

Today's Sermon

God's Attributes, Part 1: His Power and Nature

Romans 1:20

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, January 2, 2021

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” That’s how **A. W. Tozer** starts *The Knowledge of the Holy*. And that’s how I want to start this new year, thinking about how we think about God, because this is most important for how this year will go.

Everything else in life will fall like dominoes as your view of God falls. As our thoughts and affections for God rise, we can rise to face challenges. If we think small thoughts of God, our problems will look big. But if we have a big God in our thoughts and affections, whatever problem we face in 2022 will look smaller in comparison. Tozer said we’re weak when our view of God is weak, but if we see God as high and lifted up, that will lift us up. He’s right: **what we think about God is the most important thing about us.**

“Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid ... The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him ... This will prove of greater value to [the next generation] than anything ... the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most [crucial] fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, ‘What comes into your mind when you think about God?’ we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man [then Tozer quotes [Rom 1:21](#) that shows the future of those who] *glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened...*”

Let’s turn to [Rom. 1](#) and I want to look at that passage he quotes and look at our God together for our next series of messages. 15 years ago, I was a new pastor here and I started the new year with a series on the attributes of God. It changed my life. It changed our church in many ways – we grew by many families – many with kids (there were few when we came, we doubled the nursery and toddlers church our first Sunday). God drew people here during that series but most importantly, he grew our view of Himself in that series.

How many of you were here during that series? How many weren’t? Dozens of you are new to our church just in the last 3-5 years and I can’t think of a better way to start a new year. This is such a foundational formational study.

I’m excited for this study, and I pray God’s attributes will change us again.

[Rom 1:20](#) is the one verse in the Bible that uses the actual word “**attributes.**”

²⁰ For **his invisible attributes**, namely, his eternal **power** and divine **nature**, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

How we think about God is most important. Those who don't honor God in their thoughts of Him or their thanks to Him become futile in their thinking. There's a dark and downward spiral in hearts that don't glorify God as God. God's attributes should affect attitudes and gratitude, giving thanks to Him.

What's an attribute? A quality or characteristic. _____ of God. God is _____

- We've seen 'God is love' in our last study, but that's not all He is
- v. 25, the end of the verse: '*...the **Creator, who is blessed forever.***'
- God IS Creator, God is blessed forever, those are attributes of Him
- Look at v. 17 '*in it **the righteousness of God is revealed ...***'
- v. 18 '*For **the wrath of God is revealed ...***' Those are attributes, too
- We'll look at His wrath next time, His righteousness another week
- Today v. 20: *For his invisible attributes, namely, his **eternal power and divine nature**, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.*
- Later on Paul talks about God's power as *Almighty* (9:29 NIV)
- God has attributes for **every letter of the alphabet**, pray, meditate: *Almighty, Blessed, Creator, Eternal Power, Divine Nature*, etc.
- Today in v. 20, God's eternal power and divine nature in creation
 - **Why this study is so important**
 - **How creation shows God's power and nature**
 - **What our response should be**

First, why is it so important to study these attributes of God?

OUR WALK – v. 20 mentions God's power and divine nature. Listen to 2 Peter 2:3: *His divine **power** has given us **everything we need for life and godliness** through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate **in the divine nature** and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* His power is what we need for life and His divine nature in us is how we fight off sin. Everything we need comes through knowledge of Him, His power, nature.

OUR WITNESS – quote v. 15-16, leading into attributes in v. 18-20

We should be eager to proclaim the gospel as the power of God to save. As Paul did, we can start with creation, God's attributes, think rightly of Him.

Paul in Acts 17: ‘*God who made the world and all things in it...is Lord of heaven and earth...we ought not to think that **the Divine Nature** is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and **thought of man**... God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness...*’¹

OUR WORSHIP – scripture reading earlier in Rev 5 praising His attributes

But in Rom 1 sinners suppress the truth about God and don’t glorify Him as He is, and look at v. 23, it says they ‘*exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images ...*²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator ...*’ All that goes wrong through the chapter is because they exchanged the glory of God and truth about God for what’s not true about God. They exchange creation for the Creator. They trade the immortal invisible God for images (that can be mental images of God, worship of anything less or lower than who He is)

God made man in His image, sinful man tries to do that with God

Listen to **God’s rebuke** in Ps 50:21: ‘*You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you ... consider this, you who forget God [i.e., who He really is], Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver (NASB).*

Luther to Erasmus: “Your thoughts of God are too human.” Man-centered, God-lowering thinking is a root of all kinds of evil fruit in our life. Acts 17 says the thought of man can form images of God that we must repent of.

Making God in our image or likeness or by our “likes” is serious.

It can begin for us with sentences that begin something like this:

“I like to think of God as ...”

“On judgment day I think it will be like this ...”

“You know, I don’t like to think of God as ...”

“I think we have free will, so God can’t do what *this verse* says”

“That doesn’t seem fair to me by my standards, so I think...”

“I know this verse says this, but my image of God is...”

“When I picture Jesus, I have this image in my mind of ...”

Rom 1 warns against exchanging images for God, likeness of earthly things.

Rom 1 talks about God’s wrath on those who suppress the truth about God.

What we think or want God to be is irrelevant at best, and at worst, it is idolatry – any image or thought of God different than the fullness of who He is revealed in scripture is putting another “god” before God. That’s a serious violation of the first commandment. False views Christians can be guilty of:

- My God is a God of love, all love (pick favorite attributes, like BK)
- Heavenly repairman (exists just to fix our problems)

- Celestial Santa Claus (Steve Lawson's book on attributes, *Made in Our Image: What Shall We Do with a "User-Friendly God"* <repeat title> the cover has an empty throne in heaven with a Santa hat)

'Gospel light is being replaced with gospel "lite," preaching [replaced] with performance, exposition with entertainment... As our view of God has suffered, so have our ministries and lives... Only when our vision of God is restored will our lives and ministries be put right... a right vision of God must be the driving force behind the church. Only that can bring His glorious presence and all-sufficient power to bear on the lives of His people so that we can be what He desires us to be.' Lawson, *Made in our Image*, 17

That's why it's important.

#2. How is God's power and nature seen?

Rom 1:20 says in creation. Since the beginning of the world, people have perceived there must be an *eternal power* before this earth that made it, by a God who made it. We can look at nature and see something of the divine nature. His invisible attributes are visibly perceived or seen in creation. The stars and rolling thunder show His power throughout the universe displayed

Heb 1:3 says the Lord 'upholds the universe by the word of His power'

Rom 1:19 *For what can be known about God is **plain to them**, because God has **shown it to them**.²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, **in the things that have been made**. So they are without excuse.²¹ For although **they knew God**, they did not honor him ...*

The '*they*' are those who dishonor God. In v. 18 they're suppress the truth about God and His wrath comes on them. But v. 21 says they actually *know* there's a God. Atheists say they don't believe in God, but God says here He doesn't believe in atheists. They know but suppress truth and dishonor Him, so it says their thinking becomes futile and dark. Still, creation shows them a Creator. The things that have been made point to a Maker. Design needs a Designer. It's plain as day literally. It's indisputable and man is inexcusable.

Now go to ch 10. John Calvin called creation 'the theater of God's glory.'

Rom 10:14 asks how can people around the world call on God or believe in a God they haven't heard of? How can they hear unless someone tells them about the Lord? Look at Rom 10:18 *But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."* Paul's quoting from Ps 19 about how creation tells the whole world about God, at least some of His attributes, power, nature.

So turn back to Ps 19 because Paul's really building off what Ps 19 says.

SPROUL STORY - asked about dying innocent person who hasn't heard about God? His answer: there are no innocent people in Rom 1 or Ps 19.

This is a Psalm of David for the choir. There's a heavenly choir in it, too.

19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.* ² *Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.* ³ *There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.* ⁴ *Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world* [Rom. 10 quote]. *In them he has set a tent for the sun ...*

In Young Adults Group we've been going through a study called **the Blazing Center**. The opening session talked about how the sun blazes at 6,000 degrees centigrade and how massive our galaxy is around it (587,000 trillion miles across). But our whole huge galaxy is itty-bitty compared to the rest of the universe, it's microscopic to other galaxies. Scientists say if there's a God who created all that, "Seems like a lot of wasted space. What's the point of that? Look at all the space, and we occupy this little teeny planet? What's that about?" I'd say, "Well, it would be wasted space if it were about us." But Psalm 19:1 says that the heavens are not talking about us... it's not about you. [v. 1 says] *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork*. The fact that there's so much space out there [and] us little humans is to tell us we are insignificant. What this is all about really is significant... the glory of God. Who made it to do that? God made it to do that. God decided that the universe would talk about God... **He designed the universe to be about himself.**² His glory, eternal power and divine nature.

Creation declares God's attributes, His bigness and greatness

v. 2 says it's 24/7, day and night, and v. 3 says it's global, it's universal, it reaches the whole planet. No place on earth can say they haven't heard. But it's visual, not verbal, there's no speech or words with this voice going out.

Ps 29: *The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders... The voice of the LORD is **powerful** [like Rom 1, creation showing His power and divine nature] *worship the LORD ... the LORD sits enthroned as **king**...**

O worship the King all glorious above, O gratefully sing His power and love! That's how His power in nature is seen.

#3. What our response should be:

Praise God for His power and nature, and proclaim His power to save

Romans 1 says God's attributes of eternal power and divine nature were clearly seen, but many didn't glorify Him as God and weren't thankful and they worshipped lesser things. Our response should be: praise God for His power and nature. Glorify Him with thankfulness in worship honoring Him as God

Ps 68: *'sing praises to the Lord... whose **power is in the skies**. Awesome is God ...who **gives power and strength** to his people. Blessed be God!'*³

Other psalms tells us God's power opens the waters (74:13) and established the mountains (65:6), think about that as you look at the Sierras and sing:

the mighty **power of God**, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
... [God's divine nature is] displayed, where'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky.
There's not a plant or flow'r below, but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne

Ps 147 says God's power and divine nature is on display as he '*gives snow like wool; he scatters frost ... [we've seen that this past week, Ps 147:4] He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and **abundant in power...***' [that's His eternal power]

Every day and night the divine nature is on display in the skies above. Every sunrise, every sunset, every magnificent scene that is beyond any artwork man can create, or dazzling starlit nights – shouts out God's glorious power.

This is what our children need more than anything. Ted Tripp says the most important thing for our children is to be dazzled by God. A puritan gave this advice to his son, 'first and last, think magnificently of God.' Do you?

Ps 78:4 *We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the **glorious deeds** of the LORD, about **his power** ...*
145:4, 11: *Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power ... they will give examples of your power. (NLT).*

The kids song has it right: "My God is so big so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do." But too many of us adults *live* like our God is so small, so weak, not Almighty, I'm not sure I know what to do." We would never say it out loud, but we act like it. But the creation of the world around us is singing about God's eternal power and divine nature.

Are you dazzled by God? Or are you consumed with so many lesser things in life, other than God? Have you grown immune to God's constant reminders and revelation in His world all around us, if we'll but look up?

like I'm playin' Gameboy in the middle of the Grand Canyon
I'm eatin' candy sittin' at a gourmet feast
Splashin in a puddle when I could be swimming in the ocean
What is wrong with me? Wake up and see the glory (Steven Curtis Chapman)

We need to wake up and look up. PSALM 8:3-4. There are hundreds of billions of stars God keeps track of and knows by name! But He's also mindful of me! He cares for me! He keeps track of this tiny planet called earth where not a single bird

can ever fall apart from His will and not a single hair from my head outside His plan. This is His power and nature!

Astronaut Jeff Williams once called my former pastor **Phil Johnson**. Phil asked where are you, and Jeff answered 'in outer space looking down on California.' Phil said it was the longest long distance call he ever got! Jeff did a 7 hour space walk while orbiting. He said "words cannot describe the majesty and the grandeur of it" and you can see some pictures but he says "they don't do justice to the incredible size and beauty of God's creation." The heavens tell God's glory and the expanse shows the work of His hands

Job 26 says "He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing ... He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, At the boundary of light and darkness. By His Spirit He adorned the heavens [like decorating Christmas lights] Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways...But the thunder of His power who can understand?"⁴

Senator **John Glenn** "I don't think you can be up here and look out the window as I did the first day and see the Earth from this vantage point, to look out at this kind of creation and not believe in God." James Irwin was the first astronaut to ride the moon buggy on the moon. His trip into space was so moving that he later became a Christian evangelist. This is what he wrote of viewing earth from his space ship: "The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament hanging in the blackness of space. As we got further and further away it diminished in size. Finally it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine ... Seeing this has to change a man, has to make a man appreciate the creation [and] love of God"

Join the heavens declaring His glory. Join heaven's worship in Revelation:

- 4:11 *Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive **glory and honor and power**, for you **created** all things ... (eternal power as Creator)*
- 5:12 *In a loud voice ... I heard **every creature** in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be **praise and honor and glory and power**, for ever and ever!" (NIV)*
- Rev 7, an innumerable multitude give thanks for glory, honor, power
- 19:1 *I heard...the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and **glory and power** belong to our God*

*Ps 106:8 he saved them for his name's sake [another way to say for His glory], that he might **make known his mighty power**.*

POWER IN SALVATION – WHERE WE STARTED IN ROMANS 1:16

God's divine nature and eternal power should make us eager to proclaim the gospel, for it is the power of God. Ps 67 calls for God's saving power to be made known to

the nations. Ps 71:18 *'Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your **power** to the next generation...'* NIV

APPLY TO GOSPEL AND TO COMMUNION

Footnotes:

¹ v. 24, 29-31 NASB.

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-blazing-center-part-1>

³ v. 32-35 NIV.

⁴ Job 26:7-14, NKJV.