

I am beginning a series today that will probably extend indefinitely. In making this announcement I reserve the right to break into this series at any time to take up other subjects as it may seem proper. I believe that there is a terrible need in our day to rediscover the biblical doctrine of God. There is great deal of agnosticism abroad. It is fashionable to insist that no one knows what the truth is, and to speak of alternate theologies and other expressions of faith. All paths supposedly lead to God, and everyone is to do what they have to do, that there is no ultimate truth, and no certainty about God.

The fundamental effect of such talk is that man's soul is inextricably bound up with God. Man is the image of God, and when man loses God, he loses himself. When the idea of God becomes fuzzy and indistinct, then man loses a sense of his own identity and destiny. The result is inevitably a religious crisis with a corresponding moral crisis, for who we do is inextricably bound up with what we are. So these things are certain: Who we believe God is shapes our view of ourselves, which in turn drives our behavior.

Therefore, I want to preach some sermons on the attributes of God. Who is God? What sort of being is God? Is there some objective reality—apart from myself that defines God, or is the definition of God simply bound up to personal opinion? What is the reality? These sermons are the result of a lifetime of the study of the Bible, although we will be drawing on some of the finest teachings of the church on these subjects.

If our definition of God is simply personal, that God means different things to different people, and all definitions are equally true, and equally untrue; if the only definition of God is that which you believe to be true, then a series of sermons like this is irrelevant. But know what you are choosing if you choose such a path. It means that you have no definition of who man is, and you have no definition of what right and wrong is. Do not complain if men rape and steal and lie and cheat. Do not complain when the forces of darkness burn down your home and carry your friends and relatives into captivity. Do not complain when your children rise up against you, denounce you, and turn their swords against you. Do not complain if those in high places of government use the power of their office to destroy their enemies and establish a secure base for the fulfillment of their own desires. If there is no final truth about God, then there is no final truth about man, and no final standard of what is right or what is wrong.

On the other hand, if God exists apart from our idea of God, then there is a measure by which we can judge our ideas. What is that standard? The standard is God himself. Either our ideas conform to the truth concerning God, or they do not. We then have a terribly important duty to change our minds and revise our thoughts, to bring our inward thoughts to the standard, and reject those ideas that are wrong, no matter how much that changes our view of ourselves, and what demands that makes on our personal actions.

Let me warn you. These studies on the attributes of God may be very dangerous for your self-esteem and your lifestyle. Because of what I have just said, the truth of God must have a dramatic effect on how you view yourself and how you behave. Men hold to erroneous views of God because they do not want to change the way they live. False doctrines support sinful life-styles. This leads to false worship and false moral behavior. So the study of God's attributes can be a painful thing, for we cling to our idols. The followers of Diana were outraged at the preaching of Gospel, because men who came to Christ no longer purchased the idols and trappings of the Diana, and their income was greatly reduced. To the followers of Diana, the preaching of the Gospel meant the end of their trade, and the overthrow of an entire economic system. They didn't like it.

But the study of the attributes of God can be a most wonderful experience. If you cling to false ideas about God, you will have false ideas about yourself, and you will find yourself constantly warring with reality, about yourself, about the world, about others, and about the world you live in. There is no peace, God says, to the wicked. If you cherish wicked and wrong ideas about God, you will have no peace, either in your soul or in your life. Reality will be an enemy to you, and you will constantly be at war with it—shutting it away out of your mind; trying to drown in chemicals or activity; trying by your own efforts to bring some peace and prosperity into your life. You will fail, not because things are wrong, but because your mind is wrong. Out of the heart proceed the issue of life, the wise man said, and in the deepest core of your heart resides your concept of God, and that shapes everything else. It is a wonderful thing when a man comes to peace with God, and his life begins to change, and he has peace with God and with people as they really are, and with things as they really are.

What is an Attribute?

What do we mean when we say the attributes of God? It is important that you know exactly what I mean when I use this word, because my desire in these messages is to be crystal clear. The Bible is crystal clear on these subjects and your salvation and my salvation demands that we be crystal clear. An attribute is a description of what kind of God He is. We do not first of all seek to prove the existence of God, and then to show what kind of God He is. Nothing can exist without attributes. You cannot think about anything, without thinking something about it. You cannot think about God without thinking something about Him. What do you think of when you think of God? What does the word "God" convey to you? The way you answer these questions reveal what you think about the attributes of God. What do you attribute to God when you think about Him? You must think something about Him in order to think about Him.

Illustration: we have two Matt's in our family here in Colorado Springs. The names are the same, but when we think about them, we do not think the same. They are different people. This leads to confusion at times, because a person may speak of Matt, and we think of the other one rather than the one they are speaking of. We have about four or five Kathy's among our friends, and that gets interesting at time.

So an attribute is something that we think about when we think about something. It is part of the definition of that thing. But this is a problem when we come to God, because the attributes cannot be separated from His infinite Being. This is what makes it difficult, and is one of the differences between us and God. In our friends we see only outward characteristics or attributes, and they are separable from the person. When people think of me, I sure they at least think of a white beard. But the beard is separable from me. There was a time when I did not have a beard, and people who knew me then would have a different attribute in mind when they thought of me. I could cut off my beard today, and I would still be me, although your ideas of me might change.

With God it is different. The attributes cannot be separated from His Being. He cannot be other than He is. There are not parts and pieces to God, one which can be separated from another. You cannot take justice away from God and have the God of the Bible. You cannot remove Love. You cannot remove Wisdom or Knowledge. These things are the very essence of God, but we must understand that we separate them in our mind, in order to think about them, but although we abstract in our minds, they are not different parts of God. The reason for this is another attribute of God called infinity. All of God is infinite, without limits, and all of his attributes are infinite. This is another difference between God and man: man's attributes are finite, and therefore can be separated from us—I can grow old and not be young anymore. Shirley Temple was a cute little girl who played in the movies; now Shirley Temple Black is a grown woman who has distinguished herself in government service. We are finite, we grow, we change; but God does not, because He is infinite.

What are the Attributes of God?

We say that God loves, that He is just, that He is Kind. We make much of these attributes, and it is right that we do so, because God is all of these. But the sort of attributes that these things represent, we in some ways can share. We can be loving, and kind, and just. We can exist. We can be persons and make decisions. God does all of these, although He does them very differently than the way we do them. But these are communicable attributes, that is, things about God that in some way are reflected in His Creatures. We call these Communicable Attributes because they are in some way communicated to man and to other creatures, such as the angels.

But there are certain things about God that can be said only of God. Only God can be these things, and to think them of anything other than God is horrible blasphemy. These are the things that I want to take up first of all: God is independent; God is unchanging; God is Infinite; and God is One. But these things will wait for later sermons. We will keep coming back to these, because our inward thoughts must be conformed to the truth concerning God.

This brings us to the passage I read a few minutes ago, in Deuteronomy 32. This is the latter portion of the Song of Moses, the Song that Moses wrote shortly before his death. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses rehashed the history of Israel. It was written shortly before the conquest of the land of Canaan, and all of the older generation that had come out of Egypt were now dead. The younger generation had been for 40 years in the wilderness, had heard their parents speak of the wonders that God had done in Egypt, but many of them had not seen them, for all over 20 years of age had died in the wilderness because of unbelief. So Moses refreshes their memories in the book of Deuteronomy, and concludes it with this magnificent Song of God's work.

In this Song, recorded in Deut. 32, God reveals Himself to Israel as a Father and greatly worthy to be praised. Many of God's attributes are mentioned in verses 1-4.

But Israel did not believe. Moses takes them to task for their unbelief, for they forsook the Lord (verse 15,16) and served false gods, and forgot the God that formed them (vs. 18). God does not change. Even though they had changed, He did not change. He hates iniquity, lies, and evil, and when they adopted evil and false ways His wrath burned against them. (vs. 21)

They were very foolish. Vs. 28-30. How could they have been so successful to that point, if God had not been with them; if God had not done great things for them. They should consider that God is not like the gods of the other lands about them.

Verses 35-38. God would surely bring them to judgment. In due time their feet would slide. Their calamity would come. Even then the things of judgment were coming their way. Vs. 35.

But He would not bring them to utter ruin, but would completely destroy their power. Vs. 36. When their power is gone.

God would mock their gods, the things in which they trusted. God will blast the things you trust in, and mock them. The things you gave your life to; the things you loved and made sacrifices to, but which could not help you or bring peace to your soul.

God is the cause of all things. There is no other who brings all things to pass after the counsel of His own will. It is God with whom we have to do. God is the fundamental reality of the universe. In Him we live and move and have our being.

God knows who He is. He is not plagued with self-doubts or self-esteem problems. He knows where the universe came from, and does not have his mind divided by various evolutionary pseudo scientific theories. He was there when He spoke the words, "Let there be light, and light exploded forth." His memory is accurate and known perfectly to Him. God was there when man was created. God knows all about man, inwardly and outwardly, because He was there and knows what happened, that even that he described as a forming of man of the dust of the ground, and breathing into His nostrils of the breath of life, and man becoming a living soul. God knows that perfectly. He is self-conscious and knows who He is.

God knows that He is the judge of the earth. Vs. 35. He is not distressed about that. He will take His sword with energy and effectiveness. He knows that there is no God except himself. He is not impressed with the speculations and vanity of men who say, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" He will sweep all that away with one sweep of His mighty sword. The time and place of this judgment is sealed up among His treasures (vs. 34), but it will surely come in its time. Their feet shall slide in due time.

Life and Death are in the hand of the Lord. Vs. 39. He kills and makes alive. He does this all by himself: there is no god with him. He is the final and perfect cause of all things: both extremes: killing and making alive. Life and death are both in His hands. Or lesser things: wounding and healing. There is no escape from the Lord. There is no refuge from Him; there is no place of escape.

This is a cause of rejoicing. Vs. 43. There is hope for the world, because there is a God in heaven. He will establish justice and truth on the earth, and it will be good for the people of God. But we must turn from our idols and turn from our false ideas and from the sinful ways that flow out of those sinful ideas. But there is such a thing as truth; there is such a thing as righteousness; there is such a thing as goodness; there is such a thing as spirit and life. Man has a soul. Man is not the product of physical and chemical processes. You possess an eternal soul that God created to live in fellowship and communion with Him forever. He has many mansions in his house prepared for you, according to Jesus Christ. There are many dwelling places in heaven for the people of God. Therefore your work is not in vain, and the work of the righteous is not in vain. Satan and all his followers will not be triumphant, they will not prevail, although God endures them for a time.

So we would understand this, God takes an oath. Vs. 40. This gives us two things to rest our soul upon: The word of God which cannot pass away; and His oath, because it is impossible for God to deny Himself. He cannot take His Own name in vain.

What is this oath? ***I Live Forever.*** This is the fundamental truth of the universe. There is a living God. This living God is the one who is described in the Bible. His attributes describe who this living God is.

1. This is of most gracious and wonderful comfort to the people of God. This is the reason for verse 43. Why should we be afraid of a man who will die, the prophet Isaiah said. Jesus said, why should you be afraid of those who can only kill the body? If I have made my peace with the living God, what else is there for me to do?
2. This is of most fearful consequences to those who do not repent. Where shall you escape? Where shall you hide. This God lives forever. If this God is your enemy because you have set yourself against Him, will you outlive Him. Will He forget? Will He change His mind? Will He prove to be a liar after all, like you are? He will render vengeance to his enemies, and to all those that hate him. And he will not die before it is accomplished. He lives forever.
3. If there is a God who lives forever, and vengeance and recompense belongs to Him, then the most important task before you in this world is to be at peace with Him. You cannot hide from Him. You cannot think that He will forget. You cannot think that he will overlook your proud and arrogance. The most important duty of your life is to throw down your pride and arrogance and the false things you think about him, and learn the truth and learn what pleases Him. This is what Jesus meant by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." You will receive the prize for which you were created, and all things were created, if you will learn to worship and praise the Lord who made you.
4. This living God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. See II Thess. 1:4-end. God is a God of judgment. He is the living God, and He has determined to make a difference between people; between those who believe and trust, and those who do not know God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because He is the Living God, the Judge of all the earth, he will be glorified in His saints, and he will take vengeance on those who are ungodly.
5. Our prayer: II Thess. 1:11,12. God bless you.