

Chapter 5

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

"...I am that I am..." Exodus 3:14

IS GOD KNOWABLE?

There is a large element in Christian religious tradition that has customarily maintained that God cannot be known, which doctrine is called the "Mystery of God". One important historical text which records this traditional belief is the Exposition of the Orthodox Faith by John of Damascus (ca. 655 - 749) in which he stated:

"It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what he is in his essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable ... all that is comprehensible about him is his incomprehensibility."

This statement and the orthodox traditions which have been built upon such notions in the subsequent centuries goes against what is plainly stated in the Biblical text regarding the knowable nature of God.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The inference of Scripture that an understanding of God is not only possible, but commanded, makes absolutely no sense and is in fact an unrealistic and absurd ambition if God is in reality unknowable. The implication, therefore, is that it is possible to know who and what God is through the assimilation of the revelation of God of Himself into the mind of a believer.

To function within the divine guidelines of the Plan of God is not possible apart from knowing the author of those guidelines and His plan. The Bible is the Written Word of God and by its inspiration through God the Holy Spirit, its very words constitute the supreme self-revelation of God, unveiling His own Divine Attributes and His relationship with man. The Written Word of God is the only source which God has provided for a believer to be able to arrive at an intellectual understanding of the *specific* nature of the Divine Attributes. By definition, "divine attributes" refers to the nature, substance, inner and invisible, but very real character of God. The sum total of God's attributes is also called His "essence." The identical essence is resident in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, which in turn means that all three members of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal. The members of the God-Head are three in personality (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit), but one in essence (divine attributes).

Therefore, ultimate manifestation of divine attributes, as it concerns intellectual creatures, has occurred through the revelation of Himself in the inscripturation of that information into the Written Word of God. Of particular interest to mankind, as an intellectual creature, is the revelation of God's Absolute Holiness. Holiness is made up of two component parts, one being Absolute Righteousness and the other being Absolute Justice. Righteousness represents the norms and standards of the divine moral requirements to which God holds intellectual creatures responsible and Justice represents the enforcement level to which those norms and standards will be enforced upon intellectual creatures. The "level of enforcement" by divine Justice is that God requires the exact same norms and standards of Righteousness of every intellectual creature, every time, in every situation.

The Moral Attributes of God are the substance of what God thinks, while by comparison, the Constitutional Attributes are the substance of what God is. While intellectual creatures cannot violate the Constitutional Attributes of God, they can violate the Moral Attributes of God. As such, they are held culpable for choosing to break the requirements of the Righteous Moral Attributes of God. The chief concern of mankind is, therefore, that his point of contact with the Attributes of God is His Moral Attributes. The norms and standards which constitute the "moral requirements" of God are called "Absolute Righteousness." The enforcement of those morals by God is called "Absolute Justice."

Therefore, it is the obligation of mankind to acclimate himself to the content of the norms and standards of the Righteousness of God and to acquiesce to the moral standards thereof in order to be in line for divine blessing from the Justice of God instead of divine cursing.

The Scripture clearly states that God is knowable:

“Your Righteousness I have not hidden in my intellect; I have been communicating concerning your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not hidden your loyal love or your truth from the great congregation.” Psalm 40:10

In order for King David to make such a statement, he must have, by necessity, understood the Divine nature or essence of God so he could then, in turn, communicate that nature and essence of God to the “great congregation.” The principle is very basic: David cannot teach what he does not know, therefore, the inference of the words of David are that he knew and understood the nature of God’s attributes. Proverbs 4:7 states that “wisdom” without “understanding” is worthless, hence a “wisdom about God” without an “understanding of God” is superfluous.

“Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all your getting get understanding.” Proverbs 4:7

The inference of Scripture that an understanding of God is not only possible, but commanded, makes absolutely no sense and in fact is unrealistic if God is in reality unknowable. Therefore, the inscripturated presumption of the knowable nature of God is clearly the basis of its commands for all believers to come to an understanding of the Divine Nature of God.

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of your reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and cause us to hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your intellect, that you may observe it.”
Deuteronomy 30:11-14

There is even a larger Christian religious tradition which ignores and rejects the fact that God may be known and that the believer is commanded to “...grow in grace, even a knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...” (II Peter 3:18), Who is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, hence, true God Himself. Therefore, “knowing Christ” is to know God. (John 8:19,42,54; 10:38; 15:24)

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also...” John 14:7

This religious tradition is classified as “churchianity.”⁶ By “churchianity” is meant “religious tradition” and “religiosity” which must be distinguished from true “Christianity.”⁶ Churchianity is characterized by a disregard for the importance of “growing in knowledge,” i.e., the priority of acquiring and applying Bible Doctrine through the “intellectual faculties of the mind,” (Hebrews 5:11-14), and by means of placing the accentuation on external piety. This includes emphasis on the importance of rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and even “churchy” creeds of language and taboos of demeanor. In so doing, the “churchianity” movement, by its actions and priorities, in effect sanctions the notion that “God cannot be known” or “God is not to be known.” This is in actuality nothing less than simple rejection of the authority of the Scripture and the very words of Christ Himself which commands the believer to “come to know.” Churchianity rejects the content and authority of the Word by means of emphasis on “doing” rather than “learning.” The commands for a believer to learn divine viewpoint through “devotion to doctrine,” (Ephesians 4:24) confirm the fact that God’s character can be known and that the “churchianity” and the “mystery of God” viewpoints are contradictory to the purpose of and the fact that God has revealed Himself.

“And that you have as your purpose to clothe yourself according to the norm and standard of God, having been created in the sphere of Righteousness and in the sphere of devotion to doctrine.” Ephesians 4:24

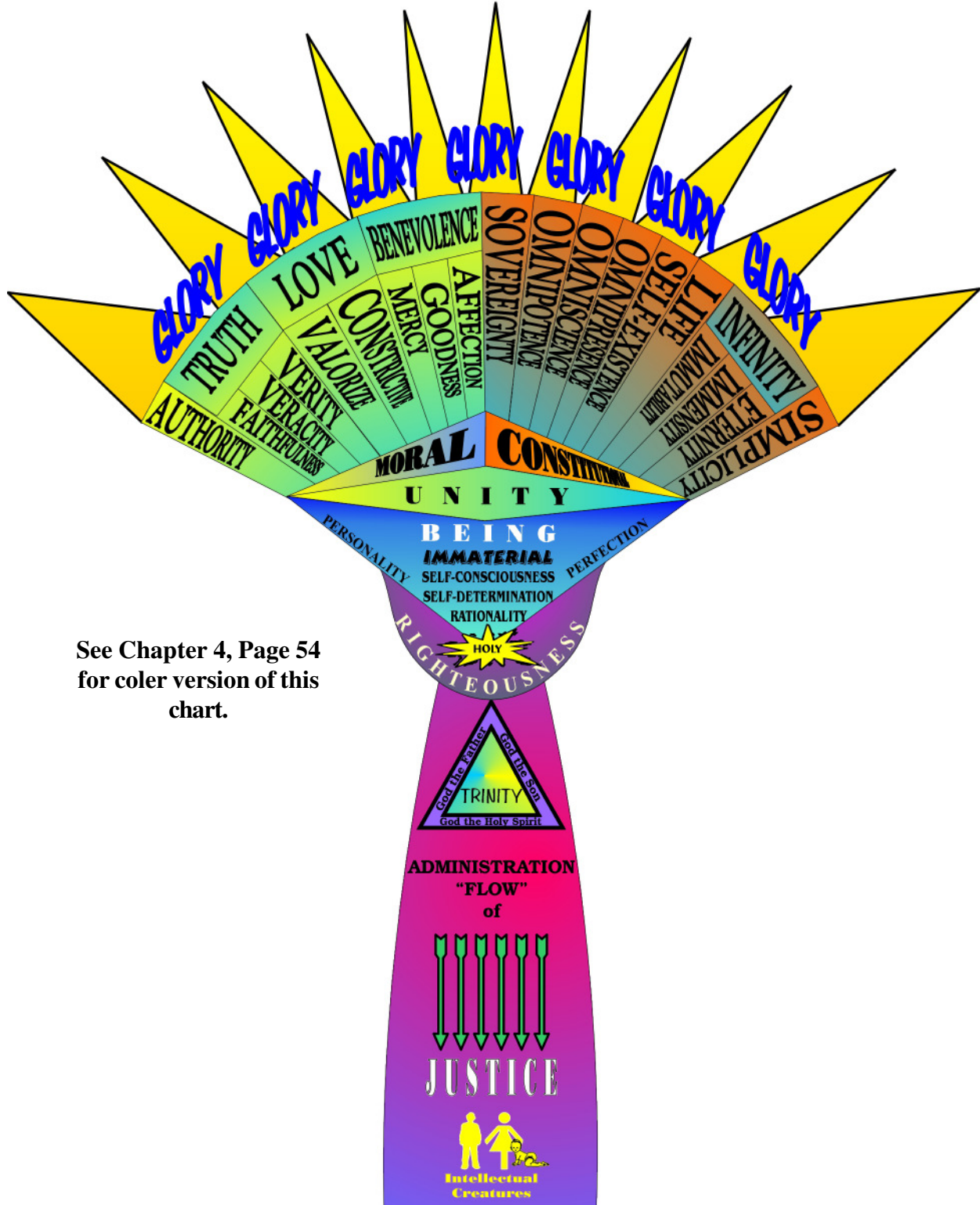
The Bible is the written Word of God and by its inspiration through God the Holy Spirit, its very words constitute the supreme self-revelation of God, unveiling His own divine attributes and His relationship with man. (This is confirmed by the Doctrine of Divine Revelation, The Doctrine of the Resurrection, The Doctrine of the Reliability of the Biblical Documents, etc.) ***Therefore, while knowing God may appear difficult, but it is not impossible.***

GOD IS KNOWABLE!

The Process: The Biblical processes of coming to know God never demands nor includes the believer entering into a system of “thought” based upon mysticism, ceremony, ritual, or emotionalism. All such systems of “thought,” actually involving little to no thinking, are unauthorized by the Bible as systems for learning about God, and they all tend to cause one to lose touch with reality and objective thinking in any field of life wherein they are employed as the *modus vivendi*. Arriving at an understanding of Who

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The various facets of the Attributes of God chart below are discussed throughout Chapter Five. Along with that discussion, extracted components of the chart have been included within the text.



See Chapter 4, Page 54
for color version of this
chart.

and What God only occurs through the Biblically authorized process and includes only the study of the revelation which God has made of Himself through the Written Word of God. Such a study process must occur through the application of the Biblically authorized mechanics for the transfer of divine viewpoint from the pages of the Written Word of God to the memory banks of the believer's soul. (These mechanics are delineated in the Doctrine of the Grace Apparatus for Perception and other categories of Bible Doctrine related to function of Bible Doctrine in the Christian Way of Life.)

The Revelation: The supreme revelation which God has made of Himself is in the form of vocabulary, concepts, principles, and rational thought, and it is all recorded and preserved **only** in the Written Word of God. [Atlas, Revelation, Chapter 4] The Biblically authorized process through which God reveals Himself to the believer does not occur through some system such as mysticism, magic, emotionalism, intuition, etc. Rather, it only occurs, if it ever does occur, through the normal function of the normal powers and qualities of the human mind and the laws that pertain thereto. Repeat -- this means that Bible Doctrine is not learned through mysticism, magic, intuition, singing, praying, meditating, etc., etc. This means that Bible Doctrine is not learned and transferred to the soul through some heterogeneous jumble of religious traditions, programs, methods, all combined to form a feeling of goodness about one's self. Therefore, Bible Doctrine is not "floating around in thin air" as if to be sniffed up by some glazed eyed and emotional churchy person. Rather, consistent with the fact that Bible Doctrine is to be learned through the function of the intellect (Hebrews 5:11-14), it is strictly recorded and preserved in the format of understandable human language, which has as its stated purpose, "...we would not have you to be ignorant..." (Romans 2:20; 6:3; 7:1; 11:25; I Corinthians 12:1; II Corinthians 1:8). With regard to the fact that divine revelation involves the intellect and not the emotions, the Scripture states:

"...stop being ignorant, but completely and thoroughly understand what is the policy of the Lord." Ephesians 5:17

There is no other authorized means recorded in the Scriptures which pertain directly to the Church Age believer authorizing any means, other than the study of the Written Word of God, for the assimilation of the divine viewpoint will of God into the soul. [See: Atlas, Chapter Four, Revelation] As such, the Written Word of God is the "mind" and "thinking" of God and is the only eternal and unchanging source for divine viewpoint, hence, divine guidance available to the believer.

"For who has come to know the Mind of the Lord that he should advise, instruct or inform him? But we keep on possessing the Mind of Christ."

I Corinthians 2:16

The believer is commanded to have the divine mind or thinking in his own mind.

"Keep on having this objective thinking in the sphere of you, which resident doctrine was also resident in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:5

The implication, therefore, is that it is possible to know Who and What God is through the assimilation of the revelation of God of Himself into one's mind. Such assimilation only occurs through attaining an understanding of the vocabulary, concepts, and principles recorded in the Written Word of God. This principle is driven home again and again by the Apostle Paul's emphasis on the importance of "the word," which by his pen was becoming the "written word." By comparison, he never relates any mechanic other than the knowledge of the Written Word whereby a believer might, as summarized by the Apostle Peter, "...grow in Grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." II Peter 3:18

"Faithful is the Word..." II Timothy 2:11

"Faithful is the Word..." I Timothy 3:1

"Faithful is the Word and worthy of unqualified acceptance ... Because of this labor, we pastors work hard ... (to young pastor Timothy he commands) command and communicate these things (namely, the Word)..." I Timothy 4:9-11

(Paul instructing pastor Titus) *"...Holding fast the faithful Word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he (the Pastor-Teacher) may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict ... Faithful is the Word ... I desire that you communicate dogmatically..."*

Titus 1:9 cf., 3:8

The conclusion that it is possible to know Who and What God is, is implied by three principles:

- 1) God created mankind in His image and in doing so has given to homo sapiens the powers of mind, (Self-Consciousness, Self-Determination and Rationality) and the laws that pertain thereto;
- 2) God holds mankind culpable for how he uses these powers of the mind; and,
- 3) It is only just and fair for God, Who *"...is a Just God..."*, (Rev. 15:3) to require intellectual

creatures to know and function within the guidelines of His Divine plan *if it is possible* for them to come to such an understanding.

Function within Divine guidelines is not possible apart from knowing the author of those guidelines. God has seen fit to reveal Himself as well as His Divine Guidelines through various means: the Living Word, the Incarnate^G Word, the Inscripturated Word, and the communicated Written Word of God. The living and incarnate Word of God (The Lord Jesus Christ) being absent from the earth and seated at the Right Hand of the Father (I Peter 3:22) during the present age, leaves the believer with only one option as a means of ascertaining the divine viewpoint and that is the inscripturated (written) Word of God, plus the communication of the same by an “authorized communicator.”^G The process of study of the Word of God under an authorized communicator constitutes the study of Biblical Theology.

“Biblical Theology consists in the facts of the Bible, harmonized by scriptural comparison, generalized by scriptural theories, crystallized into scriptural doctrines, and so systematized as to show the system of truth taught, to the full extent that it is a system, and no farther. As in botany, one gathers all the plants of the world, and arranges them without attempting to introduce new plants, even to fill up manifest gaps, so Biblical Theology, duly presented, shows scriptural truth in all the perfection and in all the imperfection with which God has given it.” (James Petigru Boyce, D.D., LL.D., Abstract of Systematic Theology, 1887)

Therefore, the Written Word of God is the only source for a believer to be able to arrive at an intellectual understanding of the *specific nature* of the Divine Attributes. (Hebrews 5:11-14 - Documents the function of the “senses” or faculties of the mind in coming to an understanding of Who and What God is.) [See: Atlas, Addendum A17, Page A17-58]

The “nature of God” refers to the substance of the inner and invisible, but very real character of God. An awareness or cognizance that God “exists” is possible by, for example, observing the orderliness of the creation and concluding that there must be some ultimate power that set it all in motion. (Romans 1:18-20) However, “cognition” of the simple fact that God exists should not be construed as being the same as “understanding” the specific nature of His attributes. For example, I know that Henry Kissinger exists, but I do not have a knowledge or understanding of his nature, personality, etc. This would require special instruction and exposure to the truth about his nature.

In the same manner, “understanding” or “knowledge” of the actual attributes of God must be attained through special revelation and instruction. [See: Atlas, Chapter Four, Revelation] Relationship, therefore, with God is never based upon human rational, empirical, intuitive or emotional systems of thinking and learning. ***Relationship with God is based upon the only non-meritorious system of thinking available to mankind, namely, “Faith” toward the divine revelation which God has made of Himself.*** Hence, it is possible to know Who and What God is through the assimilation of the Written Word of God into the Soul/Mind by means of “mixing” that Word with faith. (Hebrews 4:2) This means that the Christian is totally dependent on revelation from Scripture for knowledge of God and what God has to say about Himself.

However, even though God has revealed Himself through Bible Doctrine -- the meaning and definition of the Written Word of God -- we have no frame of reference in our finite minds for the infinite being of God. This means that God must and has revealed Himself through anthropomorphisms^G (ascribing some human physical “form” to God, such as “eyes,” “hands,” “arms,” etc., which God does not really have) and anthropopathisms^G (ascribing human feelings or emotions to God, such as “repent,” “grieve,” “anger,” “pleasure,” “jealousy,” etc..) which characteristics God does not really have. This is called “language of accommodation” and is used strictly for man’s benefit in order to aid his understanding of the infinite nature of Who and What God is in terms of a finite human frame of reference.

TO UNDERSTAND GOD IS TO UNDERSTAND HIS ATTRIBUTES

The Attributes of God are those qualities and perfections which belong to the essential nature of Who and What God is. (Hebrews 1:1) The attributes of God are often denoted by the term, “essence,” which is derived from the Greek “ousia,” meaning substance; it means the inward nature, the true substance, the intrinsic nature, the qualities or the attributes of a person or thing. Therefore, the phrase, “the Attributes of God,” refers to the true nature of God; the existence and being of God. Therefore, “Attributes of God” is the terminology which refers to the true nature of God. ***Consequently, to understand God is to understand His attributes or essence.***

Since God is a spirit (John 4:24), His attributes and qualities are invisible to human perception through empiricism or rationalism, therefore, some divine provision must be made through which man may learn about God. And so it was provided by God