

“What Is God?”

God Is Great Medicine

On Sunday January 7, 1855, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the 20 year old pastor of New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, England, began his message with these words addressing the knowledge of God:

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in [thinking about God].

And, while humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently [comforting]. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a [medication] for every wound; in [reflecting] on the Father, there is a [help] for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy [Spirit], there is an [ointment] for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a [bed] of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout [pondering] upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning. -cited in J. I. Packer, Knowing God

These are powerful words from a young man which were right on target. Too often our faith falters and our commitment to Christ crumbles under the weight of stress all because we either do not know who God is and what He is like, or we simply forget. It has always been this way. Consider what the prophet Hosea (4:6) said about the reason Israel faced judgment:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (referred to as knowledge of God in v. 1); because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

This is in line with what God promised through Moses in Deuteronomy 8:11, 18-19 if Israel forgot God:

Take care lest you forget the LORD your God.... You shall remember the LORD your God.... And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

These truths are still as applicable today as then. Hebrews 11, that great faith-building portrait of faithful saints from history, tells the New Testament believer: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he is faithful and that he rewards those who seek him.” (v. 6, author’s own translation) In other words, if we



Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92) was England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1854, just four years after his conversion, Spurgeon, then only 20, became pastor of London's famed New Park Street Church (formerly pastored by the famous Baptist theologian John Gill). The congregation quickly outgrew their building, moved to Exeter Hall, then to Surrey Music Hall. In these venues Spurgeon frequently preached to audiences numbering more than 10,000—all in the days before electronic amplification. In 1861 the congregation moved permanently to the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle.
-From spurgeon.com

are to trust in God, we must know who God is, what He is like—so that we can know He is faithful. Such informed faith comes through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

As Spurgeon suggested, a knowledge of God, a regular reflection upon Him and what He is like, and the resulting faith in Him comprise a medication for whatever ails us. This is why it is so important for us to consider who God is and what He is like.

One of the best descriptions of God ever penned in the history of the Church is the fourth question and answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It asks: “What is God?” This answer is given: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” Let’s examine more closely this statement to learn more about God.

God is a Spirit

Of this attribute of God, Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology, 187) writes: “God’s spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence.”

John 4:24: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

There are a number of implications that arise from the reality that God is spirit. First, God can be present everywhere since He is not limited by a physical body and thus confined to one particular place. The fact that God is present everywhere is often referred to as omnipresence. Psalm 139:7-10 is one of the scriptural passages which teach this:

Omni- = “all”. When prefixed to “presence,” it means present everywhere.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? [8] If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! [9] If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, [10] even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Omni- = “all”. When prefixed to “science,” it means possessing all knowledge.

Since God is present everywhere He also can and does know all things. This is part of the reason David asked God to search him and know his heart after affirming His omnipresence in Psalm 139 (esp. vv.23-24). This attribute, omniscience, is also clearly affirmed in Hebrews 4:13: “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

The fact that God is present everywhere and knows all things not only leads to ethical implications for us (e.g. even when I am by myself, God knows what I am thinking and doing), it also provides great comfort. After Jesus Christ commissioned His followers to make disciples of all nations (one of the greatest of all responsibilities and tasks) He gave the following promise: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:20) In fact this presence is one of our greatest reasons we can be content no matter the circumstance. Hebrews 13:5: “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

There is also one final implication of God’s spirituality, namely that no matter how we would try and represent Him in an image, we would always belittle Him. However great we would make the representation it would always fall so short of His perfection, excellence, and beauty that we would twist who and what He really is. That is why He teaches us in the third commandment, Exodus 20:4-6:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Family Discussion:

1. Why is it important to Know God, who He is, and what He is like?
2. In this reading we discussed the fact that God is spirit. Talk about some ways that this makes a difference to your faith in God and obedience of Him.
3. Do you believe it is proper to depict God in art? Why or why not?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, questions 50-52, deal with this commandment. They read as follows:
 50. What is required in the second commandment? A. The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his Word.
 51. What is forbidden in the second commandment? A. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his Word.
 52. What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment? A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God’s sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

