

Intermediate Biblical Counseling 201
Class 9 – March 14, 2021
Counseling the Attributes of God

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Tozer

- I. **Knowing God** (9:05-9:30am)
- A. The greatest accomplishment accompanying biblical counseling is **knowing God**.
1. This is true whether we mean that s/he comes to know Him for the very **first time** through being born again from above by faith in Christ **OR**
 2. That a believer **grows to know Him** more genuinely, fully, accurately and personally in the way Paul speaks of in Philippians 3:10 and Peter speaks of in 2 Peter 1:2-3.
- B. When God conveys that someone is not where they should be with Him, He sometimes does so in terms of **knowing Him**. Isaiah 1:3 says, “*An ox knows its owner and a donkey its master, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand.*” Not knowing or not understanding what? They do not know *God*.
- C. The only time Jesus defines eternal life, He does not refer to heaven (though that is described elsewhere). Nor does He refer to the length of the life (though that is declared elsewhere). Rather, He says eternal life is **knowing Him**. *This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, and Jesus Christ Whom thou hast sent.* John 17:3
- D. Growing in the **knowledge of God** = His goal for us (2 Pet 3:18) and results in growing obedience. *We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands.* 1 Jn. 2:3
- E. **Knowing Him** is the way He identifies us as His. *I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and My sheep know Me.* John 10:14
- F. Wisdom, strength and riches are things most people seek for. God says that possessing those is a smaller thing than **knowing Him**. *Thus says the Lord: Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, nor a strong man boast of his strength, nor a rich man boast of his riches. But let him who boasts, boast of this: That he understands and knows Me.* Jer. 9:23
- G. Satan’s greatest desire for an unbeliever is to blind him to the truth of the gospel so that he might not believe and be saved. His greatest desire for the believer? It is to keep him **from really knowing God**. *The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.* [What kind of fortresses do we destroy?] *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.* 2 Cor. 10:4-5
- H. But why? Why would Satan raise fortresses and lofty things against the knowledge of God? 2 Peter 1:2-3 might give us a clue. What would the **knowledge of God** actually do for us that might cause Satan concern? *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.* That means that the man, woman or young person walking in the true (experiential) knowledge of Christ
1. Experiences not only basic grace or “added” grace, but **multiplied grace**;
 2. Experiences not only basic peace or even added peace, but **multiplied peace**;
 3. Experiences everything necessary for **godliness**;
 4. Experiences (true) **life** (which is not biological life and not being born again, but the abundant life of John 10:10).

- I. We get to **know God** as we get to know any other person. We spend time with them, and we observe their characteristics and attributes. *Counselees come to know Him by considering His attributes as He wills to disclose them to us.*

II. Case Study Considerations **(9:30-9:50am)**

- A. Your 30 year old daughter calls to say that she has just learned that her husband has been committing adultery, and she does not know what to say or do. After you and she get past the shock, what attributes of God will you and she need to rely upon to make it through this trial, and how will these qualities of God be helpful to you or to her?

- B. Bill, 47, serves as an elder in his church. Because your church has a biblical counseling ministry, he comes to you and confides that he is slowly coming to admit that he is depressed. His 24 year old unmarried daughter recently moved in with a guy and his 19 year old son has no life direction or drive. Bill's interest in keeping himself up has faded as have many things he used to enjoy. You remember that his company bellied up last year, as did his pension. He did get another job five months ago, though at a lower rate of pay and without any pension possibility. You ask if he has spoken with others in his church about his depression. Gazing out the window, he replies, "*The last thing I need is to be looked down at in church. That's one area I feel like I have some authority and worth.*" What now? Are there attributes of God that this man needs to rely upon that will affect his life, and if so, what are they and how would they affect him?

III. Attributes of God **(9:50-10:00am)**

- A. Attributes of God are characteristics of His person. Some of those traits are true only of Him (e.g., omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, eternal, immanent, transcendent). Others are traits that we can develop as we grow in our knowledge of, obedience to and Romans 8:29 conformity with Him (e.g., holy, faithful, righteous, gracious).
- B. It is impossible to list all of God's attributes because 1) He is infinite (another of the "true only of him" traits) and 2) He is only knowable so far as He chooses to reveal Himself (as we see in Job 38-41, "incomprehensible," another trait only true of Him).
- C. However, He has revealed a great many of His traits, and it is generally pretty clear which ones He wants us to develop (*transferable*) and which are only true of His nature, revealed to us so we know what He is like and can worship and trust Him accordingly.
- D. In Isaiah 50:10, he tells us "when we're in the dark" to "trust in the name of the Lord." Those names reflect His character. When you study His names, you see His character.
- E. We will list below some of God's traits that are particularly helpful for all Christians to know, and for counselees to meditate upon and rest in. They help us have an accurate view of ourselves, our problems and, most importantly, our God.
- F. Discuss how each passage reflects a characteristic of God, and how knowing and trusting that trait would help a counselee. Each group gets one characteristic: take 8 minutes to summarize among yourselves what these passages tell us about this trait, and how you think it would help. Then we'll take 12 minutes to share. (10:00-10:20am)

1. Sovereign (Genesis 1; Daniel 4:34-35) _____

2. Righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 92:15) _____

3. Holy (Isaiah 6:1-6; Habakkuk 1:13) _____

4. Gracious (Rom. 4:4-5) _____

5. Omnipotent (Jeremiah 32:27) _____

6. Omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12) _____

7. Omniscient (Isaiah 40:13) _____

8. Faithful (Numbers 23:19; 2 Thess. 3:3) _____

9. Merciful (Psalm 59:16; Psalm 136:1) _____

10. Imminent/Approachable (Matthew 1:23; Acts 17:28) _____

IV. Homework

- A. Summarize each verse in the Sovereignty Bible Study (from Brad Bigney’s message) you will find on page 4 in one or two sentences. At the bottom, describe how it could help a counselee. Be ready to share next week with group. **(Mon-Tues total 30min)**
- B. Read the attached article (pages 5-9) on the attributes of God. **Circle your three favorites** share with your family this week and your group next week. **(Wed 20min)**
- C. Memorize Daniel 11:32b – *The people who know their God will display strength and take action.* Share with your group next week. **(2 minutes five days total 10min)**
- D. Complete the character study in the section above **(Thursday or Friday total 10min)**

Extracted from CD Message "Sovereignty" by Brad Bigney

Read each of the following verses. Write down what they say in your own words.

Job 23:12-14 _____

Job 42:2 _____

Psalms 119:67 _____

Psalms 119:71 _____

Psalms 119:74-75 _____

Psalms 115:3 _____

Psalms 135:6 _____

Ecclesiastes 7:14 _____

Lamentations 3:37-38 _____

Isaiah 45:5-7 _____

Amos 3:6 _____

Isaiah 46:9-10 _____

Revelation 19:6 _____

What do you think a full embrace of sovereignty can do for a counselee?

Reflections on the Attributes of God

Discipleship Journal July – August 1981

Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
Hebrews 11:6

All-knowing

God's knowledge is not objective and impersonal, but "interested." His knowledge is the expression of his sympathy, his care, his planning, and his love. He "knows what we have need of before we ask him."
EMIL BRUNNER

No matter how much the sinner tries to get away from God and all that is holy, righteous, and good, he is still under God's all-seeing eye. So it is with the saved. All the veneer of hypocrisy and superficiality is removed by the Lord's gaze. Not only does God know and see our every motive and action now, but at the judgment seat of Christ we will be judged according to the life we really lived. *ROBERT P. LIGHTNER*

The truth is that God in his wisdom, to make and keep us humble and to teach us to walk by faith, has hidden from us almost everything that we should like to know about the providential purposes which he is working out in the churches and in our own lives... Let us see to it, then... that we do not frustrate the wise purpose of God by neglecting faith and faithfulness in order to pursue a kind of knowledge which in this world it is not given to us to have.
J. I. PACKER

All-powerful

God is the ever-present and all-pervading energy, guiding and directing everything *LEWIS S. CHAFER*

That one who has suffered defeat in the service of God, whose enemies crucified and mocked him, one who out of the depths of dereliction cried aloud to God, could reveal the almighty power of God-what human understanding, or what human imagination, would have conceived such an idea? *EMIL BRUNNER*

For God to rule the angry sea seems nothing to me compared with the power which he exercises upon himself when he endures the provocations of ungodly men, the hardness of their hearts, their rejection of Christ, and often times their blasphemous speeches and their unclean deeds. O sinner, when you are sinning with a high hand and with an outstretched arm, is it not a wonder of wonders that God does not cut you down, and end your insolence?
C. H. SPURGEON

Caring

He will come in his own time, and when you least expect it. Hope in him more than ever; thank him with me for the favors he does you, particularly for the fortitude and patience which he gives you in your afflictions. It is a plain mark of the care he takes of you. Comfort yourself, then, with him, and give thanks for all.
BROTHER LAWRENCE

For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind; and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
FREDERICK W. FABER

Changeless

He remains everlastingly the same. There are no furrows on his eternal brow. No age has palsied him; no years have marked him with the mementos of their flight . . . The Godhead was the same when he was a babe in the manger, as it was when he stretched the curtains of heaven; it was the same God that hung upon the cross, and whose blood flowed down in a purple river, the self-same God that holds the world upon his everlasting shoulders, and bears in his hands the keys of death and hell. He never has been changed in his essence, not even by his incarnation; he remains everlasting, eternally, the one unchanging God.

C. H. SPURGEON

In coming to him at any time we need not wonder whether we shall find him in a receptive mood. He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as to love and faith. He does not keep office hours nor set aside periods when he will see no one. Neither does he change his mind about anything. Today, this moment he feels toward his creatures, toward babies, toward the sick, the fallen, the sinful, exactly as he did when he sent his only-begotten Son into the world to die for mankind. God never changes his moods or cools off in his affections or loses his enthusiasm.

A. W. TOZER

For a moral being to change, it would be necessary to change in one of two directions. Either the change is from something worse to something better, or else it is from something better to something worse. It should be evident that God can move in neither of these directions. *JAMES M. BOICE*

Eternal

God stands above time because he is its Creator and Lord. The God who creates time, who makes a beginning, who “allows” time, and who will one day say: “Now it is ended!”-this God is not himself involved in the time-process... The eternity of God-this simply means his lordship over the time which he has created.

EMIL BRUNNER

Faithful

The faithfulness of God is the unfailing source of comfort and assurance to those who are right with him, or partakers of his covenants of promise. It was a word of great meaning when Christ said, “I am... the truth” (John 14:6).

LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER

The biblical language about the faithfulness of God is . . . everywhere the expression of a great and joyful amazement.

EMIL BRUNNER

All I have needed thy hand hath provided—Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

T. O. CHISHOLM

Glorious

Though God sincerely seeks to promote the happiness of his creatures and to perfect the saints in holiness, neither of these is the highest possible end. That end is His own glory. *HENRY C. THIESSEN*

God is not indifferent to how men and women regard him. He does not go his solitary way heedless of their rejection of him. Rather, he wills and acts to see that his glory is recognized. Recognition will come now, in each individual case, or it will become true for each in the day of God’s judgment.

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

In the thought of the Bible-and indeed in all genuine Christian thought-the idea of the “Glory of God” is absolutely fundamental. God *wills* to be recognized as God . . . The Living God who makes his Name known to us is not indifferent. He wills “that the whole earth be filled with his Glory. *EMIL BRUNNER*

Good

That God is good is taught or implied on every page of the Bible and must be received as an article of faith as impregnable as the throne of God . . . If God is not good, then there can be no distinction between kindness and cruelty, and heaven can be hell, and hell, heaven. *A. W. TOZER*

The infinite goodness of God . . . is itself the source of all in the universe that is good. *LEWIS S. CHAFER*

Calvary is the measure of the goodness of God; lay it to heart. *J. I. PACKER*

Holy

In its original and most fundamental sense, *holy* is not an ethical concept at all. Rather it means that which is of the very nature of God and which therefore distinguishes him from everything else. It is what sets God apart from his creation. It has to do with his transcendence. *JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE*

God-alone-is God; the creature is-only-a creature. Hence the holiness of God evokes from man an incomparable sense of distance from him. God in his nature is inaccessible. He dwells “in light unapproachable” (1 Tim. 6:16). *EMIL BRUNNER*

He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them. *WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH*

We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible, and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God’s power and admire his wisdom, but his holiness he cannot even imagine... Holy is the way God is. To be holy he does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity.

A. W. TOZER

Just

God does not owe it to anyone to stop justice from taking its course. He is not obliged to pity and pardon; if he does so it is an act done, as we say, “of his own free will,” and nobody forces his hand.

J. I. PACKER

The wrath of God is not at all like any emotion we know in human experience. It is, rather, that necessary and proper stance of the holy God to all that opposes him. It means that he takes the matter of being God seriously, so seriously that he will not allow any thing or personality to aspire to his place.

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unregarded. *A.W. TOZER*

He is . . . most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

In no place has divine wisdom been so displayed as in the plan of redemption. Here God is seen to have solved his greatest of all problems, namely, how he could be just and at the same time be the justifier of sinners.

LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER

Christians sometimes have the mistaken notion that God is lenient and less demanding with believers than he is with unbelievers. This is not true. God meted out the just demands of his absolute but offended righteousness on Christ. He bore it all, and the payment was made by him; and since we are in him by faith in him as Savior, God the Father accepts us.

ROBERT P. LIGHTNER

Vast indeed is the universe of God. . . . The more we know, the further back we push the frontiers of the known, the more elusive seem the mysteries in the unknown to which they point. Every blade of grass is an unsolved miracle of God. Every atom is an ocean into which, if you take three steps, you are lost . . . The majesty of God! Our minds lost in the thought of it.

J. WALLACE HAMILTON

All human pride, pretense and achievement is reduced and evacuated by God, because he is that sort of God.

R. P. C. HANSON

Loving

The moral law of the love of our neighbor does not stand by itself, but it is the result of the original relation between the self-giving, creating God, and the man who has been created by him and for him. The first element in man's relation with God is not the Law, but the self-giving love of God...

Faith is indeed simply being grasped and held by the love of God in Jesus Christ...

The fact that God is love is the quintessence, the central word of the whole Bible. The God of revelation is the God of love.

EMIL BRUNNER

It is a strange and beautiful eccentricity of the free God that he has allowed his heart to be emotionally identified with men. Self-sufficient as he is, he wants our love and will not be satisfied till he gets it. Free as he is, he has let his heart be bound to us forever.

A. W. TOZER

Though infinitely holy, he nevertheless maintains a relation to fallen creatures; not a quiescent aloofness from them, but a vital, pulsating nearness.

LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER

Majestic

Like us, he is personal; but unlike us he is great...

The most universally awesome experience that mankind knows is to stand alone on a clear night and look at the stars. Nothing gives a greater sense of remoteness and distance; nothing makes one feel more strongly one's own littleness and insignificance . . . It is God who brings out the stars; it was God who first set them in space; he is their maker and master; they are all in his hands, and subject to his will. Such are his power and majesty.

J. I. PACKER

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION

We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty co-eternal.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Merciful

Without detracting from his holiness, God could make an end of sinful man. But if an end must be made, if the book of History must be closed, and the hour of judgment must strike, then why not *now*? Why not much earlier than this? Why not at the beginning of sinful humanity? To this question there is no other answer than this, that God's mercy gives this breathing-space to the human race in order to give it "a last chance," the possibility of repentance and amendment.

EMIL BRUNNER

We may plead for mercy for a lifetime in unbelief, and at the end of our days be still no more than sadly hopeful that we shall somewhere, sometime, receive it. This is to starve to death just outside the banquet hall into which we have been warmly invited. Or we may, if we will, lay hold on the mercy of God by faith, enter the hall, and sit down with the bold and avid souls who will not allow diffidence and unbelief to keep them from the feast.

A. W. TOZER

To some of us, the most incredible verse in the Bible is "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. The angels must have been breathless with the sheer restraint of it: this God who could wither us by his power, coming to men not with might, but with mercy, with enormous respect for our frailty and our freedom, standing at the heart's door to seek admission there.

J. WALLACE HAMILTON

Sovereign

No difference exists between what God *wills* and what he can *do*.

EMIL BRUNNER

Temptations and sorrows come to Christians and non-Christians alike. The question is: How shall we meet them? Clearly, if we must face them with no clear certainty that they are controlled by God and are permitted for his good purposes, then they are meaningless and life is a tragedy. That is precisely what many existentialists say. But if God is still in control, then such circumstances are known to him and have their purpose.

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

Who owns the earth? The communists say it belongs to the workers. The socialists say it belongs to the state. The capitalists say it belongs to those who are smart enough and strong enough and free enough to take it. And because all are wrong in their basic outlook-that is, in their ideas of sovereignty-they will go on setting tribe against tribe in endless economic confusion. "The earth is the Lord's." That is not good advice; it is the great truth, to which we must adjust, and without which nothing else will come right.

J. WALLACE HAMILTON

He is our Creator, Lord, our Sustainer. He has an unlimited right to us and claim over us which in any other person would be intolerable tyranny, but is right and justified in God alone, because God is God. In the case of God alone it is wrong and sinful for us to criticize, to be objective or neutral, to stand outside; we must submit and surrender.

R. P. C. HANSON

Only God is free.

A. W. TOZER