

Jerimiah 9:23-24

The Knowledge of God

Open your Bible to...

Jer. 9:23 “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

Jer. 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me...

Pray

Intro

✓ God

Having completed our study through the book of Ephesians we're going to begin a new series this morning.

It will be topical in nature as we'll look at a number of different scriptures from various books of the Bible rather than doing a line-by-line exposition of a single book.

But as I have opportunity to cover for pastor Damian we'll only look at one subject, and that subject is...

...God.

Why? Well because as A.W. Tozer correctly observed...

*“The greatest thoughts that a man can entertain are
thoughts of God.”*

That's because there is nothing greater that we can think about than God...

Because if the God of the Bible exists, and I believe that He does, then everything else in Creation...

...both in the material realm and the world of the spirit, was made by Him and for Him and as such is less than Him.

While it is good and profitable for us to invest our time learning about physics, language, music, human relationships, angels, art and a thousand other subjects...

...ultimately there would be nothing for us to study if God hadn't created it!

And of course, we wouldn't be able to think at all if God had not made us.

So the most profitable use of our mind is to think often and deeply about God, Who He is, what He's like, and most importantly...

...how we can know Him!

✓ Correct thoughts about God

However, when we think about God it is imperative that we think correct thoughts about Him and His nature.

For if we create an image of God in our mind, who He is, and what He's like, as anything other than Who He truly is, then we have created an idol in our mind...

...and God hates idolatry for it leads people down a path in which they degrade and profane God to be nothing more than a higher version of themselves—a path that leads ultimately to destruction rather than eternal life.

The problem for the Christian who has an incorrect, and unbiblical understanding of Who God is, and what He is like...

...is that that person will be disappointed in life because God doesn't meet the expectations of the false image of God that they have created in their mind.

Remember that Jesus warned us that at His return He will judge a group of very religious people saying...

*"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' ~
Matt. 7:22-23*

This group that Jesus describes believed that they were serving God, however, as Jesus makes plain the god that they were serving was not the God revealed in the Bible.

So in our pursuit of the knowledge of God we must be faithful to receive the truth about God as revealed in the only authoritative source—the Bible...

...rather than creating a god of our own imagination, or the god of false religion, or the vain philosophies of Man!

Ap. The knowledge of God

The goal of our time together isn't just to gain knowledge about God, that would lead only to pride!

Rather, the goal of our study is to grow in our love for God, for that will lead to a purer form of worship and service to Him!

For I would contend that to know Him is to love Him, and to know Him better is to love Him more!

So I invite you to follow along with me as we seek to know God better that we might love Him more!

God's Attributes

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

Rom. 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

✓ God's attributes

The first chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Rome is one of the most important in all of the Bible!

For in it he lays out an irrefutable argument that all people—everywhere, for all time, stand guilty before God and thus are in need of a divine intervention!

And, that the foundation of our guilt is that we have willfully turned away from the knowledge of the true God to worship instead the things that He has made!

In other words, since the Garden of Eden to the present-day people have willfully rejected right thinking about God to embrace instead wrong concepts of Who He is, and what He's like...

...which Paul tells us will putrefy our minds rendering us unable to think clearly about anything, which will lead us ultimately to the worship of idols rather than the worship of God, and condemnation rather than eternal life.

✓ Knowledge of God

Notice in vs. 20 that Paul tells us that people can know about God's existence by His...

“...invisible attributes”

God's attributes are those characteristics that can be attributed to His nature...

Another way of saying it, an attribute is an essential trait of God's being.

Or those things that define Who He is and what He is like.

In short, God's attributes describe Who and What He is. Those attributes are revealed to us in both general and special revelation...

...don't panic we're going to define what those terms mean!

1. General revelation

Romans chapter 1 is a classic section of scripture that describes how God makes Himself known to Mankind through general revelation.

That is, God makes His existence universally knowable by what He has made. Look again at Paul's instruction in vs. 20...

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood”

*by the things that are made, even His eternal power
and Godhead...” Romans 1:20*

The Psalmist declares the same truth by calling our attention to starry night sky and the good earth upon which we live...

- Ps. 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
 And the firmament shows His handiwork.
- Ps. 19:2 Day unto day utters speech,
 And night unto night reveals knowledge.
- Ps. 19:3 There is no speech nor language
 Where their voice is not heard.
- Ps. 19:4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
 And their words to the end of the world.

Bible students and theologians call this form of knowledge general revelation, or natural revelation...

...because the invisible attributes of God’s existence are plainly perceived by all people, in all places for all time by the things that He has made.

Ap. A reasonable person

Should be able to look at the marvel of Creation, from quarks to quasars, atoms to Andromeda, the miracle of reproduction and the unnecessary beauty all around us and recognize...

...this didn’t happen by chance! There must be a Creator!

But notice that Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit tells us in Romans 1 that those who deny the evidence for God’s existence displayed in the Creation do so willfully—in spite of the evidence!

Ex. Richard Dawkins

The poster boy for neo-Darwinian evolution evaluating the fossil record said...

“The only alternative explanation of the sudden appearance of so many complex animal types in the Cambrian era is divine creation and (we) both reject this alternative.”

(The Blind Watchmaker, pgs. 229-230)

That is, Dawkins admits that the evidence points to a Creator God, but he rejects the evidence because it doesn't fit his philosophical worldview.

Paul says their condemnation is justified.

2. Our conscience

A second form of general revelation is found in the testimony of our conscience. Solomon writes...

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

Ecc. 3:11

That is, God created every human being—from the financier in NYC to the cannable in Papa New Guinea with an innate knowledge that there must be more to life than just this brief sojourn on earth.

That impulse within us is designed to bring our thoughts continually back to the important questions in life such as...

“Where did I come from?”

“Why am I here?”

“Where am I going—that is, is there life after death?”

Those questions should lead us to search for satisfactory answers, answers that will bring peace, purpose, and hope to our lives, which is found only in a relationship with God.

Where do we find answers to those questions? In God’s special revelation which tells us Who the God of Creation is, and what He is like!

3. Special revelation

By special revelation we mean that in addition to revealing Himself in the natural world God has also revealed Himself supernaturally!

How?

Through the supernatural revelation of His Word recorded in the Bible, through which God makes Himself known to us! Paul describes that special revelation in 2Timothy 3:16...

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness...”*

The word “inspiration” literally means...

“God breathed”

That is, God spoke (breathed out His Word) that was then recorded by His prophets so that we might know Him. The Apostle Peter describes the process this way...

“for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2Peter 1:21

So it's in God's special revelation, recorded for us in the Bible that we learn Who God is and what He's like. That's very important because...

While general revelation seen in the Creation tells us that God exists, and by logical extension that He must be all-powerful (omnipotent), and all-wise (omnisapient), to be able to make everything...

...special revelation, His Word tells us that there is only One God, and that He is a holy, good, and righteous God to whom we are all accountable!

So it is by God's special revelation that we learn Who and what God is like.

4. Jesus Christ

The final and most special way that God has revealed Himself is through His Son Jesus Christ!

As the author of Hebrews tells us (Heb. 1:1-2) Jesus is the full and complete revelation of God!

For example, Paul tells us that Jesus is...

“the image of the invisible God.” ~ Col. 1:15

The word “image” that Paul used means that Jesus is the perfect reflection of God, and the full visible manifestation of the invisible God!

That is, in Jesus the invisible God is made visible!

As Jesus Himself declared to Philip...

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father...”

John 14:9

All of which tells us that if you want to know Who God is and what He is like you simply have to look at Jesus!

So while the **Creation** tells us that God exists, and by logical extension that He must be all-powerful, and all-wise, to be able to make everything.

And His **Word** tells us that there is only One God, and that He is a holy, good, and righteous God to whom we are all accountable!

It is in **Jesus** alone that we can know God through a personal relationship with Him by which we come to know and experience His most precious attributes...

...His mercy, grace, and love!

So if we are to think rightly about God then we must study His attributes as revealed in His Word, the Bible.

✓ He is perfect

Before we move on to identify the first of God’s attributes that we will study it is important that we understand that whatever God is, and whatever God does is perfect.

For example, the Psalmist tells us that...

Ps. 18:30 As for God, His way is perfect;

Moses wrote...

Deut. 32:3 For I proclaim the name of the Lord:
Ascribe greatness to our God.

Deut. 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect;
For all His ways are justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright is He.

Finally, Jesus exhorted us to...

Matt. 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Notice that with people perfection is our goal but with God it is His nature!

When the Bible describes God as perfect it means that He is without flaw.

Everything He is, and everything He does, is flawless.

So when we consider the various attributes of God, whether it be His...

Omnipotence (having all power)
Justice
Love
Immutability (unchanging)
Etc.

We must remember that He is perfect in His nature and the manifestation of every attribute, and that none of His attributes conflict with another...

...each work together perfectly in divine harmony.

Ex. But!

Someone might protest...

“How can God be loving and just? Wouldn’t His perfect love for sinful people prevent Him from executing His perfect justice upon those sinners?”

“That is, if He loves sinners, then how can He punish them as His justice demands? And, if He doesn’t punish sinners then He wouldn’t be just!”

Great questions! God’s answer...the Cross of Christ!

For on the Cross Jesus expressed the perfect love of God for sinful people when the Father executed His perfect justice by pouring out His perfect wrath upon His only begotten perfect Son.

Thus God maintains His perfect love and justice!

Ap. Our experience

Whether we experience His love, or His justice is up to us. If we receive the gift of salvation then we experience His perfect love. However, if we reject Christ’s substitutionary death then we will experience God’s justice as expressed in His wrath upon our sin.

Ex. Riding into a headwind vs. riding with the wind at your back

God's Actuality

✓ God is pure actuality

The first attribute of God that we need to look at is foundational to our study, *but* it has a fancy academic sounding name that can be intimidating!

That attribute is called God's *pure actuality*.

Now some of you are thinking...

"Seriously pastor, I didn't come here today to get a seminary education!"

Don't worry—you're all well taught students of the Bible so I know that not only can you handle this but that you'll really appreciate it once you get your mind wrapped around it.

Let's begin by acknowledging that you won't find the phrase "pure actuality" in the Bible.

Rather, it's like the word "Trinity".

"Trinity" isn't in the Bible, but it does accurately describe the biblical reality of God's nature—One God in Three Persons.

So too God's pure actuality describes God as a unique kind of Being.

He alone is pure actuality, everything else in creation is a composite of actuality and potentiality.

So, what does pure actuality mean?

It means that God actually is, with no potential to not exist or to change.

Therefore, because He actually is and always has been, He has no potential to not exist or to be anything other than He is!

Said another way, God doesn't just exist...

...He is existence!

Think about the implication of that truth...

Everything else in Creation from planets to plants, Angels, and apples, you, and me...

...have the potential to not exist—that is we don't have to exist.

And the only reason we do exist is that the God Who is pure existence...

...the God with no beginning and no end, not potential to change, the God Who made you, me, and everything else in the material and spiritual world, made us to exist.

God alone is existence, everything else exists only at God's good pleasure.

✓ The Biblical foundation for God's pure actuality

Now you might be thinking...

“That's some fancy sounding philosophy but I want to know where the Bible says that about God.”

We could look at a number of scriptures, but we don't have to look any further than the first sentence of the Bible for a description of God's pure actuality where Moses writes...

"In the beginning, God..."

Genesis 1:1

Think about what Moses is saying. In the beginning—"God". That one word, "God", is charged with meaning because it speaks to us that before there were...

Atoms
Gravity
Trees
Waterfalls
Lions
Bumblebees
And even before time began...

God is...

That is, God was already there...

A perfect
Uncreated Being
Eternal Being
A Being that was not caused by any other
A non-material Being (He's not made of the stuff that He made)
A Being Who is pure existence

In short, Genesis 1:1 tells us that everything else in the material universe and in Heaven itself exists only because God made it to be so.

God's Affection

✓ So what?

Here again you may be tempted to think that while this is all interesting and intellectually challenging, you might still believe...

"The truth of God's actuality has very little to do with me and my daily experience."

Oh but it does! In fact, the Apostle Paul waxes eloquent as he lays out the benefits and blessings that we experience because of God's pure actuality...

Rom. 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Rom. 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Rom. 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Did you hear that? Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit tells us that no created thing can separate us from the love of the uncreated God! Specially he names...

Death ~ because death has no hold on God; those who die in Christ are immediately ushered into His presence to experience the fulness of His love and life.

Life ~ because God is the giver of life no circumstance or situation during our earthly pilgrimage can hinder His love from reaching us.

Angels ~ because God created angels; both holy and fallen are powerless to stand between God and the expression of His love for us.

Time ~ because God is not subject to time His love for us is not hindered by the past, present, or future.

Height nor depth ~ because God created the material universe no mountain is too high, nor ocean too deep, no universe too great that it can keep God's love from us.

And finally to make sure that we understand him clearly Paul adds...

Nor any created thing ~ that is, because God created everything, all that God created is subject to Him, and therefore has no potential to keep God's love from us!

Paul's point is that now that we are "in Christ" we can be confident that nothing can ever keep us from God's love because all of creation exists at His good pleasure...

The One Who is pure existence.

The One Who is the ultimate reality.

The One Who is the Source of all that has been made.

The One to Who all creation must submit.

That's an exciting promise and it's true because God is pure actuality—pure existence. And since He is pure existence then is. Able to overcome all that He brought into existence!

Close

√ The knowledge of God

I recognize that for some of you, or maybe many of you, this mornings' study has been difficult to grasp.

We covered some some deep and challenging concepts about God and how the Bible describes Him.

But just because an idea is difficult doesn't mean that we should avoid trying to understand it.

That is especially true on the subject of God!

There are no deeper thoughts than thoughts about the infinite God, so it follows that thoughts about God are going to be challenging.

So may I encourage you not to dismiss hard thinking but instead to think often and deeply about God that you might experience the glory that God promised to those who seek to know Him...

Jer. 9:23 “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

Jer. 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me...