

By Michael Huskey

Introduction to this class

- This is the class where we are going to roll up our sleeves and dive in to learn, discuss, debate, and ultimately glorify God in a way that other classes may not have the time to do.
- You will learn words and concepts that you have probably never heard before. Our intent is to leave no one behind, so don't be shy to ask questions if you do not understand something.
 - i. I make a distinction between something that is difficult to understand and something that is difficult to accept. There will be things that are difficult to accept, which we will diligently study and ask for the Spirit of God to reveal, enlighten, and teach us. If at the end of our time studying there still exists a difficulty to accept, we can discuss further privately. But if something is difficult to understand, we will take as much time as we can in order to help you understand, at least till the point in which the class as a whole can tolerate.
- We are not going to rush through this to simply cover more real estate. Our intent is to go as deep as we can in order to answer looming questions about who God is and learn what the Bible teaches us concerning Him.
 - i. Congratulations, you have all just become blue collar workers because this will take work.
- There will be disagreement. One of the greatest things a good disciple of Christ can learn is how to disagree.
 - i. You will learn things about God that have been accumulated for over two thousand years by our brothers and sisters labor in the faith. This will be a biblical teaching on the attributes of God.
 - ii. If you disagree with something, and you may, please raise your concern. If you do not want to raise your concern in class, feel free to see me, text me, call me at any time and We can further discuss what has been taught.
 - iii. Disagreement should always be done for two purposes: Love and truth.
 - a. Our goal is to know and understand truth — this is our quest, and make no mistake, the Christian life is a quest for truth. The truth of God may not be what we want it to be. We all have an idea of who God is, we are all theologians, but our idea of God can be wrong because of our nature. Sometimes we would rather ascribe to Him our attributes rather than understand who He says He is in Scripture. God is not like us, and therefore our pursuit of truth needs to be rooted in God's Word as opposed to our own thoughts about who we wish Him to be.
 - b. Our quest for truth may lead to disagreement but this must be done in love. We either love to be right or we love the truth. The fact is, it is hard to get passed our pride sometimes and admit that we are wrong. But at the bottom of disagreement must be to desire to truly know God rather than what we assume about Him. We must love the truth and seek truth in love.

- c. We should love the truth because we love the people around us. We love people too much to let them believe something that is false about God.
- Relative truth does not exist.
- Majority or collective truth does not exist.
 - i. There is an absolute truth that goes beyond what an individual or a collective believes — the truth of God.

The Attributes of God

Introduction

“High views of God lead to high and holy living. High views of God lead to exalted, transcendent worship of God. But low views of God lead to low and base living.” Steve Lawson

- The most important thing about you is your view of God. That is a big statement. Let’s qualify it.
 - i. Your view of God will have eternal consequences. There is no neutral position when it comes to God: you either love Him or hate Him. You are either for Him or against Him. You are either in His family or you are His enemy.¹
 - ii. As a believer there is nothing more important than learning who God is. It is impossible to love someone that you know nothing about. The greater your understanding of who God is, the greater your love of Him will grow. You cannot love something about God that you know little or nothing about.
 - a. We are commanded by Jesus to love God with our whole *minds* in **Matthew 22:37**. One of the ways we can do this is by studying His attributes.
 - b. If we are to deepen our knowledge of God, we must have an accurate and clear understanding of who He is. It is impossible to grow in our love of God and understanding of Scripture if we have a wrong view of God in our minds.
 - c. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” The more we understand God the greater we can glorify Him, and the more we understand God the greater our joy will be made complete.
- All of theology is for all of life.
 - i. The way you understand God will affect every part of your life.
- A high view of God will lead to greater worship and adoration of God.

¹ Colossians 1:21; Romans 5:10; Psalm 92:9; 1 Corinthians 15:25–26; Matthew 12:30

“IN ONE OF HIS LETTERS TO ERASMUS, LUTHER SAID, ‘YOUR thoughts of God are too human.’ Probably that renowned scholar resented such a rebuke, the more so, since it proceeded from a miner’s son; nevertheless, it was thoroughly deserved. We too, though having no standing among the religious leaders of this degenerate age, prefer the same charge against the majority of the preachers of our day, and against those who, instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, lazily accept the teaching of others. The most dishonoring and degrading conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of the Scriptures is quite unknown.” Arthur Pink ²

- i. If you are lacking in your desire to worship God, every day of your life, in song, in action, in speech, in life, in the workplace and in the marketplace, it is probably because you haven’t taken the time to really get to know Him.
 - If we want to grow in our intimacy with God, studying the attributes of God is a good place to start.
 - In this class we will look closely at the attributes of God. This will sharpen your understanding of God, who He is, what He has done, and why this is so important.
 - The higher your view of God, the lower your view of man becomes — this is a good thing. God is always the hero and His love for us is greater than we can comprehend. It is the knowledge of God that helps us better define ourselves.
 - i. We cannot understand how we are made in God’s image unless we understand who God is and be accurate in our understanding.
- 1 Peter 1:16** *because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”*
- a. How can we be holy if we do not understand the holiness of God? Understanding the holiness of God will help us define and live our Christian lives. We can apply this to love, mercy, justice, etc.
 - ii. A high view of God and a low view of man will help us in every aspect of life.
 - Has anyone here ever been disappointed with someone?
 - a. The greater that we understand that humans are imperfect, fallen, in need of a Savior, and completely dependent, the lower our expectation of man becomes. The more accurate our view of God becomes, the more our expectations are placed upon Him rather than upon the shoulders of the person you are disappointed with.

² *The Attributes of God*. Chapter 5

- Man is always in distress and God is always the hero.
 - i. God is always the hero. The more we learn to place our cares upon the Lord and believe in His divine sovereignty, the more we can reflect who He is to those around us. And that is what we are called to do.
 - ii. Man is always in distress. We are not called to size up others' reflections of God to us. When we understand that our wives, husbands, children, and friends are in distress, that they are fallen people, broken, and in need, we can set aside our pride and lashing out when we are not treated to suit our expectations. So, a high view of God and low view of man will give us the right kind of contentment in our relationships.
- There is no greater knowledge that you can have than having the correct view of God. If we are wrong about God, we will be wrong in every other place concerning God and concerning the way we approach life.
 - i. Many questions we have concerning Scripture will be clarified with a greater understanding of God.
 - ii. The way we approach life in family, in business, and in recreation will be drastically changed when we have a greater understanding of God.
- Understanding the attributes of God should have a positive effect on your evangelism.
 - i. Any evangelism that is presented without some kind of mention of God's holiness, justice, love, and mercy is an incomplete evangelism.
- What is an attribute of God?
 - ❖ An attribute refers to the qualities that belong to a person. It refers to His nature, His person, His perfections, His essence, and the *being* of God.

Psalm 89 5–18 *5 The heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. 6 For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD, 7 A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, And awesome above all those who are around Him? 8 O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. 9 You rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them. 10 You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain; You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. 11 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it contains, You have founded them. 12 The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name. 13 You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted. 14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You. 15 How blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! O LORD, they walk in the light of Your countenance. 16 In Your name they*

rejoice all the day, And by Your righteousness they are exalted. 17 For You are the glory of their strength, And by Your favor our horn is exalted. 18 For our shield belongs to the LORD, And our king to the Holy One of Israel.

- Each of the attributes of God that we will study are eternally God's, unchangeable and inseparable from God. These attributes are not something that God simply possesses; they are who He is.
 1. God's attributes are eternal.
 - i. God's attributes did not manifest with creation. He has always possessed and will always continue to possess each and every attribute.
 2. God's attributes are unchangeable.
 - i. God never grows weary of sharing His attributes with us.
 - ii. His attributes never grow weaker, and they never grow stronger.
 3. God's attributes are inseparable.
 - i. Each attribute of God is in perfect unity with the other. We separate the attributes of God in order to understand each one in a greater way. In reality, these attributes are inseparable. This is an important point.
 - a. God's attributes are much like God's Law. In the book of James, we are told that the Law of God is a perfect unity. *Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*³ This is because the Law of God is holy. To break one Law shows that we are guilty of not *loving God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds.*⁴ Likewise, God is holy. We cannot play one attribute of God against another. For instance: His love and His wrath go hand in hand. We will get deeper into this as our study progresses.

The Simplicity of God.

- Why would God be considered simple?
 - ❖ A complex being would be divided into parts where God is wholly One. A human being is divided into parts (nose, mouth, eyes, etc.) where God is entirely perfect without division.
 - i. A part is less than a whole. We cannot think of God as being independent attributes making up His being. In this respect, God is a simple being.

³ James 2:10

⁴ Matthew 22:37

- a. Not that He is simple by way of easy to understand, but simple in His nature of being.
- Why does it matter or what is at stake that we should understand that God is a simple being?
 - ❖ The absoluteness of God.
- What is a part?
 - ❖ A part is anything in a subject that is less than a whole and without the subject would be different than it is.
- Does God depend on anything to be God?
 - ❖ Something made of parts is dependent upon each part for its whole. God is not dependent upon anything.
- God is absolute in sufficient reason for Himself. He is also absolute in sufficient reason for anything else.
 - i. Nothing made of parts offers in itself the sufficient reason for its existence or attributes.
 - a. To be made of parts by necessity demands being a creature. All compositions suppose a composer.
- Our tendency is to project our complexity and attributes upon our understanding of who God is because we relate God to what we know about ourselves.
 - i. In this study we will learn that God isn't entirely like us, we simply reflect, dimly, His communicable attributes.
 - a. God is not love in virtue of love; God is love in virtue of God.

“For whatever is composed of parts is not altogether one, but is in some sort plural, and diverse from itself; and either in fact or in concept is capable of dissolution. But these things are alien to thee, than whom nothing better can be conceived of. Hence there are no parts in thee, Lord, nor art thou more than one. But thou art so true a unitary being, and so identical with thyself, that in no respect art thou unlike thyself; rather thou art unity itself, indivisible by any conception. Therefore life, and wisdom, and the rest are not parts of thee, but all are one; and each of these is the whole, which thou art, and which all the rest are.” Anselm ⁵

⁵ Anselm, *Proslogion*

“God is the most simple being; for that which is first in nature, having nothing beyond it, cannot by any means be thought to be compounded; for whatsoever is so, depends upon the parts whereof it is compounded, and so is not the first being: now God being infinitely simple, hath nothing in himself which is not himself, and therefore cannot will any change in himself, he being his own essence and existence.” Stephen Charnock ⁶

- This is why God is not dependent on His creation to feel satisfaction.
 - i. God creates so that His creature can participate in some of who He is, to participate in His glory.

Incommunicable Attributes of God

- This simply refers to the attributes of God that we do not and cannot possess.
 - What would be examples of God’s incommunicable attributes?
 - ❖ His eternality, the Trinity, His omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.
- Though we do not share these attributes with God, God shares with us the fact that He possesses these attributes.
 - God was under no obligation to share with us anything about Himself. Why does He share with us, on the pages of Scripture, His incommunicable attributes?
 - ❖ God truly wants to be known by us. He loves us and wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - i. We cannot love God as we should if He did not reveal Himself to us. God reveals Himself to us in a way that we can understand Him.
 - ii. We are limited in our creatureliness as to our comprehensibility of God, yet we should strive with all that we are to understand about God as much as possible during this lifetime.
 - a. This will not only help us to grow in our love toward God but help us be of help to other people.
 - iii. This is the chief thing that separates Christianity from gnostic religions. We want to teach people all that we know about God. There are no secrets in Christianity.

⁶ Charnock. *The Existence and Attributes of God*. I.333

- a. One of the chief things that Gnosticism teaches is a secret knowledge.

Communicable Attributes of God

- What does the communicable attributes of God mean?

Ephesians 5:1–2 *1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

- Communicable attributes of God refer to God's attributes that He has given to mankind.

Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness . . .*

- We are image bearers of God.
 - i. God, being all knowing, knew that Adam would disobey Him and all of mankind would be plummeted into sin and rebellion against Him. God was under no obligation to give us any of His attributes, but what an amazing grace that His merciful kindness reached down to us and blessed us with being made in the image of God.
 - ii. We should see each other as made in the image of God, as immortal. Understanding that we are image bearers of God should change everything about our human relationships.
- Do you view others as being made in the image of God?

What about your spouse? What about your parents? What about the undeserving? What about your enemy?

- The communicable attributes of God are worked in us and through us by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22–25 *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

The Knowability and Incomprehensibility of God

- If God is incomprehensible, then why are we studying His attributes?
- ❖ God is incomprehensible in the sense that we are limited to what we can understand about Him. We cannot have an exhaustively comprehensive knowledge of all that He is.

“The finite cannot grasp the infinite.” John Calvin

“For whom even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus, such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our slight capacity. To do this He must descend far beneath His loftiness.” John Calvin⁷

- God communicates Himself to us in a way that we can understand. A kind of baby talk that we call anthropomorphic language.
 - i. We will talk more about anthropomorphic language in the next chapter.
- Karl Barth (a 20th century Swiss Reformed Theologian) made a distinction about God by saying that “God is wholly other.”
- Why is that an incorrect statement?
- Though Barth was attempting to show that God is big and was attempting to highlight the glory and majesty of God, his statement about God is incorrect.
 - i. If God was wholly other, it would be impossible for us to know anything about Him at all. There would be no common point in which to connect anything about Him.
- The problem with Barth’s statement is the word *wholly*. That indicates entirely, without exception.
 - i. Unfortunately, Barth was aware of his concept but failed to connect the impossibility of communication between God and man if there were absolutely nothing in common between us.
 - a. Generally, in theology words hold great weight and do not change over time like common language.
- Barth and those who believe this theology would argue that God communicates through natural revelation and Scripture. But again, if there was absolutely no point of reference to understand God, it would be impossible to understand anything whatsoever about Him.

“Though God can be known truly, Scripture also reveals that God is not comprehensively or exhaustively knowable to humans in any aspect of His being or actions. Humans are limited to time and space and in Adam are corrupted by indwelling sin, which has made them rebellious toward God and has darkened their understanding of God’s revelation in

⁷ Calvin. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Chapter 13.1

the Bible and in nature. God is eternal and holy, transcending time and space, infinitely omniscient, and absolutely morally pure. God alone is great. Man was created as a different and inferior order of being. Even in his originally created state, humanity could not know God exhaustively, but after the fall of Adam, even the knowledge humans can have of God is corrupted by sin.” John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue.⁸

- Man cannot see God and live.
 - i. This is a big God / little man view, which is the right view, and the view all Christians should hold.

Exodus 33:20 *But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”*⁹

- God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

1 Timothy 6:15b–16a *He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.*

Psalms 145:3 *Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

Revelation 10:4 *When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.”*

Psalms 139:6 *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it. 17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.*

Isaiah 55:9 *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

Romans 11:33–34 *33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?*

- Theology has fallen victim to pragmatism which has led to outright laziness.

⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue. *Biblical Doctrine. A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*

⁹ Leviticus 16:2

- What is pragmatism?

“Pragmatic theory of truth is an American idea of philosophy that undermines Christianity. It has its roots in Darwinism and secular humanism. Today it is often called relativism because it rejects the notion of absolute right and wrong, absolute good and evil, absolute truth and error and redefines these things as what is helpful and meaningful in a particular moment. In other words, pragmatism is a shifting sand, changing tomorrow what was true yesterday if what was true yesterday is no longer working. Right and wrong changes depending on what works. Good is only good if it helps today. Evil changes if it doesn’t work. In this kind of secular ideology, doctrine and theology is cast from the window and replaced with methodology. Pragmatism is sometimes true because of universal law but what is right should never be called pragmatic because that would make what is right capable of change.”¹⁰ Michael Huskey

- i. We will not be pragmatic in this class.
- ii. I have asked theological questions in the past and received this answer. “That isn’t important, we just have to have faith, faith is all that is important, there are some things we just cannot know about God.”
 - a. This is an unacceptable answer and is the heart of pragmatic thinking. While it is true that there are things about God that we cannot understand, we will not be pragmatic in our approach, this does an injustice to God. To not make every attempt to understand His perfect character and nature is to not love Him.
 - b. Faith isn’t blind. Faith is rooted in an object and that object is God. We cannot have proper faith if we do not know the object of our faith. The more we understand the object of our faith, the more our faith can grow by the grace of God who is the author and finisher of our faith.
- Pragmatism is a violation of loving God with our whole minds.

Questions

- How does a high view of God and low view of man help us?
- What are examples of God’s communicable attributes?
- What are examples of God’s incommunicable attributes?
- How does viewing someone else as created in the image of God change or inform the way you treat them?

¹⁰ Michael Huskey. *Tear Down the Church*

- In what way is God simple?
- In what way does God make Himself known to us today?
- Is faith a leap in the dark or is it fixed in an object?

Notes