God is all-knowing. There is nothing that He does not know. His insight pierces to the inner heart of every person everywhere simultaneously. The full range of scientific knowledge is known to Him. As humans feel that science has made God unnecessary, they would do well to compare their knowledge with God’s. The truth is that God knows us better than we know ourselves. We would do well to turn our lives over to Him who has a good and perfect plan for us.

Omnipotent: God is all-powerful. No force, physical or spiritual, holds more power than God. The Bible teaches that God has **all** power. Any power Satan or an evil ruler has is held because God allows it. When Jesus ascended into Heaven, His disciples remembered that He has said, “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt 28:18). If you want to be on the power side, the winning side, be a disciple.

GOD IS: PERFECT

This refers to God’s characteristics, sometimes called moral attributes.

Theologians generally list all of them under four:

Holiness: We frequently use a very shallow definition of the word holy. For example, a holy thing is something used on an altar at church; or a holy person lives above and beyond the call of duty. These are pale images of the Biblical meaning of holy. The word holy has several uses in the Bible: (1) God’s divine nature; (2) something set apart for God’s use; (3) moral qualities. In regard to God, His very nature is perfect holiness. The Bible tells us repeatedly to “be Holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” Life is to be lived by believers in ways that reflect whose we are. Our thoughts are to be set apart for God; our lives are to be holy sacrifices; our deeds are to be above reproach. God’s holiness is absolute

moral perfection, which is reflected in His dependability, love, grace, mercy, judgment, honor, and very being.

Righteousness: God affirms right as opposed to wrong. Every one of His actions is right, and He has provided guidelines, such as commandments, for people to follow that help us to be righteous. His righteousness demands that He punish unrepentant evil and judge injustice. But, His righteousness also is redemptive; for God has provided a way for unrighteous people (all of us) to be redeemed, to be made righteous through the blood of Christ.

Truth: God is the source of all truth and is Himself ultimate Truth. Nothing about God is untrue. The attribute of truthfulness refers to the unchanging absoluteness of God, but it also reflects the fact that full truth eludes us apart from God. Man is capable of discovering facts, but is incapable of interpreting those facts adequately apart from God. No matter what realm of truth is being discussed – whether physical sciences, philosophy, or religion – it is grounded in God. Truth never contradicts truth. If we have problems with apparent facts and feel that they contradict the truth of God, the problem resides within us and not with the truth. The inquiring, believing mind can reconcile apparent contradictions through God's leadership.

Love: God is love. God's love is the kind that seeks the best for those whom He created and does so at great cost to Himself. The book of Hosea tells the beautiful story of the love of Hosea for his unfaithful wife, Gomer. His love for her was so strong and persistent that he did not give up on her, in spite of her unfaithfulness. This is a picture of God's love, even for the rebellious and ungrateful. The crucifixion of Jesus is the supreme demonstration of such love.

GOD IS: CREATOR

This is more than His action in creating the universe. It also includes His continuing work to sustain that which He created, and His involvement in His creation as He moves it toward the destiny for which He created it. Romans 1 points out that God has revealed enough of Himself through His creation that mankind should be able to discover Him through it; so obvious should God be in His creation that people are without excuse for not knowing and acknowledging God. Instead, people tend to worship the creation and not the Creator.

God created out of nothingness (*ex nihilo*). If any raw material existed prior to creation, then we must account for its creation. The Biblical certainty is that God spoke and the creation came into existence.

God is separate from His creation. The Bible sets God apart from His created order. The creation is not God. God does not need His creation; He exists independent of it.

God had a reason to create. Why did God create a universe He did not need? For His love and His glory. A parent does not need a child, but the parent's life may be enriched by the presence of a loving child, a child who loves because he or she chooses to love. It is correct theology to say that God is enriched by His creation, but He does not need His creation.

God sustains His creation. Colossians 1:17 tells us that, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." God the sustainer is in control of His universe. He established the universe to operate according to certain rules, which might be called natural processes. God cooperates with the natural processes which He Himself established. The universe continues to be subject to God; God did not simply create the universe and the step apart from its functioning.

God moves the world toward a planned destiny. This concept is called Providence. God, before the foundation of the world, planned the world's destiny. Christian hope is based on the absolute certainty that God will defeat all opposition and bring the world to its planned conclusion.

GOD IS: SOVEREIGN

God is in control. God does not delegate His sovereignty to any person or organization; He relates directly to the individual. The sovereignty of God influences everything in the universe. He is sovereign over His created order and over every individual person. His sovereignty is ultimate and complete. All power that exists exists because God allows it. He is sovereign over the believer and intends for the believer to acknowledge that sovereignty in loving obedience.

Now that we have provided a descriptive framework for Who God is, let us briefly turn to my second point which is, ineloquently stated, “Why should I Care?”

I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE:

Knowing God gives me the desire to be like Him. The most natural thing in the world is to become like our parents – even if we don’t want to be like them! How many times have you heard people protest that, “I am NOT going to be like my dad when I’m a parent.” Yet, inevitably, they end up just like their parent. Why? Because they know their parents; they’ve been around them. Their parents’ thumbprint is indelibly imprinted on their lives. That’s the way it is with God our Father. The more I get to know my God, the more I become like Him. I discover He’s holy; I want to be holy; I discover He’s strong; I want to be more confident; I discover He’s good; I want to be better. I have the ultimate role model parent. I

want to be like my Father and in order to be like Him, I need to know what He is like.

I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE:

Knowing God reveals the truth about me. When we study the Lord God we discover He's holy and we are unholy. It doesn't hurt us to know that – it helps! We discover that He's perfect and we're imperfect...He's strong and we're weak...He's patient and we're impatient...He's in control, and our lives are often fractured by fear and worry. And something occurs in that contrast that causes His character to overshadow our need. The result is marvelous – the knowledge of the Holy One equips us to see the truth and to change. When we see ourselves as we really are, we are prompted to lean on Him and to trust Him to make us like He is.

I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE:

Knowing God enables me to interpret our world. When we see God in all His sovereignty and glory, our whole perspective changes. When we understand that the earth is under God's control, our pride can vanish as we realize that He is the one calling the shots, not us. When you get hold of the knowledge of God and begin to see that He is in charge, you won't panic every time you read the newspaper. You won't give up hope when there is an earthquake somewhere. You won't live in fear of terrorism or some fatal disease. You will realize that God

is large and in charge and you can have peace knowing that He has a good and perfect plan for your life and the world.

I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE:

Knowing God makes me stronger and more secure. The author, James Boice, said this about the strength of our God. “The church and the individual believer have become weak due to an acute lack of sound spiritual knowledge. We have let our thinking become conformed to the spirit of the age. We have forgotten what God is like and what He promises to do for those who trust Him. The God of the Bible is not weak; He is all-mighty. Nothing happens without His permission or apart from His purposes – even evil. Nothing surprises or puzzles Him. Therefore those who know Him rightly act with boldness assured that God is with them to accomplish His own desirable purposes in their lives.” God strengthens and secures His people. Those who know their God operate in such a context of confidence, that they can face whatever...and display strength and take action.

I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE:

Knowing God introduces me to the eternal dimension of existence. In John 17:3, Jesus is praying to the Father as He says, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.”

Knowing God introduces me to the invisible world of God's kingdom. I see through eyes that aren't given to everyone. 1 Cor. 2:9 continues this idea, ... "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

The natural person isn't born with this kind of insight. It's given at the new birth. When Jesus comes into your heart, He introduces you to an eternal dimension for living. And that perspective lifts the mind ABOVE the present, irksome details of life. What we gain is an eternal dimension of life.

Even after providing a description of God and justifying why knowing Him is of paramount importance, the Scriptures plainly tell us that there are many things about God which will remain incomprehensible to us in this lifetime. My advice to you is not to get wrapped around the axle because you can't explain the truth of the Trinity. Don't lose sleep trying to figure out how a perfectly Holy God allows sin in His world and quit worrying about what the Glory of God "looks" like.

Have faith knowing that our infinite, loving God is in control. And that He is pleased when we walk by faith and He is glorified when we worship in truth.

