

# The Implication/Application of the Excellencies of God

## Lesson 1 – Introduction

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### Introduction

The pursuit of the knowledge of God is the highest pursuit.

<sup>23</sup>Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; <sup>24</sup>but **let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,**" declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

God's creation displays His "invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Romans 1:20). Yet, it is only in God's word (His specific revelation) that we see God's self-revealing of His character and works (See Psalm 19 for a description of both).

A.W. Tozer in his book "The Knowledge of the Holy" notes, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." As believers, are those thoughts correct, i.e. biblical, or are they incorrect, i.e., humanly and worldly? Your understanding of God and what you think about Him affects you deeply. When you come to a heart-level, true understanding of God as He has revealed Himself to be in His word, all other affections fall away and you are driven to our knees in worship. Having a proper God-consciousness is critical to living a life pleasing to God.

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; <sup>7</sup>who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." <sup>8</sup>**Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.** (Exodus 34:6-8)

<sup>3</sup>You keep him in perfect peace **whose mind is stayed on you**, because he trusts in you. <sup>4</sup>Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. (Isaiah 26:3-4 ESV)

"When you study the Bible carefully with regard to the character of God, you wonder how we could possibly be distracted from something so incontestably foundational. But further when you plunge into the depths of His attributes, you wonder how anything else so soul-possessing could be a rival for man's attention. After all, if God be God, then nothing but nothing could be more important for man than, "the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy" (Isaiah 57:15)." (Barry E. Horner in "Who is the Lord? A Study of the Attributes of God")

"Focusing on the attributes of God is one of the most proactive and preventive activities you can undertake in order to be prepared to overcome the snares of sin and Satan." (Kenneth Mick Sr. in "Lion slayer: Using the right truth to slay the enemy")

Unfortunately, in our instant gratification culture, people want immediately what God designed a lifetime to pursue. There is no shortcut to the study of God. This lifelong pursuit is something that we should never be satisfied with in the depth of our learning. Horner again notes, “There can be no condensed learning of God; the very thought is an insult to His transcendent majesty.”

Our goal for this series is threefold:

1. Look into the Scriptures to develop a biblical view of the character of God.
2. Look at the implications for our walk of faith of understanding the character of God.
3. Ultimately, to glorify God by knowing Him better and becoming more like Christ.

❖ **Is your heart yearning to know God more?**

### **Knowability of God**

Is it possible to know God and, if so, to what extent?

The unregenerate are “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1-3); have their minds blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4) and are held captive by Satan (2 Timothy 2:25-26); love the darkness and hate the light (John 3:19-20); are a slave to sin (John 8:33); and are “foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending their life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

To people in this condition, God has graciously revealed himself in creation. They “know of” God, but do not “know” God.

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.** <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, **being understood** through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For **even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks**, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:18-23)

Yet, it is possible to “know” God in a personal way in salvation as God is “revealed” to His adoptive children through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In salvation, “knowing” God is expressed in a mutual relationship.

<sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.** (Matthew 11:27)

<sup>8</sup>However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. <sup>9</sup>But **now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God**, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? (Galatians 4:8-9)

❖ **Have you come to know the only true, transcendent God intimately?**

Unfortunately, many people, including believers, use logic or human philosophy when attempting to know God. This is problematic since people's ability to think and reason is tainted by the Fall, by sin. Therefore, we need a source of authority in our pursuit of the knowledge of God that is independent of ourselves.

Absolute truth exists and the only source of truth concerning God is the Bible. In other words, the Bible is the only inspired word of God. Many people believe the Bible to *contain* the word of God, but not to *BE* the word of God. The testimony of Jesus and the Scripture's authors is that the Bible *IS* the word of God. It is the inspired word of God. God is its source. The Bible is the inspired (God-breathed), plenary (inspired in equal parts), verbal (extending to the very words), infallible (not wrong), inerrant (completely without error) in the original manuscripts word of God (2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Titus 1:2; John 17:17; Matthew 5:18; 22:31-32; Galatians 3:16). (See the VBC website for additional studies on God's word).

So, it is possible to know God and we will seek to only use the Scriptures when attempting to understand God's self-revelation. Additionally, this type of study falls into a "systematic theology" type study where we are systematizing (or bringing together all the Scriptures) on a certain topic to understand the theology on the topic. This tends to lead to "proof texting" where passages/verses are taken out of context to prove a preconceived idea. We will try very hard not to do that. In our study, we will seek to use the Scriptures exegetically.

So, to what extent is it possible to understand God? The Scriptures tell us that we can never fully understand God. He is "incomprehensible". He is unable to be fully understood. We can understand God, but he cannot be fully understood. His greatness is too magnificent to fully comprehend. His greatness is beyond the finite mind's ability to understand.

<sup>5</sup>How great are Your works, O Lord! **Your thoughts are very deep.** (Psalm 92:5)

<sup>1</sup>O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*. ... <sup>6</sup>**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.** ... <sup>17</sup>How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! **How vast is the sum of them!** <sup>18</sup>If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You. (Psalm 139:1, 6, 17-18)

<sup>3</sup>Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, And **His greatness is unsearchable.** (Psalm 145:3)

<sup>5</sup>Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; **His understanding is infinite.** (Psalm 147:5)

<sup>28</sup>Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. **His understanding is inscrutable** ("unsearchable" – ESV). (Isaiah 40:28)

<sup>8</sup>"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. <sup>9</sup>"For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!** (Romans 11:33)

❖ **Does God's incomprehensibility cause you to give up in your striving to know Him more or drive and increase your passion to know Him more?**

However, just because we cannot understand God fully, or exhaustively, does not mean that we cannot know God. We can know God truly. Knowing facts about God is different than knowing God. For example, I know who John MacArthur is (I know facts about John MacArthur), but I don't "know" John MacArthur. I have no relationship with John MacArthur. The Scriptures do not speak to us knowing facts about God, but in knowing God personally, relationally.

<sup>23</sup>Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; <sup>24</sup>but let him who boasts boast of this, **that he understands and knows Me**, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

<sup>3</sup>**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

<sup>20</sup>And we know that the Son of God has come, and **has given us understanding so 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. (1 John 5:20)

<sup>13</sup>I am writing to you, fathers, because **you know Him who has been from the beginning**. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because **you know the Father**. (1 John 2:13)

In addition, it is God's will for His children to "increase in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). "Increasing" means to cause to grow or mature. "Knowledge" refers to full, perfect, personal (rather than just intellectual) knowledge. It is experiential knowledge.

❖ **What disciplines do you put in your life to increase your knowledge of God?**

### **Definition of God's Excellencies**

An "attribute" of God is anything true of His character – either something that the Bible says is true about God or what the Bible shows is true about God. Note that we are interested in what the BIBLE says about God.

Normally, people use the word "attribute" to describe aspects of God's character. The difficulty in using that word is that it implies ascribing a quality to something. We are not ascribing something to God that He may or may not have. We are describing God by the intrinsic qualities that are His.

Another word for "attribute" is perfection denoting that His attributes are perfectly found in Him as apposed to His creatures. However, I believe that the better word for the characteristics that are intrinsically God's is "excellencies".

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the **excellencies** of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup>for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

“Excellencies” describe any preeminence (moral, intellectual, military) or quality by which one stands out as excellent. It is a term denoting consummate ‘excellence’. Vine notes that it “properly denotes whatever procures preeminent estimation for a person or thing; hence, intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue”.

This passage in 1 Peter says that the reason believers are a “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession” is so that we will proclaim God’s “excellencies”, His perfections, His intrinsic qualities. Ultimately, so He may be glorified; for His glory. So, we will refer to God’s attributes as His “excellencies”.

### ❖ Do you display, verbally and non-verbally, the excellencies of God?

With God, His excellencies are the perfect, full manifestation of the attribute and are intrinsic to His being. People can know some things and to some extent are powerful, but God “is” all knowing (knowing all things actual and possible) and “is” all powerful. People can display love at points in time, but God “is” love. People can make good judgments, but God “is” justice. People can do faithful things, but God “is” faithful. And so on. God’s excellencies describe His nature. If any one of the excellencies found in Scripture were not found perfectly, fully in God, then God would not be God.

The excellency of “infinite” is a comprehensive attribute of God. God’s infinity touches all aspects of God’s being. Every excellency of God is so to the fullest. God is unlimited. God Himself has no bounds or limits imposed on Him except that which might be self-imposed (like the incarnation). He is not limited or confined by anything including time and space. He is beyond and beyond ultimate comprehension. Because of this excellency, we understand that the finite cannot fully grasp the infinite.

<sup>27</sup>“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, **heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You**, how much less this house which I have built! (1 Kings 8:27)

<sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psalm 90:2)

<sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And **His greatness is unsearchable**. (Psalm 145:3)

<sup>5</sup>Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; **His understanding is infinite**. (Psalm 147:5)

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!** (Romans 11:33)

Here are examples of how God’s infinity is related to His other excellencies.

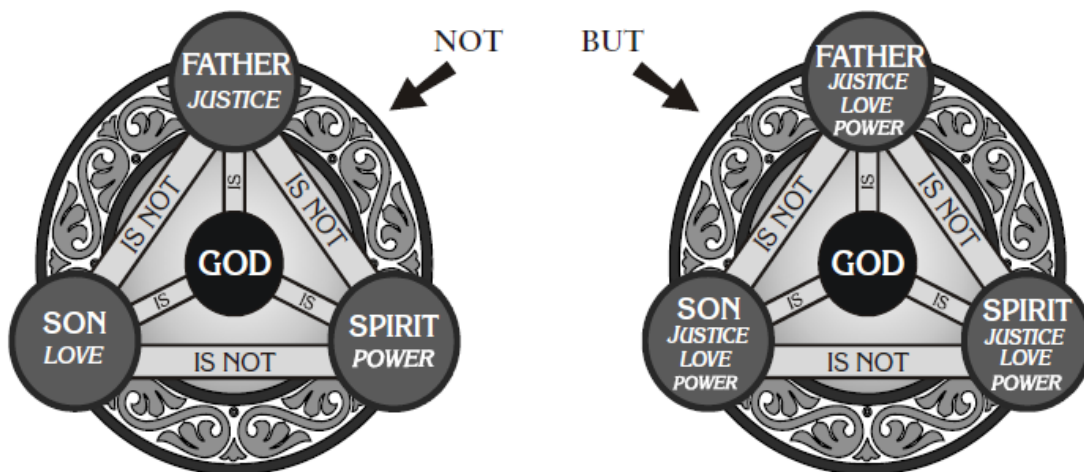
God is holy	-->	Infinity of morality
God is omnipotent	-->	Infinity of power
God is eternal	-->	Infinity of time
God is omniscient	-->	Infinity of knowledge
God is omnipresent	-->	Infinity within space
God is immense	-->	Infinity beyond space
God is immanent	-->	Infinity within creation
God is transcendent	-->	Infinity beyond creation

Also, not one of God’s excellencies is present or working at any one time more than any other. The excellencies do not “balance” each other. God’s wrath is not “balanced” by His grace. There is not “balance” or “compromise” in His excellencies. When He acts in infinite wrath for sin, He is also acting in infinite love. This is an aspect of God that we have difficulty fathoming because it is completely different than our experience.

Also, when you view God as loving, He is not just acting in love, all the other excellencies (e.g. holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, sovereignty, omniscience, etc.) are present and are working also because they are all intrinsically a part of God. They are all who He is. His excellencies are not like a patchwork quilt bringing together separate partitioned attributes. They are perfections of God’s indivisible, simple being. This is why it is dangerous to focus on one excellency at a time because God never acts in time and space with only one excellency, they are all working perfectly, fully at the same time.

❖ **Do you think of God’s excellencies one at a time or all equally together?**

Also, all the excellencies are equally found in each of the members of the Godhead. For example, some often think of Christ as being loving, the Father being justice, and the Spirit being powerful. Yet, each member of the Trinity possesses in equal, full, perfect measure each excellency.



From Barry Horner’s study on the attributes of God found at bunyanministries.org

**Classification of God’s Excellencies**

There are many ways to categorize or classify God’s excellencies. Yet, no one classification is absolute or perfect since it is the finite attempting to describe the infinite.

Since God is transcendent (beyond) over all (1 Kings 8:27; Isa 40:21-25) and also immanent (existing or remaining within) in the world (Psa 139 see v7-10), theologians often discuss the excellencies of God by dividing them into those two categories. Excellencies that deal with God’s transcendency and belong to Him alone are called *absolute* or *incommunicable* or *divine* attributes. Those that deal with His immanency and are qualities that God is working to build in His children through the Spirit’s work of sanctification are called *relative* or *communicable* or *personal* attributes.

This type of classification is useful because it helps us focus our attention on the uniqueness of God in relation to ourselves and also the nearness of God to us.

❖ **Do you think of more of God’s greatness, immanence, or balance the two?**

*All Scripture are from the NASB ‘95 Update unless noted.*

We will start our study looking at some of the absolute or incommunicable or divine excellencies, then move to the relative or communicable or personal attributes. Here is our plan.

1. Introduction
2. Transcendency and immanency
3. Summary excellencies (perfection, blessedness, beauty)
4. Glory and aseity
5. Immutability
6. Omnipresence and omniscience
7. Omnipotence and sovereignty
8. Holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath
9. Faithfulness
10. Love, lovingkindness, goodness, wisdom
11. Grace, mercy, compassion, kindness
12. Forgiveness and longsuffering

### **Conclusion**

We must cultivate a deep understanding of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. When we see the high and lofty King for who He has revealed Himself to be in His word it drives us to our knees in worship; it moves us to deep love for our creator; it cultivates a heart motive to obey, please, honor, and glorify Him.

We must think with a balance of all of God's excellencies. Elevating any one in our thinking leads us to false thinking and therefore false living.