

# Knowing God

by Don Rogers

As a child, she lived in a family where she was never allowed to express her emotions, because it would disrupt the peace of the home. Neither parent was very expressive emotionally, except when they were displeased. She was expected to conform to her parents' standards, but was seldom praised or encouraged. Entering into adulthood she was fearful and insecure, because there had never been any positive process of affirmation concerning her identity. She also had a difficult time when she received Christ into her life. There were nagging thoughts that she was not pleasing God and wasn't worthy to receive His love and forgiveness. As a result, life was filled with feelings of self-accusation and guilt. She had little joy because of frequent depression.

During the many years I have been involved in counseling, I have been continually struck by the fact that many problems Christians experience in their lives are related to their understanding of God. In the majority of cases, the average Christian's knowledge of God is deficient and distorted because of past negative influences, especially from family. By deficient, I mean that they have not moved beyond a creedal understanding of God so that they are able to make real life applications of what He means to their lives. By distorted, I mean that wrong conclusions are often made when a person does not properly understand God's nature and His relationship to ourselves.

The Church has to take responsibility for not doing a good job of discipleship after people are saved. In too many cases, the emphasis has been upon knowledge through teaching and very little time spent in one on one mentoring to apply this knowledge. In many cases, people have been provided with teaching and then left to flounder, struggling to apply what they had learned. Embarrassed with their failure, many do not feel free to share their failure with others.

If believers are not grounded in a proper and practical understanding of God's nature and work, their faith will be adversely affected. Often, the limited characteristics of humanity are projected into their understanding concerning God. They make God in their own human image or their parents' image. Their human frame of reference and past experiences become a main point of reference as they seek to understand their relationship to God. In other words, their understanding of God and His dealings are greatly influenced by past relationships and their interpretation of those experiences. This often leads to disastrous conclusions and results. Satan is willing and able to fuel the fire and impugn God when we rely too heavily on experience. For example, the concept of God as a heavenly Father is very difficult for those who had a distant or abusive earthly father. There is the tendency to see the Heavenly Father through the filter of these experiences as One who is distant and ready to judge.

Our knowledge of God must begin with God's revelation of Himself. As we learn the truth concerning God and His will concerning us, the proper foundation will be laid for our relationship with Him. We will understand who He is and what He is doing.

When I see people consistently questioning God's actions and becoming angry with Him, I realize that they are deficient in their knowledge of God's character and purposes. As I observe their problems of low self-esteem and self-worth, I know their struggle is related in part to a poor understanding of themselves as God's creation. They cannot relate to God's unconditional love being extended to them continually.

It is not my intent to provide a heavy, exhaustive theological study concerning God, but one that has practical implications for everyday life.

## I. THE ESSENCE OF GOD

When I talk about "essence" I'm speaking of substance or elemental nature; that which underlies the outward manifestation.

A. God is spiritual in nature. He does not have material substance, except for the body of Jesus Christ, which has been transfigured. God is an Infinite Spirit, which means that He has no limitations. He is inexhaustible in every aspect of His nature. He has given to each of us a spiritual part to our nature for the purpose of uniting with Him and having a personal relationship with Him..

B. God is personal. A force does not have personality. God has self-consciousness, self-determination and character. He has intellect, emotions and will on a level of perfection which dwarfs our finite abilities. In fact, we cannot make any significant comparison that is meaningful. Unbelievably, God desires an ongoing personal relationship with each of us. Even though He is our creator, He also wants to fulfill our lives by being many other things to us as well. He is a Father, Redeemer and Provider. He desires to be a Teacher, Counselor, Comforter, Protector and Friend if we will allow Him.

C. God is self-existent. He is completely sufficient in Himself. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are the perfect community, yet They are One. God has chosen to move beyond the sufficiency He has and share Himself with His creation. As humans, we are not able to find sufficiency and meaning within ourselves, independent of other sources. We only find meaning, sufficiency and completeness outside of ourselves in God. Through Jesus Christ's work and the Holy Spirit's presence, we are able to commune (come into community) with God.

D. God is infinite. He has no limitations in any area or circumstance. In fact, all that exists depends upon Him. He is beyond space and time, yet He is in the midst of it. All that exists are products of His creative will. All of creation is held in place by His power. Nothing can withstand or resist His will. God is the One who always is. He revealed Himself as "I AM." He was, He is and He always will be. (Ps 90:1-2)

We should be greatly encouraged by the magnitude of God's essential nature, because He has the infinite ability to back up His revelation and promises to His people. But let us build upon this understanding by looking at His attributes.

## II. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- God's Non-Moral Attributes-

A. God is Omnipresent - [Acts 17:27-28; Jeremiah 23:23-25] God rules transcendent in the heavenlies and also dwells immanently in our lives. The thought of His presence can be both intimidating and encouraging. No matter what we do, we cannot escape from Him. On the other hand, He is ever present to help when people turn to Him.

B. God is Omniscient - [Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13] God knows everything. He not only sees every action, but He is aware of every motive and desire of our hearts. God also knows the future, because He is not restricted by time. Every desire and action of the enemy is known to God as well.

God's knowledge and wisdom have no limits. His plan for all creation that was conceived and instituted in His own heavenly counsels are perfect in every aspect. To think that we can ever conceive a better answer to resolve our personal problems or question His actions is the height of human pride, arrogance and ignorance.

**C. God is Omnipotent** - [Genesis 17:1; Job 42:2; Mathew 19:26; Luke 1:37] God is able to do whatever He wills; but His will is always in concert with His perfect nature. Everything He does is in harmony with His perfections. This may seem to be a limitation, but true infinite power can only exist in complete harmony with God's perfections. God's sovereignty is so perfect and complete, that even Satan and his hosts can be used by God, in spite of their rebellious nature, to accomplish His purposes. God's omnipotence was exhibited in creation, the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and Jordan River, the defeat of Israel's enemies, the people raised from the dead, the people freed from demonic oppression, those who have been divinely healed and those transformed by the saving power of Christ.

When Jesus was raised from the dead, the Father seated Him far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in this present age, but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. (Eph 1:19b-23) God also raised us up (positionally & practically) with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms *in Christ Jesus*. (Eph 2:6) We, who have received Christ as our Lord and Savior, have been placed securely within God's omnipotent power and are able to draw upon it as we serve Him.

**D. God is Immutable** - [Malachi 3:6; James 1:17] God is unchangeable in regard to His essence, attributes, consciousness and will. All change is either for the better or worse. Since God is perfect, He can neither change for the better or worse. This is very encouraging, because man cannot influence or manipulate God for their own purposes. God is immune to pressure or deception, but will respond to faith and perseverance of His people who seek His will. God's favor is available to all, but is not received by all. We can always be assured that God's love for us will never change.

For those who walk in righteousness, these attributes of God are extremely encouraging and comforting. They are a source of constant hope. For those who practice sin, His very presence is a source of guilt and dread. But God is always willing to forgive those who turn to Him in repentance.

#### God's Moral Attributes-

**A. God is Holy** - [Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Samuel 6:20; Psalm 22:3; Isaiah 40:23; Ezekiel 39:7] God is separate from all moral evil that we call sin. God's throne is established on the basis of His holiness, so His holiness is the regulative principle of His love, His power and His will. (Psalm 47:8; 89:14; 97:2) Even though God loves each of His creatures dearly, He cannot compromise and make exceptions regarding the issues of sin, because it would be inconsistent with His holy nature. That is why Jesus had to make the supreme sacrifice and die for our sins. Only He could pay the price for sin by becoming the once and for all, perfect, unblemished sacrifice.

**B. God is Righteous and Just** - [2 Chronicles 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:33; Isaiah 45:21; Daniel 9:14] The righteousness and justice of God issue out of His holiness and are demonstrated in His treatment of His creatures. Regarding His righteousness, He instituted a moral government in the world, provided just laws for His creatures and attached sanctions accordingly. Regarding His justice, He executes and enforces His laws bestowing rewards and punishments. God's righteousness makes known the parameters he expects his creatures to live within. God's justice brings us to accountability and directs us toward those parameters He has set.

### **C. God's Goodness - Mark 10:18**

1. **The Love of God** - moves God to share Himself. Love is an expression of His nature. His love is always unconditional to all. Through His love God communicates His goodness to His creatures. (1 John 4:8,16) Through His love, God seeks to draw us closer to Himself. When God gave His Son to die for our sins, we became the recipients of the ultimate expression of God's love.

2. **The Grace of God** - is His disposition to show favor to His creatures that is suited to each person's needs and capacities. It is God's unmerited goodness extended to those who do not deserve it. (Ephesians 1:6-7; 2:7-9; Titus 2:11; 3:4-7) Every person experiences God's grace constantly, whether they realize it or not. God's grace provides opportunities to seek Him and receive from Him.

3. **The Mercy of God** - considers the individual who is bearing the consequences of sin, is in a pitiable condition and in need of divine help. It is God's goodness shown to those in misery and distress, even though they do not deserve it. God's mercy is bountiful to all of us. (Deuteronomy 5:10; Psalm 57:10; 86:5) God's mercy cannot override His justice though. His mercy is constantly being exercised unconditionally.

4. **The Long-suffering of God** - is that aspect of His virtue that bears with the wicked in spite of their continued disobedience. In essence it postpones, for a time, the merited judgment in order that the sinner may have the opportunity to repent and be saved.

5. **The Truth of God** - is the foundation of all knowledge. He is the source of all true understanding. God is truth in that He is perfectly genuine. We see that genuineness in the scriptures as He discloses the bad with the good. God's revelations of Himself are true and can be depended on. What He has revealed is neither exaggerated or idealistic. What God promises can be appropriated through faith and obedience. Because He is truth, He will do what He says. Because He is truth, He is accurate and faithful. Only truth can set us free and keep us free as we respond to it in faith and obedience.

We are constantly being confronted with thoughts and ideas that impugn God's character. Like Adam and Eve, we are faced with a crafty enemy who wants to distort our view of God and undermine and destroy any kind of a quality relationship with Him. As long as the enemy is able to plant questions in our minds and we consider them, he will be able to instigate anger and foster doubt in our lives. As long as these thoughts influence us, our relationship with God will be greatly affected.

6. **The Freedom God Allows** - God has given man freedom to exercise his will. Because of this freedom, each has permitted sin in his life. As a result of sin, suffering has touched mankind on many levels. But God in His wisdom knew that if freedom was not a reality for each of us, love would not be manifested. Love is a choice that each of us has to make, to give and to receive. God could have programmed us to be perfect, but we would never be able to love Him or anyone else. Without freedom, we are not truly unique individuals. So God sacrificed a lot to make our uniqueness possible so that we might have the opportunity to respond to His great love.

**In conclusion**, a proper understanding of God's nature helps each of us to relate to Him in a more personal way. The most personal way of relating to God is as a Father. Hopefully, from our study each may be able to conclude that:

**1. We have a secure and unchanging Father - He has no limitations, so He never becomes defensive in His relationship with us. He is always truthful and does what He says He will do.**

**2. We have a concerned Father - Every issue is important to Him and He is ALWAYS there for us even though it may appear otherwise.**

**3. We have a loving Father - He loves us on the basis of who we are, not on the basis of how we perform. He desires the very best for each of our lives, according to His will and wisdom. He wants to provide us with those things that will help build us up spiritually and strengthen our relationship with Him.**

**4. We have a protective Father - He watches over us and will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to bear it. He has provided a Comforter to help us get through the difficult times in life.**

**Praise God for who He is! How blessed we are to have such a caring and loving Father! Thank you, Jesus, for taking my place on the cross and giving me Your example of how I should live! Thank you, Holy Spirit, for enabling me to experience the presence and the power of God in my life!**

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