

Special Section: God's Attributes

'They Shall See God'

As sunlight falls free on the open field, so the knowledge of the Holy God is a free gift to men who are open to receive it.

By A.W. Tozer

Issues: 1. God has revealed himself to us in three ways. 2. He is one God. 3. His attributes are not added-on qualities, but aspects of his essential being. 4. Knowing him is both the easiest and most difficult thing in the world.



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What is God like? What kind of God is he? How may we expect him to act toward us and toward all created things?

Such questions are not merely academic. They touch the far-in reaches of the human spirit, and their answers affect life and character and destiny. When asked in reverence and their answers sought in humility, these are questions that cannot but be pleasing to our Father which art in heaven.

To our questions God has provided answers—not all the answers, certainly, but enough to satisfy our intellects and ravish our hearts. These answers he has provided in nature, in the Scriptures, and in the person of his Son.

The idea that God reveals himself in the creation is not held with much vigor by modern Christians; but it is, nevertheless, set forth in the inspired Word, especially in the writings of David and Isaiah in the Old Testament and in Paul's epistle to the Romans in the New.

In the Holy Scriptures the revelation is clearer:

The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord, In every star Thy wisdom shines; But when our eyes behold Thy Word, We read Thy name in fairer lines.

Isaac Watts

And it is a sacred and indispensable part of the Christian message, that the full sunblaze of revelation came at the incarnation when the Eternal Word became flesh to dwell among us.

Though God is this threefold revelation has provided answers to our questions concerning him, the answers by no means lie on the surface. They must be sought by prayer, by long meditation on the written Word, and by earnest and well-disciplined labor. However brightly the light may shin, it can be seen only by those who are spiritually prepared to receive it. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

God exists in himself and of himself. His being he owes to no one. His substance is indivisible. He has no parts but is single in his unitary being.

The doctrine of the divine unity means not only that there is but one God; it means also that God is simple, uncomplex, one with himself. The harmony of his being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but of the absence of parts. Between his attributes no contradiction can exist. He need not suspend one to exercise another, for in him all his attributes are one. All of God does all that God does; he does not divide himself to perform a work, but works in the total unity of his being.

An attribute, then, is not a part of God. It is *how* God is, and as far as the reasoning mind can go, we may say that it is *what* God is.

The divine attributes are what we know to be true of God. He does not possess them as qualities; they are how God is as he reveals himself to his creatures. Love, for instance, is not something God has and which may grow or diminish or cease to be. His love is the way God is, and when he loves he is simply being himself. And so with the other attributes . . .

The God we must see is not the utilitarian God who is having such a run of popularity today, whose chief claim to men's attention is his ability to bring them success in their various undertakings and who for that reason is being cajoled and flattered by everyone who wants a favor.

The God we Must learn to know is the Majesty in the heavens, God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, the only wise God our Savior. He it is who sits upon the circle of the earth, who stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in, who brings out his starry host by number and calls them all by name through the greatness of his power, who sees the works of man as vanity, who puts no confidence in princes and asks no counsel of kings.

Knowledge of such a Being cannot be gained by study alone. It comes by a wisdom the natural man knows nothing of, neither can know, because it is spiritually discerned. To know God is at once the easiest and the most difficult thing in the world. It is easy because the knowledge is not won by hard mental toil, but is something freely given. As sunlight falls free on the open field, so the knowledge of the Holy God is a free gift to men who are open to receive it.

But this knowledge is difficult because there are conditions to be met, and the obstinate nature of fallen man does not take kindly to them.

First, we must forsake our sins . . . "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Second, there must be an utter committal of the whole life to Christ in faith. This is what it means to "believe in Christ." It involves a volitional and emotional attachment to him accompanied by a firm purpose to obey him in all things. This requires that we keep his

commandments, carry our cross, and love God and our fellowmen.

Third, there must be a reckoning of ourselves to have died unto sin and to be alive unto God in Christ Jesus, followed by a throwing open of the entire personality to the inflow of the Holy Spirit. Then we must practice whatever self-discipline is required to walk in the Spirit, and trample under our feet the lusts of the flesh.

Fourth, we must boldly repudiate the cheap values of the fallen world and become completely detached in spirit from everything that unbelieving men set their hearts upon, allowing ourselves only the simplest enjoyments of nature which God has bestowed alike upon the just and the unjust.

Fifth, we must practice the art of long and loving meditation upon the majesty of God. This will take some effort, for the concept of majesty has all but disappeared from the human race.

Sixth, as the knowledge of God becomes more wonderful, greater service to our fellowmen will become for us imperative. This blessed knowledge is not given to be enjoyed selfishly. The more perfectly we know God the more we will feel the desire to translate the new-found knowledge into deeds of mercy toward suffering humanity. The God who gave all *to* us will continue to give all *through* us as we come to know him better.

From "A Divine Attribute: Something True About God" and "The Open Secret" in The Knowledge of the Holy by A. W. Tozer (Harper & Row, 1961).