

We began last week a study on the Glory of God. If you remember, the glory of God is the manifestation of the sum-total of God's perfections. Thus, the glory of God is nothing more than God Himself, revealed or made known. It's the majesty and beauty of God manifested.

Thus, it's my purpose for the next several weeks to examine God's glory, or perhaps put another way, it's my purpose to examine what the Bible says about God. This is really our theme – God! What a novel thought – that the church actually studies what the Bible says about God.

Brethren, it's become apparent to me that many Christians have a very insufficient and even misinformed understanding of God. I fear what Martin Luther said of Erasmus, is true of us—"Your thoughts of God are too human."

And so, having introduced our topic last week, I want to come this week to God's glory as revealed in His Knowability.

- I. Its Means
- II. Its Limitation
- III. Its Implications

I. Its Means

1. Here I want to address the question—How has God revealed Himself in Scripture to give man knowledge of Himself?
2. But before I do that, let me briefly remind you of the important distinction between general and special revelation.
3. General revelation refers to God's revelation of Himself to man through creation and conscience apart from Scripture.
4. Even those who've never seen or heard a Bible, have a general knowledge of God through creation around them and conscience within them.
5. Ps.19:1-2—"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."
6. What knowledge does the heavens daily reveal? Well, obviously the heavens reveal a certain knowledge about their Creator.
7. Furthermore, the Scripture teaches that man, as made in God's image, possesses an innate knowledge of God.
8. Rom.1:21—"For although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God"—that is, the pagan man by nature.
9. Now, let me clear, the knowledge man derives from God from conscience and creation is not sufficient to save him.
10. God has truly revealed Himself through general revelation, and this knowledge renders all men without excuse.
11. And yet, because man needs a further and clearer revelation of God, He has condescended to speak to man verbally.
12. This verbal revelation is what's called special revelation, and it's contained within the books of the Old and NT.
13. It's within these 66 Books (called the Bible), where God has revealed Himself in the clearest and fullest of ways.
14. And this brings me to my main point under this first heading, and that's to examine the ways God has revealed Himself in Scripture.
15. And I want to suggest that generally speaking, God has revealed Himself through His names, attributes, and metaphors.

16. (1) His names—at times Scripture speaks about God's name, Ex.33:5—"Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD."
17. By "name" is simply meant "God Himself"—it's another way of speaking about His Nature, Being, or Essence.
18. In the Scriptures, names are given to people to illustrate their character—names reveal the nature of the person.
19. Thus, when Scripture speaks about God's "name" it merely refers to all that God is essentially in and of Himself.
20. And yet, Scripture also uses specific names to reveal to us who God is—these names provide knowledge about God.
21. Now, here it's not my intent to examine every name Scripture gives to God, but to merely suggest the two most common (and they are found together in v6).
22. (a) Jehovah—this is usually translated LORD (with all capital letters)—it literally means "the self-existent One."
23. It's the same Hebrew word rendered "I AM WHO I AM" in Ex.3:14—it describes God as self-existent, eternal, and unchangeable.
24. All that God is, He is, in and of Himself—God is perfectly sufficient, content, and blessed within His own Being.
25. (b) Elohim—this is usually rendered God and it means "the Almighty One"—it's found in the OT in various forms.
26. An interesting thing about this Hebrew word is that it's plural, which likely points to the great truth of the Trinity.
27. The previous word Jehovah is singular, whereas Elohim is plural, which teaches us God is One in three Persons.
28. Thus, from these two names we learn that God is a self-existent Being, who is almighty and separate from all others.
29. Furthermore, that while God is singular with regards to His essence, He exists as three co-equal persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.
30. Admittedly, we do not learn all these from the name Elohim, but this becomes evident from the rest of Scripture.
31. (2) His attributes—the word "attributes" is found only once in our English Bibles, Rom.1:20—"For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."
32. The older word most often used by our forefathers was "perfections" or those character traits that are true of God.
33. Ex.33:6—"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth."
34. Mercy, grace, longsuffering (patience), goodness, and truth are all attributes or perfections that are true of God.
35. Like His names, God's attributes are means whereby God reveals who His is—each attribute describes God in a unique way.
36. Thus, the attributes of God are not merely true about God, but they describe God from a specific perspective (viewpoint).
37. Put another way, each attribute is simply another way to describe God Himself—God and His attributes are one.
38. Thus, we must never think that God's attributes are a part of Him, and when we put them together they make God.
39. No, each attribute is God viewed in a specific way—God is love, God is wisdom, God is power, and God is holiness.
40. These are not parts of God, they are God—each describes the essence (nature) of God from a specific standpoint.
41. Thus, we must never think God's attributes are something distinct from God, as if there's God and then His attributes (God and His attributes are one and the same).

42. (3) His metaphors—by metaphors are meant figures of speech applied to God to communicate truth about God.
43. For example, God is likened to a lion, bear, eagle, fire, fountain, rock, tower, shield, husband, king, judge, builder, warrior, shepherd, and physician.
44. These are just a few of the many metaphors used in Scripture to describe various attributes or character traits of God.
45. None of these are obviously literally true of God, but they all intend to teach us various things that are actually true of God.

II. Its Limitation

1. Here I want to talk about something that's difficult to explain but important to understand, and that is God's transcendence.
2. God's transcendence refers to the fact that He transcends our ability to fully comprehend or grasp the nature of God.
3. Perhaps another way of speaking about God's transcendence is to speak of God as incomprehensible—He's not able to be fully comprehended.
4. The reasons for this are basically two—first, because God is infinite, and secondly, because man is finite (put another way, God is limitless and man is limited).
5. And thus, I want to take a few minutes and survey four classic texts (2 in OT and 2 in NT), that underscore God's transcendence.
6. Job 11:7—"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty (Job 26:14)?"
7. These are rhetorical questions—the point being—no man can search out the deep things of God, or find out the limits of the Almighty.
8. This is simply another way of saying—no mere man can fully know or understand God because He is limitless.
9. God's Being or Essence exceeds the limits of man's ability to grasp—He is infinite and eternal and we are finite.
10. Ps.145:3—"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable"—that is, it's beyond comprehension.
11. By "greatness" is simply God Himself—if you remember in Ex.33:19, God spoke of His "goodness" which is the same thing.
12. God's greatness is unsearchable, which doesn't deny He can be searched (known), but that He can not be searched (known) in full.
13. Rom.11:33—"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"
14. It's impossible for man to plunge the depths of God's wisdom and knowledge, they are simply too deep for him.
15. 1Tim.6:16—"He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see."
16. God dwells, as He is in and of Himself, in "unapproachable light"—that is, moral purity that exceeds our grasp.
17. Thus, it's very important to understand that in and of Himself God is too infinite for man to grasp or understand.
18. And thus, He has stooped to reveal Himself in Scripture through His names, attributes, and various metaphors.
19. And so, we can only understand God as He's made Himself known through His names, attributes, and metaphors.
20. But these only gives us a limited understanding of God—they only reveal God as He relates to His beloved people.
21. To put this more theological—we can only know God as He has revealed Himself to us, and not as He is in Himself.

22. Dear brethren, we have to distinguish between God as He is in Himself, and God as revealed to us in His word.
23. Now, I want to help you understand this distinction by introducing you to a distinction that Martin Luther made.
24. Martin Luther (in his book *The Bondage of the Will*), makes the distinction between God as hidden and revealed.
25. God as hidden refers to God as He is in Himself—God as revealed refers to God as He's made known in Scripture.
26. We can never know God as hidden—only God Himself knows Himself in this sense—we can only know God as revealed.
27. 1Cor.2:11-12—"No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (that is, in this sense, no one knows God except God). We have received the Spirit of God that we might know the things that have been revealed to us."
28. Notice, there is a sense in which we do not know God (as hidden), and there is another sense in which we do know God (as revealed).
29. And thus, our ability to know God is limited—it's partial—and yet, I want to suggest, it's real, adequate, and expanding.
30. (1) It's real—by this I want to clarify—while our knowledge of God is limited or partial, it's nevertheless real.
31. Perhaps I can illustrate this with Moses—if you remember, God told him he could see His back but not His face.
32. Obviously, God doesn't have a back or face, but this is another way of saying, Moses could only know God in part.
33. God's back and face both refer to Him—His back refers to Him as revealed and His face refers to Him as hidden.
34. Thus, when we say God cannot be known as hidden, this does not deny that God can actually and really be known.
35. The knowledge we have of God as revealed, while only partial or limited, is nevertheless a real knowledge of God.
36. Jer.9:24—"Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, who exercises lovingness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth."
37. (2) It's adequate—by this I mean, while our knowledge of God is limited, it's sufficient for us as redeemed creatures.
38. God has revealed Himself within His word in such a way, so as to enable His people to know Him sufficiently.
39. This means we must avoid any unsanctified desire to pry into things about God, that He has not revealed to us.
40. All that's necessary for us to know of God has been revealed to us within the pages of Scripture—it's adequate.
41. (3) It's expanding—by this I mean, the knowledge we have of God, increases as we mature in our Christian lives.
42. Eph.1:17—"May the Father of glory, give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."
43. Thus, while we will know God without error in heaven, there's good reason to believe this knowledge will increase.
44. Put another way, though our knowledge of God in heaven will be without error, it will be ever and always expanding.
45. Because God is infinite or incomprehensible, our glorified humanity will be plunging the depths of God for eternity.

III. Its Implications

1. Here I want to suggest a few implications that arise as a result of what we've learned—let me simply suggest three.
2. (1) Let us be sure we know God and not merely know about God—I've said this before, you can't know God without knowing about God but you can know about God without knowing God.
3. There are two important questions—how can man know God, and secondly, how can man know he knows God.
4. The NT, especially the book of 1John, provides three important marks or evidences of a saving knowledge of God.
5. (a) Those who know God believe God, 1Jn.4:6—"He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us."
6. False teachers had crept into the church, and John provides a simple way to distinguish the false from the true.
7. Those who truly God "hear us"—that is, they hear the inspired writings of Christ as given through His apostles.
8. Brethren, to put it plainly—those who do not believe the Bible to be God's word, do not personally know God.
9. Those who know God know His voice—they hear that voice within the pages of Holy Scripture and they believe it (My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me).
10. (b) Those who know God obey God, 1Jn.2:3-4—"By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."
11. When a person comes to savingly and personally know God, they come to know Him as a loving and Heavenly Father.
12. (c) Those who know God love God, 1Jn.4:8—"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love"—to know God become partakers of the divine nature.
13. Now, this does not mean we become gods, but it does mean, those who know God now become godly and act like God.
14. To know God is to be like God! The more we know God the more we become like God! And according to John, God is love!
15. (2) Let us grow in our knowledge and understanding of God—O brethren, God has revealed Himself that He might be known.
16. And God not only desires to be known initially, but He desires to be known increasingly—this is what sanctification is about.
17. Let me ask you this question—What is the Christian life about? What are to be goals as we live our lives in this world?
18. Well let me suggest we find a very helpful statement of Paul, in Phil.3:10, wherein he summarizes three goals.
19. Phil.3:10—"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings"—these were his goals.
20. There were three—notice the first one—"that I may know Him"—that is, that I may know God more intimately.
21. Thus, the question becomes, how do we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God, and the answer is rather obvious.
22. How do you get to know anyone more intimately and personally, but you spend time communicating with them.
23. For example, my wife and I have been married 20 years (last may), and while I knew her 20 years ago, I know her better know.
24. Why? Because I have spent 20 years listening to her and talking to her—we have spent time communicating together.
25. And brethren, it's the same with our relationship with God—to know Him better is to spend time getting to know Him.
26. And how do we do this, but by listening to Him speak to us through His word, and talking to Him, through prayer.

27. (3) Let us know God savingly for the sake of Jesus Christ—this is an important point that I have yet to underscore.
28. While it's possible for fallen man to really, sufficiently, and increasingly know God, this can only happen in Christ.
29. Put another way—no man can know God directly, but only through the mediation of Jesus Christ—the GodMan.
30. This of course was not true of our first parents in the garden—Adam and Eve knew God directly without mediation.
31. But when man sinned, he was banished from the garden that was the place where God and man fellowshiped.
32. And do you remember what God did? He blocked the entrance into the garden by an angel with a flaming sword.
33. That flaming sword was a picture of God's righteous wrath against us for our sins, which kept us from knowing God.
34. Thus, if anyone is to have access back to the garden and be reconciled to God, the flaming sword must be satisfied.
35. And dear friends, this is the whole point of the gospel—why did God send His Son into this world but to reconcile man to Himself.
36. Zech.13:7—"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd. Against the Man who is My Companion, says the LORD of hosts. Strike the Shepherd."
37. Jer.31:34—"No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
38. 1Jn.5:20—"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."
39. I mentioned earlier Martin Luther's distinction between God hidden and revealed, which is a very helpful way to say, God is unknowable and knowable.
40. And yet, he also used another distinction to basically teach the same thing, and that was his theology of the cross and glory.
41. For Luther, the theology of glory referred to God as transcendent and hidden, beyond our reach and comprehension.
42. And yet the theology of the cross referred to God as revealed in Christ, and especially His revelation of the cross.
43. This is where God meets man! This is where God reveals Himself to the world! This is how fallen man knows God!