



The Person of God

Key Doctrines for Starting and Finishing Strong

LESSON 1 | Part 2



"For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."

PSALM 36:9 NASB

MAIN POINT IN THIS LESSON:

- **God's Revelation**—In what ways has God revealed Himself? What does God's self-disclosures reveal to us about God? What are the evidences that a person has obtained a true, saving knowledge of God?

Are the following statements true or false? (circle one)



- God may exist, but He cannot be truly known. T F
- Any person can find God within their own soul. T F

Be on the lookout for the answers to these questions as we study the Word of God.

God's Revelation

Herman Bavinck, who succeeded the great Abraham Kuyper (former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, 1901-1920) as the esteemed Professor of Systematic Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam, made this statement:

"Religion and the knowledge of God can have their origin only in revelation. If God does not reveal Himself in [to] His creatures, knowledge of Him is evidently unattainable."—**Herman Bavinck**, *Attributes of God*.

In this quote, Professor Bavinck asserts that the doctrine of the knowledge of God is rooted in *God's own self-disclosure*. The knowledge or revelation of God can be discovered in five areas:

- Innate knowledge
- Acquired knowledge
- Creation
- Conscience
- Christ

1. Innate knowledge—What does the Bible say about innate knowledge?

- **Romans 1:19-20**—*"Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 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."*

When the Apostle Paul says, *"...that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them,"* he affirms the two ways in which God has revealed Himself. Theologians call this the *innate knowledge* of God and *the acquired knowledge of God*.

By **innate knowledge**, Christian theology asserts that:

- a. Man is not born with *clear ideas* of who God is.
- b. Man is not born *fully equipped with the knowledge of God*, needing only time and effort to bring it out.
- c. Man does not have *something within himself that dispenses divine revelation*.
- d. Man is not able to *obtain a conscious, clear, and true knowledge of God* from the storehouse of his own soul.

Having the **innate knowledge of God** means that when God created man in His image, He implanted within the structure of man's being, or soul, the capacity or ability to obtain the knowledge of God. However, this ability or capacity does not mean that man is *conscious* of that capacity or that he can come to this realization through compulsion, reasoning, or argument.

For example, although we are born with eyes at birth, we are unable to see any object without light. Even so, man at creation was given the capacity to obtain the knowledge of God, but he could never know Him unless God revealed Himself, both from within and from without.

This is the fact that makes **knowing God** different from **knowing inanimate** objects like a *book*, or a *language*. If we want to know a language or a country, we could do so by using various methods of learning, like *inspection* and *exploration*. However, when it comes to **knowing people**, it gets a little more complex because people keep secrets. You can know a person for years and then something happens and you say, "I feel like I don't really know this person at all!" What we are acknowledging when we say this is *that there are degrees in our knowledge of people*. This illustrates in a small way something of what it means to **know God**. The *extent* and the *quality* of our knowledge of Him really depends upon how much God is willing to open up His heart and mind to us.

2. Acquired knowledge—How can we gain the knowledge of God?

Innate knowledge is *passive*; acquired knowledge is *active*. Innate knowledge is *the ability to know*, but acquired knowledge is *the result of reasoning, reflection, and argumentation* of God's revelation. All mankind acquires a certain amount of revelation about God through *general revelation* or in *creation (Rom.1:18ff)*. We will study this more in a moment. In addition to the *general revelation* of God in creation, God has given *special revelation* in the Scriptures. The Old Testament (OT) mode of revelation was through the prophets.

- **Amos 3:7**—"Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets."
- **Hebrews 1:1**—"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways."
- **2 Peter 1:20-21**—"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

Go back to Romans 1:19-20 and find the three clear revelations that are given about God in creation.

- **Romans 1:19-20**—"Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 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."
 - a. His _____—what does this mean?
 - b. His _____—what does this mean?
 - c. His _____—what does this mean?

God designs these three clear general revelations to accomplish two things: 1) *to direct men away from worshipping false gods* and, 2) *to render men without excuse in honoring the only and true God*. However, Romans 1:18 says that all of humanity, in a fallen and sinful condition, "*suppress the truth in unrighteousness*."

The good news is that God has not left men with *general revelation* alone. He has given mankind *special revelation* in the Holy Scriptures.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17**— *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*

In these verses the phrase "*inspired by God*" (Gk. "theopneustos") comes from the terms "theo" which means "God" and "pneo" which means to "breath or blow." It means that the Scripture is *God breathed* or *given by inspiration*. John MacArthur footnotes this point well:

"Scripture is the revelation conveyed, inspiration is the means of that conveyance. In the words originally revealed and recorded, all Scripture is God's inerrant Word."

3. Creation—What does creation tell us about God?

- **Psalm 19:1-4**—*"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun."*

There are four things you always need to remember about general revelation:

- It is God's *autograph* in the heavens. It is God's self-written revelation of Himself.
- General revelation is enough to *condemn*, but not enough to *save*.
- General revelation is *above barriers of language and culture*.
- God's general revelation is *persistent* and *consistent* regardless of the affairs of men.

4. Conscience—What does conscience reveal to us about God?

First, we need to be clear about *what conscience is* and second, ***what it is designed to accomplish?*** The word "**conscience**" comes from two words: *con* meaning *with*, and *science* which means *knowledge*. It is a *universal inbuilt capacity given by God* to every human being. It is an element of the image of God. It distinguishes humans from animals, for it gives man the capacity to discern right from wrong.

"Conscience involves the *mind*, the *emotions*, and the *will*. It is both retrospective and prospective. It judges actions done or omitted and brings *feelings of guilt* and *the awareness of the need for repentance*. It guides and directs before we act, so that we may act properly in good conscience.

The New Testament (NT) shows that consciences may be *weakened* or *deadened* (1 Tim.4:1-5; Eph.4:19; Tit.1:5). The Christian has the responsibility to educate and develop his or her conscience (Heb.5:14; 9:9; 9:14; 10:2; 10:22; 2 Cor.1:12).

This involves directing the conscience to keep it in line with external moral norms. While the conscience is not to be disobeyed, it is not the sole guide to moral life. It needs to be checked and tested in relation to the character of God as *revealed in Christ*, to be *informed by Scripture* and *renewed by the Holy Spirit*." (New Dictionary of Theology, A Concise Resource, pg.161)

5. Christ—Jesus is the ultimate and greatest revelation of God.

We will dive into the Person of Christ in another chapter, but for now, read these verses and underline or highlight what they say about Christ as God:

- **Colossians 2:9**—*"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."*
- **John 8:58**—*"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'"*
- **Titus 2:13**—*"looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
- **John 1:1-2, 14**—*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*
- **John 14:6**—*"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"*

Has God Revealed Himself?

Yes! Yet we must quickly qualify this by adding: that we can never know Him *exhaustively*. Even if God did fully reveal Himself, it would be impossible for finite creatures to grasp the infinitude of God. This is surely what compelled Moses to say, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever..."* (Deut.29:29). God has made Himself known and that which He has revealed is so rich and so deep that we still cannot get our arms around it. F.H. Lehman, in his hymn, *"The Love of God,"* said it this way:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the oceans dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

F.H. Lehman was just thinking of the love of God! This is to say nothing of His *grace, mercy, goodness, holiness, or power!* Well, bless God He has revealed Himself in two very distinct and related ways: He has revealed Himself *in us* and *to us*. Man has what is called the *seed of religion*, or a sense of divinity in him—a divine instinct, if you will. When God created man in His image, it means, in part, that in man's makeup and mind, he possesses the ability to see God in His works and that he has the work of the Law written in his heart (Gen.1:27; Acts 17:28; Rom.1:19-20, 2:15). John Calvin said, "No one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he 'lives and moves'" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1*) (Acts 17:28).

Have you ever looked into the mirror and heard that voice inside of you asking:

- Who are you?
- What is your purpose?
- Why are you here?
- Where are you going?

Again, John Calvin wrote in the *Institutes*, "All the wisdom we possess, that is true and sound wisdom, consist in two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves."

Putting it another way: we will never know ourselves until *we know God*, and *when we know God* we will possess true wisdom.

John R.W. Stott wrote, "together [invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature] constitute something of his glory...In other words, the God who in himself is invisible and unknowable has made himself both visible and knowable through what has been made. The creation is a visible disclosure of the invisible God, an intelligible disclosure of the otherwise unknown God. Just as artists reveal themselves in what they draw, paint and sculpt, so the Divine Artist has revealed himself in his creation." (*Romans, *God's Good News for the World*, IVP Press, pg.73)

Closing:

Application questions: Being a Doer of the Word

- **2 Timothy 3:16**—"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [what is right], for reproof [what is not right], for correction [how to get right], for training in righteousness [how to stay right]; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
1. What did I learn ("teaching")?
 2. Where do I fall short ("reproof")?
 3. What do I need to do about it ("correction")?
 4. How can I make this a consistent part of my life ("training")?

Answer Key:

Are the following statements true or false?

- F
- F

God's Revelation

2. Acquired Knowledge

- invisible attributes—unseen qualities
- eternal power—uncreated ability and authority
- divine nature—infinite being

Holy Habits Weekly Devotion



This week's memory verse: **Romans 1:20**—"*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.*"

This week's holy habit: **The Word**

God reveals Himself to us by various means and most profoundly through Jesus Christ. Refusing His call simply requires absorption with one's self, pride. Denying His existence takes that a step further by requiring a high degree of foolishness. Scripture clearly illustrates the truth. We can rest assured that God is who He says He is, and He does *everything* that He says He will do.

DAY 1 Read Isaiah 6:3.

- Think about this majestic proclamation and the ways that it is manifested in the world.

DAY 2 Read Hebrews 2:9.

- Reflect on the kind of love that it would take to give up this position for your sin.

DAY 3 Read Psalm 19:1.

- Consider the night sky and the immense number of stars that God knows by name and can hold between His index finger and thumb.

DAY 4 Read Judges 13:20-22.

- Think about the dark and challenging times in your life when you felt like you were alone. Now, with perfect hindsight, vocalize how your Father was always there.

DAY 5 Read Romans 1:20.

- Name three ways the human mind and body illustrates the hand of its intelligent Creator.

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