

## Attributes of God Part 1

Today I want to talk about the subject, which is probably the hardest subject in the world to understand and it is the subject of who God is. Who is God? I am convinced the heaviest word in any language is the word for God. Probably the most profound word in any language in the world is the word for God. And probably the most misunderstood and you think of this, the most misunderstood term in the world is the term for God. I am convinced that at the heart, first of all with Christians, at the heart of most spiritual problems is the misconception of who God is in His basic nature. In fact, I would say much of religious heresy is the result of a misunderstanding of the basic nature of God. And once we have a proper understanding of God, then usually most of the areas of our life coincide with who God is and what He desires for each one of us.

In Acts 17, verse 23, Paul talks about coming across the statue to the unknown God. An unknown God cannot be served, trusted, or loved. And yet I am convinced to many, even Christians of the world, God is unknown.

In Daniel 11:32, it says “And those who know their God should do great exploits.” The key is when we come to properly understand God, then we can trust Him to live through our lives and that is when we see great things happen. Those who know their God should do great exploits.

And yet here is a problem that keeps many of us from a proper relationship with our heavenly Father. In the book of Psalms 50:21, the word of God says this, “You thought that I was just like you.” You thought that I was just like you. If there is any one thing that we project upon our Heavenly Father it is the image of our earthly father. Let me share what I mean. If our earthly father did not spend time with us, it is hard for a young person to grow up and think well my Heavenly Father wants to spend time with me. If our earthly father would not listen to us, it is hard to grow up thinking well my Heavenly Father wants to listen to me. If our earthly father does not talk to us, it is hard for that child to grow up and think well my Heavenly Father wants to talk to me through His word. If there is any one thing that we project upon our Heavenly Father it is the image of our earthly father. As God said, “You look at me altogether as you look at yourselves.”

I have learned one thing over the years since I came to Christ; my Heavenly Father is sure a lot different than what my earthly father was. And for me, I thank God for that because my earthly father was an alcoholic and very abusive verbally and emotionally. As a result I projected that upon my Heaven Father and that was one of the barriers to me truly coming to Christ and loving a Heavenly Father.

And when I hear the statement, and I hear this a lot from young people, they say, “Well you know I am enjoying myself too much right now, talk to me later about Christ. I am enjoying myself too much to really commit my life to Christ.” And now at my age and having seen God do so many marvelous things, I look at that statement and think it is dumb... because if anyone truly understood who God is, they would never say I am enjoying myself too much to truly commit myself to Him.

Now the question is; Who is God? We basically know God through His attributes. God has revealed Himself in the scriptures, because with our finite minds, we cannot reason through who God is. Plato once said, the philosopher, he said, "If there is anything about God that our minds cannot tell us, then the gods are going to have to reveal it." Well I believe in this situation there is a lot about God we can never realize or reason through in our minds, and therefore God is going to have to reveal it and that's the story of Christianity, that God has revealed Himself in the scriptures. Now He has revealed himself through showing us what His attributes are.

Now what is an attribute? Most people think that an attribute is a part of God. We say God is love. We mean, well a part of God is love. We say God is just; a part of God is just. We say God is faithful; well a part of God is faithful. Therefore, if you take all of His attributes and add them up, the sum total equals God.

You know, I finished seminary thinking that. And it wasn't until later, through my own personal study and devotion and everything, I realized that is not a true concept. An attribute is not a part of God. Look at it this way. An attribute is a different perspective, a different glance of who God is in His basic nature. When we say God is love, we don't mean a little part of God over here is love. That is something that is true of God in His nature. When we say God is just, it doesn't mean a part of God is just. It means that is something that is true of God in His character and His nature.

And so an attribute is not a part of God. Look at it this way it's something that is true of God in His basic nature. And so when we say, well God is loving, He is simply being Himself. It is not a certain part of God exercising something, God is simply being Himself.

Now, how has God revealed Himself to us? So often we think that God is removed from us. Well I believe the scriptures have brought God to us. Now in order to experience that, we need to know how He's revealed Himself. And let's look at that, some of His attributes.

The first one is this – God has revealed Himself as being omnipotent. Omnipotent. Now when I see that word, it doesn't say a thing to me. There are two parts of it, "Omni" in the Greek means all. Omnipotent, "potent" means powerful, all powerful.

Well I learned years ago that for something to be lived out in my life, I have got to bring it down to where I understand it in a simple way. So when I hear words like, God is omniscience, omnipotent, it does not say anything to me. That's not part of my vocabulary. So I redefine it without losing the meaning to where it speaks to me, then I am able to live it out in my life. So every time I see the word, omnipotent, I think of this, "He can do it." That's what it means, He is all powerful. He can do it. So maybe the rest of your life, whenever you hear the phrase, God is omnipotent, you will immediately think, He can do it. And the scriptures point out that "He ruleth over all the kingdoms of the heathen and nothing is too great for God." But often... Luther said once, Martin Luther, that our thoughts about God are too human. And I believe that's true because we rationalize through the way we think God will be and not the way He has revealed Himself.

Let me illustrate that with a little humorous situation. Johnny was in Sunday school and he came home and his mom, over lunch, said, "Well Johnny, what did you learn in Sunday School?" He said, "We talked about Moses crossing the Red Sea." "Really? Well, what happened, Johnny?" "Oh Mom, you would not believe it. They were in captivity with the Egyptians and he broke out all the rifles and everything else and pulled in the tanks, got into the troop carriers and they took off for Israel." But he said, "They looked back and here came all the Egyptians in the Hummers, the military vehicles, and so they sped up a little more and they got to the Red Sea and they didn't know what to do. So they called in the Core of Engineers, Mom. And they went and built a pontoon bridge all the way across the Red Sea. And they drove everything across and then they put dynamite explosives all over. And as soon as the Egyptians got half way across, Moses ordered that it be blown up and they pushed the lever and they blew up all the Egyptians and the Israelites were saved." And the mother says, "Johnny, is that really what they taught you?" "No Mom, but if I told it to you the way they told it to us, you'd never believe it." And you know so often we try to do that. We try to rationalize away who God is and how powerful He is.

The Bible says that God is omnipotent. He can do it. He spoke to nothing and something came into existence. Now how does this affect us in our personal life and walk with Christ? One, it allows me to pray for the impossible. It allows me to pray for things that I would never dream of praying for if I didn't know He can do it. He is omnipotent. Second, when you are really tired, He gives strength to the weary.

It was first brought home to my attention, a number of years ago I was speaking at a conference, a very large one, and I had had two solid weeks of heavy meetings and the week before a true revival broke out and I was exhausted. And I sat there that Saturday morning and I started to cry. I just said, God, I can't do it. I am so exhausted. I cannot, I don't even have the energy, to get up out of this chair and walk to that podium let alone give an hour talk. And I just said, "God, please help me." This might be just some little thing to someone, it was big to me.

They were introducing me and as they were going through the introduction, I just said, "I can't do it." Something happened when they started to applaud and they said, "Here's Josh McDowell." I cannot explain it, strength came into me, I stood up, and I walked to that podium and probably exerted almost more energy for one hour than I ever have in a talk. And I remember later, I said, "God, I can't believe it. But you are able." And I cannot tell you how many times in my life, I have had to call upon that strength. He is able.

And then, I think because we know that He can do it, when we face what appear to be insurmountable problems we need the Holy Spirit to recall to our minds, He is omnipotent. He is able. He can do it. And I think it gives you a different attitude in facing what appear to be insurmountable problems.

Then the Bible says that God is not only omnipotent, now get this one, He is omnipresent. That word doesn't say a thing to me. Now what it means in the Greek, the original language, "Omni" – all – present here. So this is a phrase that I use, "He is here." He can do it. And He is here. Now, what that means is, there is no point nearer to God than any other point. You say what? That's right. No point nearer to God than any other point. In the Psalms, the book

of Psalms, chapter 139 the word of God says this, starting with verse seven, “Where can I go from thy spirit, or where can I hide from thy presence? If I ascend to Heaven, thou art there. If I ascend to Sheol thou art there. If I take the wings of the dove and if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there thy hand will grip me and thy right hand will lay hold of me.” Whew. He is here. God is immediately accessible wherever you are. He is omnipresent. He is here.

You say, now wait a minute Josh, the Bible says to draw near to God. How can you draw near to God if there is no point closer to God than any other point? What the Bible means is this, when it talks about drawing near to God, it is speaking of your experience, not your position. Let me show you what I mean. I have had the privilege of being married to Dottie for twenty-nine years, consecutively, to one woman. And I think I am the luckiest man in the world to be married to Dottie. And over the years, we have drawn so close together, and I am still learning things about Dottie. And we are being drawn closer together – now, not physically in position, but emotionally in experience. And when God says to draw near to God, He’s not saying get closer physically in position but rather emotionally in your experience, to draw closer to God.

Then the Bible says that God is omniscient. Now here again it’s a tough word for me. “Omni” meaning all; science meaning “knowledge” and it means “He knows it.” That is how I translate omniscience. Omnipotent, He can do it. Omnipresent, “He is here.” Omniscient, “He knows it.” “He knows it.” And here is the thing about God. He knows not only things that has, is, or will happen but also knows all things that could or would have happened. He is all knowing, “He knows it.”

In Psalms 139 again, in the first six verses, the word of God says this, “Oh Lord, thou has searched me and known me. Thou doth know when I sit down and when I rise up. Thou doth understand my thoughts from afar and thou doesth scrutinize my path and my lying down and are intimately”, whoo, “are intimately acquainted”, in other words, no barriers, “intimately acquainted with all my ways. Thou have enclosed me behind and before and laid thy hand upon me, such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” He knows it, every thought. And the thing that amazed me here, God is just not the God of reality He’s a God of all possibilities.

Do you know how this affected me? After I came to the point where I placed my trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, for several years I tried to intellectually refute that and I could not. So I came to the point at the end of the second year in the university where I placed my trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. A short while after that I came to a crisis of taking my whole future, everything, and placing it in the hands of God, with an active decision on my part.

My whole life centered around law school, that’s all I dreamed of and I had a full scholarship to law school, but I wasn’t quite sure that was God’s ultimate desire and will for me. And because of knowing that “He knows it”, He’s omniscient it helped me to make that decision. When I said, “God here is my life. Here’s my future. Here’s my future mate. Here’s my future profession. Here’s everything to my future.” And what helped me to make that decision so much easier is that I knew God knew all of the possibilities of my life. And because He loved me, He chose the best. And when I totally yielded my life to Him, He took all the possibilities and chose the best.

And this is one thing that has helped me over all the years to maintain a very high level of commitment to Christ is that I know I am right in the center of God's will. I know it is not just one of the possibilities; it's His number one choice. And so knowing that "He knows it", helped me to make that very choice. And then knowing that "He knows it", He's omniscient; it causes us to realize, nobody can inform on me. Nobody can go to God and say, "hey, do you know this about Josh McDowell, how can you trust him, do you know that?" He already knows it and He still loves me. Boy, you talk about being humbled. He knows you and He still loves you.

I don't have any fear of any skeleton coming crashing out of the closet in my relationship with God. If there is any skeleton there, then my wife wouldn't know, God does. "He knows it." He's acquainted with all of the intimacies of my life, everything, and I don't have that fear of a crashing skeleton coming out of the closet.

And then because "He knows it", I have no fear that there is some unknown weakness in my life that is going to destroy my relationship with God or Him ever using me. Why? "He knows it." He knows all the weaknesses. He knows the shortcomings and He still loves me and He still uses me. He can do it. He is here. And He knows it.

And then, it says that God is immutable. What does that mean? He never changes. He never changes. He is immutable. In Malachi chapter 3, verse 6 in the Old Testament, the word of God says, "I am the Lord. I change not." I am the Lord. I change not. His power can never diminish nor His glory ever fade. He will always be the same. He says I am the God who changes not. Now you say, now wait a minute, in Genesis chapter 6 and Numbers 23 and Isaiah 15, it says that God repented. So that shows that God changed. No, you see when it talks about God repenting, God accommodates His language to our limited capacity. You say, now what do you mean? When He institutes a change in dealing with men, it is because men changed in their relationship to Him. He is consistent with His basic nature. And so sometimes it will appear that God has changed His mind and the reason is, He has changed the way He relates to us because of what we have done. But it appears that He changed and that is when the Bible says, and God repented.

How does this apply to us? It encourages me to pray, and not thinking, well today He might hear my prayers, tomorrow He won't. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He never changes. So I know every day He will hear my prayers if I come in purity and faith before Him. He does not change. He won't acknowledge your request one day and deny it the next just out of His whim or because He changed. And then I do not have to worry if I am going to find God in a receptive mood or not. Oh Lord, I just pray you will hear my prayers today, if you're in a good mood. No. He never changes.

"He can do it." "He is here." "He knows it" and "He will never ever change." But here is the problem. As human beings, how we project our earthly relationships upon our Heavenly Father can so often over-ride the scriptural truth. So often and I would say, my relationship with my father, who was the town alcoholic – I never knew him sober until I was almost twenty years old – his physical abuse of my mother, his verbal abuse of me and the other kids and everything was so implanted in my mind a negative image of a father, that when the Bible talked and people would talk to me about their Heavenly Father, I couldn't grasp it. I could not grasp it.

And do you know, with many people today, especially singles, say from about twenty-two to about 35, 40 years of age, and now even younger, I would say in most places in the world – the number one barrier to someone coming to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the image of their earthly father. Because why? Like God said, you look at me altogether as you look at yourselves. And we project that upon our heavenly Father.

And so one of my prayers is that as we go through who God is, He may be your father, but He's not your old man. He is totally different than our earthly father. But then I think what a responsibility. I have three daughters and a son and the thing that has kept me on my, how would you say, kept me alert spiritually over all the years is to realize of my children coming to Christ, and what they think of God would depend so much of how they look at me and how they perceive me and what I do. Boy that is scary. And that's why so often I said, one of my biggest prayers is, "Oh God, help me as a father. Help me to reflect your attributes that my children will find it so much easier to come to you."

He may be your Father but He's not your old man.