

The Attributes of God 17. the Contemplation of God

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Transcript

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

17. THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD

In the previous chapters we have had in review some of the wondrous and lovely perfections of the Divine character. From this most feeble and faulty contemplation of His attributes, it should be evident to us all that God is, first, an incomprehensible Being, and, lost in wonder at His infinite greatness, we are constrained to adopt the words of Zophar, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Job 11:7-9). When we turn our thoughts to God's eternity, His immateriality, His omnipresence, His almightiness, our minds are overwhelmed. But the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful strivings to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His Word. Because we are unable to acquire perfect knowledge, it would be folly to say we will therefore make no efforts to attain to any degree of it. It has been well said that, "Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity." (C. H. Spurgeon). Let us quote a little further from this prince of preachers. The proper study of the Christian is the God-head. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, amid that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought "I am but of yesterday and know nothing." (Sermon on Mal. 3:6).

Yes, the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature should teach us humility, caution and reverence. After all our searchings and meditations we have to say with Job, "Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him!" (26:14). When Moses besought Jehovah for a sight of His glory, He answered him "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Ex. 33:19), and, as another has said, "the name is

the collection of His attributes." Rightly did the Puritan John Howe declare: The notion therefore we can hence form of His glory, is only such as we may have of a large volume by a brief synopsis, or of a spacious country by a little landscape. He hath here given us a true report of Himself, but not a full; such as will secure our apprehensions—being guided thereby—from error, but not from ignorance. We can apply our minds to contemplate the several perfections whereby the blessed God discovers to us His being, and can in our thoughts attribute them all to Him, though we have still but low and defective conceptions of each one. Yet so far as our apprehensions can correspond to the discovery that He affords us of His several excellencies, we have a present view of His glory.

As the difference is indeed great between the knowledge of God which His saints have in this life and that which they shall have in Heaven, yet, as the former should not be undervalued because it is imperfect, so the latter is not to be magnified above its reality. True, the Scripture declares that we shall see "face to face" and "know" even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12), but to infer from this that we shall then know God as fully as He knows us, is to be misled by the mere sound of words, and to disregard that restriction of the same which the subject necessarily requires. There is a vast difference between the saints being glorified and their being made Divine. In their glorified state, Christians will still be finite creatures, and therefore, never able to fully comprehend the infinite God. The saints in heaven will see God with the eye of the mind, for He will be always invisible to the bodily eye; and will see Him more clearly than they could see Him by reason and faith, and more extensively than all His works and dispensations had hitherto revealed Him; but their minds will not be so enlarged as to be capable of contemplating at once, or in detail, the whole excellence of His nature. To comprehend infinite perfection, they must become infinite themselves. Even in Heaven, their knowledge will be partial, but at the same time their happiness will be complete, because their knowledge will be perfect in this sense, that it will be adequate to the capacity of the subject, although it will not exhaust the fulness of the object. We believe that it will be progressive, and that as their views expand, their blessedness will increase; but it will never reach a limit beyond which there is nothing to be discovered; and when ages after ages have passed away, He will still be the incomprehensible God. (John Dick, 1840).

Secondly, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that He is an all-sufficient Being. He is all-sufficient in Himself and to Himself. As the First of beings, He could receive nothing from another, nor be limited by the power of another. Being infinite, He is possessed of all possible perfection. When the Triune God existed all alone, He was all to Himself. His understanding, His love, His energies, found an adequate object in Himself. Had He stood in need of anything external, He had not been independent, and therefore would not have been God. He created all things, and that "for Himself" (Col. 1:16), yet it was not in order to supply a lack, but that He might communicate life and happiness to angels and men, and admit them to the vision of His glory. True, He demands the allegiance and services of His intelligent creatures, yet He derives no benefit from their offices, all the advantage redounds to themselves: Job 22:2,3. He makes use of means and instruments to accomplish His ends, yet not from a deficiency of power, but often times to more strikingly display His power through the feebleness of the instruments. The all-sufficiency of God makes Him to be the Supreme Object which is ever to be sought unto. True happiness consists only in the enjoyment of God. His favour is life, and His loving kindness is better than life. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him" (Lam. 3:24). His love, His grace, His glory, are the chief objects of the saints' desire and the springs of their highest satisfaction. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:6,7). Yea, the Christian, when in his right mind, is able to say, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither

shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cutoff from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17,18). Thirdly, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that He is the Supreme Sovereign of the universe. It has been rightly said: No dominion is so absolute as that which is founded on creation. He who might not have made any thing, had a right to make all things according to His own pleasure. In the exercise of His uncontrolled power, He has made some parts of the creation mere inanimate matter, of grosser or more refined texture, and distinguished by different qualities, but all inert and unconscious. He has given organization to other parts, and made them susceptible of growth and expansion, but still without life in the proper sense of the term. To others He has given not only organization, but conscious existence, organs of sense and self-motive power. To these He has added in man the gift of reason, and an immortal spirit, by which he is allied to a higher order of beings who are placed in the superior regions. Over the world which He has created, He sways the scepter of omnipotence. "I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doeth Thou?"—Daniel 4:34, 35. (John Dick).

A creature, considered as such, has no rights. He can demand nothing from his Maker; and in whatever manner he may be treated, has no title to complain. Yet, when thinking of the absolute dominion of God over all, we ought never to lose sight of His moral perfections. God is just and good, and ever does that which is right. Nevertheless, He exercises His sovereignty according to His own imperial and righteous pleasure. He assigns each creature his place as seemeth good in His own sight. He orders the varied circumstances of each according to His own counsels. He moulds each vessel according to His own uninfluenced determination. He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens. Wherever we are, His eye is upon us. Whoever we are, our life and everything is held at His disposal. To the Christian, He is a tender Father; to the rebellious sinner He will yet be a consuming fire. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

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