

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY (A. W. TOZER)

PART 1 – KNOWING GOD: A FOUNDATION

Deuteronomy 29:29 – Does God want to be known? Can God be known? Can God be fully known?

Job 38-40 – Can God be fully known and understood?

Jeremiah 9:23-24 – My glory should be in the knowing and understanding of God.

Philippians 3:8, 10 – Jesus Christ reconciles that unknowable/knowable tension in God.

INTRODUCTION

- *True religion confronts earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear upon time.*

Explain that.

- Creating Need:
 - *Problem* – The loss of the concept of majesty from the popular religious mind.

KEY WORD: “religious” – Do you agree? Can you admit that personally?

- *Symptom 1* – An increase of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us (external / morals)
- *Symptom 2* – The loss of a spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence (internal / mind)
- *Solution* – If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is.

- This, then, is the goal of this study = to learn of God more nearly as He is that the heavenly and eternal God may mold His image into our earthly and temporal lives.

WE MUST THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT GOD.

- *What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. “What comes into your mind when you think about God?”*
- Why is a right concept of God so important?
 1. It is foundational to systematic theology. (“Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence.”)
 2. It is foundational to practical Christian living. (“I believe there I scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics than cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”)

What recent study does this sound like? *Jerry Bridges, who taught that “ungodliness” is the root of all other sins.*

 3. It is foundational to the gospel.
 - A right view of God reveals our weighty obligation to Him.
 - A right view of God reveals our failure toward God and our rebellion against Him.
 - A right view of God contextualizes the message of the gospel, which (1) meets our obligation to Him and (2) deals with our rebellion against Him.
- What is a wrong view of God? IDOLATRY
 - *Idolatry is a libel on God’s character.*
 - The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness (Psalm 50:21).

- The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place (Romans 1:21).
- This is a big deal.
 - The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God (Case Study = Israel).
 - 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—and of her.
 - We do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God which we received from our Scriptural forefathers.
 - In all her prayers and labors this should have first place.

How does this fit with a gospel-centered mission (i.e., Great Commission)? Does it contradict or negate it? Does it come after it? *Missions exists because worship doesn't (J. Piper). The mission of the church is in a doxological (God-conscious, God-glorifying) framework, and our message is all about a relationship with God (which is what this study enhances).*

*O Lord God Almighty,
 not the God of the philosophers and the wise
 but the God of the prophets and apostles;
 and better than all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 may I express You accurately?
 They that don't know You
 may call upon You as other than You are,
 and so worship not You, but a creature of their own fancy;
 Therefore, enlighten our minds
 that we may know You as You are,
 so that we may perfectly love You and worthily praise You.
 In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WE MUST APPLY FAITH TO GOD'S SELF-REVELATION.

- What is God like?
 - *God is not like anything; that is, He is not exactly like anything or anybody.*
 - We learn about God by using the familiar as a bridge over which to pass into the unknown (“like”-words; cf. Ezekiel 1); using “that-which-is-not-God” as the raw material for our minds to work on.
 - Whatever we visualize God to be, He is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God.
 - Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him. We want a God we can in some measure control.
- How, then, can we know God and be held accountable for knowing Him? (“If what we conceive God to be He is not, how then shall we think of Him? If He is indeed incomprehensible, as the Creed declares Him to be, and unapproachable, as Paul says He is, how can we Christians satisfy our longing after Him?...how shall we acquaint ourselves with One who eludes all the straining efforts of mind and heart? And how shall we be held accountable to know what cannot be known?”)
 - GOD MUST REVEAL HIMSELF, AND HE HAS!
 - The yearning to know What cannot be known, to comprehend the Incomprehensible, to touch and taste the Unapproachable, arises from the image of God in the nature of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11)...the soul senses its origin and longs to return to its Source.
 - How? “Through Jesus Christ our Lord”! The Gospel of John reveals the helplessness of the human mind apart from Christ before the great Mystery which is God (Matthew 11:27), and I Corinthians teaches that God can be known only as the Holy Spirit performs in the seeking heart an act of self-disclosure (2:10ff).

- How can we know God through Jesus Christ?
 - By faith and love (“God shows Himself not to reason, but to faith and love. Faith is an organ of knowledge, and love an organ of experience.”)
 - God can be known by the soul in tender personal experience while remaining infinitely aloof from the curious eyes of reason.

How should that affect how we go through this study? *In humble, loving, faith, accepting what He says even where question marks remain and loving Him for what He has revealed. This is the avenue through which a relationship with Him is cultivated.*

*Lord, how great is our dilemma!
 In Your presence silence is best for us,
 but love inflames our hearts and constrains us to speak.
 Were we to hold our peace the stones would cry out;
 yet if we speak, what shall we say?
 Teach us to know what we cannot know,
 for the things of God no man knows, but the Spirit of God.
 Let faith support us where reason fails,
 and we shall think because we believe,
 not in order that we may believe.
 In Jesus' name. Amen.*

WE MUST PURSUE KNOWING GOD.

- To the soul that is thirsty for God, nothing could be more delightful than the study of the attributes of God.

When, then, is true of the soul that does not delight in this study? *That soul is not thirsty for God.*

- What do we mean by “attributes”? Let’s build some thoughts here:
 1. Whatever God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself
 2. What we can *conceive* as being true of Him (“God, being infinite, must possess attributes about which we can know nothing.”)
 3. It is *how* God is, and *what* God is – therefore, it is different from a characteristic (which can function independently and change), for He does not have parts, but is a whole. His attributes simultaneously function in consistency and harmony, and “all of God does all that God does.” Example: His love is the way He is, His justice is the way He is, His truth is the way He is, His holiness is the way He is, His power is the way He is, etc – He is all of these things, because these things are how God is.
 4. There is a difference between who God really is and our study of His attributes, for “of what God is conscious when He is conscious of self, only He knows.”
- This study has great limits, but by grace there is a study!

- How, then, can we learn of these attributes?
 - God has provided these answers in nature, in the Scriptures, and in the person of His Son.
 - 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 (Matthew 5:8).
 - “As nothing is more easy than to think, so nothing is more difficult than to think well” (Thomas Traherne).

*O Majesty unspeakable,
 my soul desires to behold You.
 I cry to You from the dust.
 Yet when I inquire after Your name it is secret.
 You are hidden in the light which no man can approach unto.
 What You are cannot be thought or uttered,
 For Your glory is inexpressible.
 Still, prophet and psalmist, apostle and saint have encouraged me
 to believe that I may in some measure know You.
 Therefore, I pray,
 whatever of Yourself You have been pleased to disclose,
 help me to search out
 as treasure more precious than rubies or
 the merchandise of fine gold:
 for with You I will live
 when the stars of the twilight are no more
 and the heavens have vanished away
 and only You remain.
 Amen.*