



UNIT 3

The Attributes of God

“God’s glory lies chiefly in His attributes, which are the several beams by which the divine nature shines forth.”

—Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*



His Omniscience

“If God be infinitely wise, let us go to Him for wisdom, as Solomon did.”

—Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*

You may have noticed in Scripture that when God asks a question, He already has an answer in mind. He does not ask people questions because He seeks knowledge, but because He wants people to appreciate the truth He already knows.

- “Where are you?” He asked Adam, because the first man and woman no longer walked with God (Gen. 3:9–13).
- “Where is your brother?” He asked Cain, because the first son had murdered the second (Gen. 4:9).
- “What’s that in your hand?” He asked Moses, because the exiled prince wanted a sign to show his people. God could use anyone and anything to glorify Him (Exo. 4:1–2).
- “Have you considered my servant Job?” He asked Satan, because He intended to reveal His grace through the life of a faithful person (Job 1:8).
- “Where should we buy bread, so these people can eat?” He asked His disciple Philip, because He would show the multitude His power to care for them (John 6:5–6).
- “Do you love me?” He asked Peter, because the disciple needed to wrestle with the answer before he served God’s children as a teacher and servant-leader (John 21:15).

When God brings a question to your mind, consider carefully its answer. Our curiosity and wonder can help us appreciate, however imperfectly, the perfect mind of God.

We call God's perfect knowledge *omniscience*—that is, His all-knowing. That attribute is the topic of this lesson.

In the previous unit, we discussed the nature of God by describing several facets of His *essence*. Now we'll begin studying His attributes, or characteristics. The teacher's lesson divides these attributes into two categories to aid your understanding:

- **Natural attributes**—which describe God's sovereign character; the qualities that help us understand His power and the scope of His rule
- **Moral attributes**—which describe how God chooses to exercise His power, particularly within His relationship to humanity

Student Work

As discussed in the teacher's lesson, God is *omniscient* in that He knows—and has always known and will always know—everything. His knowledge does not increase or decrease. He is never surprised, nor does He wonder *if, what, how, or why*. All truth is always known to Him because all truth flows from Him. He lives timelessly in perfect awareness of everything that was, is, and will be.

God is so far above us that sometimes it's easier to understand Him by discussing what He's *not* like. So Scripture occasionally uses a negative approach.

- ▶ Note, for example, Isaiah 40:13–14. How do these verses express God's perfect knowledge?

The answer to those questions, of course, is *no one*. God would not be God if He needed to learn from someone else.

Omniscience Illustrated

The Bible abounds with stories and events in which we see God's omniscience. Note the following examples.

In Creation

- ▶ According to Psalm 104:24, what quality did God display by making all things?

As Thomas Watson wrote,

None but a wise God could so curiously contrive the world.

. . . [We can see the] wisdom of God blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars . . . in marshalling and ordering everything in its proper place and sphere. If the sun had been set lower, it would have burnt us; if higher, it would not have warmed us with its beams. God's wisdom is seen in appointing the seasons of the year.

- ▶ What does Psalm 74:17 say that God established?

God, in His infinite wisdom, designed the wonder and complexity of the universe to showcase His glory—to fill us with wonder over His work. As we live in the rhythm of night and day, cool and warm, in the cycle of tides and seasons and harvest, we can appreciate the God who gave us not only the consistency to survive and thrive, but also the diversity to keep us surprised and delighted.

Despite the corruption from the Fall, this universe is still a precious gift marked by the wisdom and love of our Creator.

In Redemption

In God's plan of redemption we see a masterstroke that only He could have planned. God is a God of mercy and grace, yet also a God of righteousness and judgment.

As a holy God, He could not tolerate our sin. As a just God, He demanded a penalty. So in His mercy, He chose to send Jesus to Earth—to live perfectly, to bridge God and humanity, and to pay the price for our sin.

Theologians still have trouble mapping out the interaction between God's righteousness, love, and power. Yet at the cross and the tomb we see all three working in perfect harmony—God sacrificing Himself in love for us, fulfilling His own righteous requirement, defeating death and sin through His power. There we see God's great majesty beaming through even the worst of humanity.

As Watson writes,

What wisdom was this, that Christ should be made sin, yet know no sin; that God should condemn sin, yet save the sinner! Here is wisdom, *to find out the way of salvation.*

In His Providence

“Every providence,” Watson declares, “has a mercy or a wonder wrapped up in it.” We see the providential wisdom of God in the following ways.

By Using Small Things

God chose to heal the snake-bitten Israelites with a simple glance at a bronze snake on a pole. He used a small stone—and a brave shepherd boy—to bring down Goliath. He used a few torches and pitchers to rout the army of the Midianites. It seems to be His habit to use what might seem small and insignificant to us.

By Doing the Opposite of What We Might Do

Which of us would have saved Jacob's family the way God did through Joseph? God advanced his servant by allowing him to be . . .

- Thrown into a pit
- Sold to slave traders
- Accused falsely of sexual assault
- Thrown into prison
- Forgotten and neglected by those he helped

Yet through these experiences Joseph became second-in-command to Pharaoh, and God in His wisdom preserved the founding family of His people, Israel.

Another illustration would be the organization of Gideon's army. When God chose to save His people from the oppression of the Midianites, how did He accomplish that end? He *decreased* the size of Gideon's army. He repeatedly told Gideon that the soldiers with him were too many (Judg. 7:2), reducing the force from a sizable 32,000 to a mere band of 300. Through this unusual move, God made sure that no one would question His hand in Israel's victory.

By Turning Evil Acts Toward Good Ends

A skilled chemist can combine several individually harmful ingredients into a single, helpful medicine. Likewise, God can orchestrate the sin and wickedness of people toward a good and worthy end.

- ▶ Paul recognized this truth in 2 Corinthians 4:17. How did he view the afflictions he faced?

- ▶ Joseph expresses this truth in Genesis 50:20, as well.
 - Joseph's brothers had intended against him.
 - But God meant it for .

In His Prophecies

► We see God’s omniscience most clearly perhaps in His knowledge of future events. What prophecies did God reveal in the following passages?

- Genesis 15:13

- Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2

- Jeremiah 29:10; 2 Chronicles 36:14–21

Omniscience Applied

How should we respond to this great doctrine? We could explore many implications, but in this lesson we’ll consider four brief applications.

It Illumines His Love for Us

We can rejoice and delight in God’s love even more when we appreciate His omniscience.

He Knows the Worst About Us—but Still Saved Us

► God does not love us because we’ve somehow fooled Him into thinking that we’re perfect people. Read Psalm 103:13–14. What does God know about us?

He knows how fleeting and pathetic we are, compared to Him, yet He still reaches out in compassion, like a loving Father.

In human relationships, we often fear that a secret about us might come to light and then break up the relationship. So we try to put on our best

face with others, hiding our insecurities and not allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, even with good, safe people.

But God already knows the worst about us—and He still saved us! He knows the wrong we have done, the wrong we might be doing now, and every wrong we will do. Yet He still promises to keep us safe in His hands, now and forever (John 10:28–29; Rom. 8:38–39).

He Sees Our Service, Even When Others Do Not

At times, the people around us don't notice the ways we try to reflect God's love and truth. They offer us no thanks or appreciation, and no one seems to care. At other times, they might even misjudge our actions, criticizing us for something we didn't do or didn't intend. They might call us failures or assume the worst motivations for our effort. Some people simply will never accept us or approve of our work. They're negative, critical people, and nothing we say or do can change their opinion. What then?

We can find comfort in the knowledge that God, who sees all things, also sees our heart. He knows our weakness and brokenness, and He knows our sin, but He still chooses to use us. Further, He glorifies Himself *through* our weakness. He sees us when we try, and He knows when we struggle to serve others in His name. We don't need to serve the fickle approval of others. Our Master is God, and no other.

He Knows What He Is Going to Make of Us

God has a purpose for each of us, a purpose so important that He sent Christ to die for us. God redeemed us to glorify Himself—to become more holy, to be more like Him.

- ▶ Read Romans 8:28–29. To what did God predestine us?

God will bring us to this end. Although we fall and fail, sin and slip, God still works—even through our failures—to make us like Himself.

Don't lose sight of Him. Don't stop seeking the One who will one day present us before His throne as blameless, spotless, and pure.

It Comforts Us in Difficulties

- ▶ How did God's omniscience comfort Job, even in the middle of his trials (Job 23:10)?

God knows every trial, tribulation, sorrow, and heartache. Though we cannot yet understand why, He allows these to occur in some way for our good and His glory.

It Encourages Us to Rely on Him for Wisdom

God knows the bad way, the good way, the better way, and the best way. He knows the trials and pitfalls along each path, and He offers us His wisdom. We have only to ask for it (James 1:5). His Word and His Spirit provide us a guide through the winding maze of life.

To refuse His wisdom seems like folly. But how many times do we make decisions without consulting Him? When God inspired His Word, He knew every detail of every moment of our lives. We can rest assured that its truth applies to us.

It Discourages Us from Betraying Him

Few things sober people more than the thought of being caught in sin by someone they love. Meditate on this for a moment. The God who loves us—the God who endured a life and a death of suffering and shame for us, the God who gave us every good thing in our lives—watches over us. To sin against Him and against others is to betray His love and care.

- ▶ This should dominate our thoughts when we face temptation. Read Psalm 139:11–12. What two things are alike to God?

God holds us accountable for our actions, regardless of who else sees them.

After Sarah beat her servant Hagar and drove her into the wilderness, the “Angel of the Lord”—which was God Himself—appeared to Hagar. The Angel comforted her, assuring her that after she left Abraham’s family for good, God would preserve her and her son Ishmael, whose descendants would form a mighty nation.

Hagar was so overwhelmed at this unexpected appearance that she exclaimed “*La Hai Roi*”—that is, “God sees me.” In Genesis 16:14, we read that she named the well in that spot *Beer-lahai-roi* as a memorial that God sees all, even those abused and rejected by others.

We can be comforted and sobered by God’s omniscience. It should affect not only our actions and speech, but also our thoughts and motives. Every secret evil is as plain to Him as the most boisterous good deed.

Celebrate God’s perfect, knowing love, and let it challenge you to better reflect Him to others.

Notes from the Teacher's Lesson

The Attributes of God

Natural Attributes	Moral Attributes

The Definition of Omniscience

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The Statement of Omniscience

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The Significance of Omniscience

- To (Prov. 15:3; Ps. 10:7–11)
- To (Rom. 8:28–29)

Application Activities

1. Read Psalm 139 and record all of the things you learn about God's omniscience in those verses. Note especially verses 1–6 and 14–24.
2. Consider an example of providence in your own life that, at the time it happened, you could not understand. Yet, looking back, you might begin to understand part of God's purpose. Write about the circumstances on a personal providence sheet.
3. Write a three-page overview of a Christian that God used through incredibly difficult circumstances.
 - For your source material, read a biography, or conduct research on a contemporary Christian figure who serves God despite opposition.
 - If this person is alive, consider writing him or her a note of encouragement, along with perhaps some questions to enhance your writing.
 - Cite at least three sources in your work, and document any personal research you perform.
 - Your teacher may also ask you to briefly present your paper to your classmates.