



# GOD'S GREAT HEART

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God's Great Heart reveals His inner being, His attributes and His Character

1. Monday "God's great heart" reveals His inner being, His attributes and His character
2. Tuesday "God's great heart" – how does the Bible understand the meaning of the "heart?"  
The attributes of God demonstrated in the great heart of God
3. Thursday "God's great heart" The heart of God reaching out to men and women:  
communicating His attributes.
4. Friday "God's great heart" as it functions in the heart of the Christian.

## THE GREAT HEART OF GOD REVEALS HIS INNER-BEING, HIS ATTRIBUTES AND CHARACTER

Let's map out where we are going! We are all used to viewing things from the perspective of our world. We are going to take a wider perspective and we are going to go *backwards into God*. This is where all things have their beginning, in the womb of God. We are going to emphasise the intimate relationship of triune God and then we are going to see God reaching out of Himself to create the universe and humankind. We will now understand God's nature and attributes by His relationships with His creatures. The next great event is the coming of Jesus into our human flesh bringing to us a full revelation of God's nature. We will then note how men and women are changed in their heart, receiving a new nature and they now reveal the nature and character of God in His attributes. They now go forwards to impact the world just as Jesus did by Father's indwelling and thus reproduced His character and His works. Of course His works are in perfect accord with who He is in his character qualities. We see how consistent God is in all His ways.

### God's heart is the manifestation of His inner being.

We are going from the heart of God where we see the manifestation of God's nature: His love, His desires, the declaration of His will and ***we are going behind the heart of God, we are going to go back into the very being of God*** to examine His nature and character which we call His attributes and look at the constitution of God – *the illustration of Big Ben*. ***Of course we can only see what God is like on the inside by seeing Him as He impacts men and women. It is the same for us – we only know what a person is on the inside by observing their behaviour.***

Therefore we will entitle this study "**GOD IN HIMSELF**" The Lord said to Moses, "you cannot see my face and live" – he was talking about His inner being, which no man can see - nevertheless, when the Lord did reveal Himself He spoke of His character attributes when they impact men and women, "*And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex.34:6-7a)*". How then do we know what God is like? God has revealed Himself through creation, through man who is made in the image of God, through Scripture, through what He has said to men and women and by His actions. ***However, the complete revelation of God is in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we see the depths and fulness of God's great heart.*** This is not to say that there were not men of God who experienced in large

measure the great heart of God. We see the great heart of God in His relationship with His people Israel.

The great heart of God is the means He has chosen to show to us His nature and character. Who is this God with such a great heart? It is the person behind the heart we must discover. Where do we begin? I have chosen a particular tool to explore our subject. I am going to examine what is traditionally spoken of as the attributes of God. These attributes are viewed firstly, in the context of the triune God and then they are viewed in the context of men and women.

It is necessary at this point to look at a Scriptural distinction between the period *before* creation and the period after. Before creation there was only God! What was God's great heart like then? It was not engaged with humankind - man had not been created. Jesus speaks about the glory he enjoyed with Father *before* creation, *"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You **before** the world was"* (Jn.17:5). Later Jesus refers back to a time "before" creation. It is that time that we want to look into, *"for You loved Me **before** the foundation of the world"* (v24). In v5 we also see that Jesus looks back in retrospect, – *"the glory which I **had** with **You**"* (v5), but can you catch the longing and desire in the voice of Jesus for those former days at Father's right hand?

All that we know about God comes from this time of intimacy in the triune God *prior* to creation. Everything was born here. Their inter-relating, their responsiveness to each other, their honouring, their loving, their planning, their deep submission and their worship of each Person in the Godhead. They were totally fulfilled in their love and worship. Their fellowship was thrice holy. We never visit this sacred place in our thinking because our attention is taken up with God's workings among his creatures. The Bible recognises this time when there was only God and then makes it clear the amazing thing that took place when He created the world:

- **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1), and triune God created man "in His own image" "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (1:26).**
- **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn.1:1).** This verse refers to a time before the creation (see also Ps.90:2).
- **"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You *before* the world was" (Jn.17:5).**
- **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which *WAS* with the Father, and *WAS* manifested unto us)" (1Jn.1:1-3).** The first "was" refers to a past eternity, the second "was" refers to the past when Jesus was incarnated (Jn.1:14)

God spoke from within the triune God and He spoke with such creative power that our world came into being! Equally important in the economy of God was the coming of the WORD into human flesh. The vision of Jesus in Jn.ch.17 gives the total expanse of God's purpose for Himself and for

man. He takes into account the fellowship of the triune God prior to creation and the ultimate return of man to incorporation into the triune God. This was a new place for us, resulting from the great salvation won for us by Jesus Christ. This will take us into the endless future of eternity. Jesus came to us from eternity past so that he could bring us into eternity yet future. We began with the triune God apart from creation and now Jesus takes us out of earth's creation into the intimacy of the triune God. There is wonderful balance here and perfect will accomplished by Jesus Christ!

We know that creation brought new factors into existence. God not only created the universe but He also sustains the universe and when Adam and Eve fell we know that God began His great work of salvation to restore men and women. God's interaction with people demonstrates His attributes in a new way. They are not new attributes. God's nature is changeless, but it is their application that reveals the character of God in a new light. We find a new vocabulary in Scripture - forgiveness, mercy, kindness, longsuffering, anger jealousy. Holiness becomes righteousness; love becomes forgiveness, kindness and mercy. Anger relates to God's violated holiness and jealousy the result of Israel's unfaithfulness.

We need to take into account the picture of God presented in the Bible. I will do this by looking at the attributes of GOD. God is triune, but His first revelation is that He is ONE. This is the central truth of the OT. We call this monotheism. There is one God not three. There are three Persons in the Godhead. God has revealed His Name as LORD/Jehovah/YHWH. There is no need to call Him Yahweh. This name was first revealed to Moses, "And God said... **I am the LORD**: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name **JEHOVAH** was I not known to them" (Ex.6:2-3). This name became embodied in the Shema: "**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD**: And you shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut.6:4-5). This may well be the most important verse in the OT. You might ask: "what has this primary doctrine about God to do with the heart?" - look at the next verse! Jesus slightly changed this verse. Changing "might" to "mind." Jesus expects us to know the biblical teaching about His character qualities as we study them with our minds.

We are now going to look at the nature of God and the attributes of His character and let me remind you that we cannot look inside God but we can see what He is like on the inside by His impacting human lives by His character attributes.

### **1. God is Spirit: the characteristics of "Spirit" - Invisible, Incorruptible, immaterial substance, present in all places and eternal**

Jesus said, "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth*" (Jn.4:24).

Jesus' key teaching on the Holy Spirit is Jn.14-16. He is a Person, He has a name but he is invisible

Paul said, "*He (Jesus) is the image of **the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation*" (Col.1:15) and "*Now to the King **eternal, immortal, invisible**, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen*" (1Tim.1:17).

## 2. God is alive – He is the living God: inexhaustible life, eternal life, indestructible life, abundant life

God is alive - He is. His name, 'I Am', Ex 3.14, indicates that He is a living God. His life is different from that of other living beings: He does not derive His life from any other source. He has never been brought into being. The adjective 'eternal' applies to Him. The continuation of God's existence does not depend on anything outside of Himself. He exists independent of everything else; He is the great uncaused one.

In the OT: *"For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of **the living God** speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?"* (Deut.5:26; Ps.42:2; 84:2; Isa.37:4 etc)

At Caesarea Philippi Peter said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of **the living God**"* (Mat.16:16).

Paul used the phrase several times, *"we trust in **the living God**, who is the Saviour of all men"* (1Tim.4:10; Rom.9:26; 2Cor.3:3; 1Thes.1:9).

Jesus offers abundant life, *"I am come that they might have **life**, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (Jn.10:10).

Jesus offers eternal life, living water (Jn.4:14) and speaks of Himself as the life. Jesus said that *"whoever believes in Him should not perish but have **eternal life**"* (Jn.3:15). He also said, *"I am the way, the truth, and **the life**"* (Jn.14:6).

## 3. God is Infinite: God's nature has no bounds or limits. He is unlimited resource, unlimited power and wisdom. He cannot be confined or measured. Man by contrast is finite and limited

*"Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You"* (1Kings 8:27).

*"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable"* (Ps.145:3, 5-13)

*"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"* Rom.11:33

*"Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen"* (1Tim.6:16).

## 4. God is Perfect: the attributes involved in perfection are moral attributes and are viewed in the context of "God in Himself" – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Truth:** *But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King (Jer.10:10). Jesus: "He who is truth and the source of truth." Jesus said, "I am the truth" (Jn.14:6; Mat.22:16)*

**Love:** *"I am He who is love and the source of love." Jesus said, "I have loved you" (Jn.13:34; 1Jn.3:16; 4:8).*

**Holiness:** *"I am he who is holy and the source of holiness. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God" (Mat.5:8; Ex.39:30; 1Pet.1:16).*

These three attributes of God are associated with His perfection but they are supremely the attributes of the heart.

## 5. God is All in All: the 3 all's

**A). All Powerful (Omnipotent)** 'El Shaddai' – *"I am God Almighty" (Gen 17.1; Rev.19:15-16)* He is unlimited, immeasurable power shown in creation, sustaining creation, natural wonders (the Flood) and miracles of power.

*"Great is our Lord, and mighty in power" (Ps.147:5a).*

*"Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mat.19:26).*

*"But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps.115:3).*

**B). All Knowing (Omniscient)**, He has perfect and eternal knowledge of all things including us. He is the source of all knowledge and exercises this with wisdom and understanding. His understanding is immeasurable. God's full knowledge qualifies Him to judge.

*"Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Ps.147:5b).*

*"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it" (Ps.139:6).*

*"God knows all things" (1Jn.3:20).*

**C). All Present (Omnipresent)** God in the totality of His being is everywhere present in the universe. There is no place where God is not present. The atheist wrote: "God is nowhere" his little daughter took his pen and wrote: "God is now here" he gave his life to Jesus right there.

*"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence"? (Ps.139:7-10).*

*"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place" (Isa.57:15).*

*But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from **the presence of the Lord** (Jonah 1:3, 10).*

*"For where two or three are gathered together **in my name**, there am I **in the midst** of them" (Mat.18:20).*

*"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mat.28:20).*

## 6. God is Changeless and Constant:

He is perfect and therefore no change is necessary (all change is for better or worse). His constancy and unchangeable nature does not mean that He is not infinitely flexible in adapting to our needs. Hebrews speaks of the *"immutability of His counsel"* (6:17).

*"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"* (Nu.23:19).

*"The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations"* (Ps.33:11).

*"For I am the Lord, I do not change"* (Mal.3:6).

James writes of the Father, *"with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17).

*"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Heb.13:8).

We have looked at God's life in all its dimensions; this is necessary before we look at those same attributes as they are employed by God in His relationships with men and women. We will need to spend far more time looking at those attributes of character which are well designated as the moral attributes of God and are gathered under the heading of perfection.

## **7. God is holy, love and truth**

These are ATTRIBUTES OF GOD'S INNER CHARACTER – God is holy, God is love and He is truth- this is God at the very core of His being and the important point that I have made is that they eternally functioned in relationship to God Himself – in the context of triune fellowship. Holiness was at the core of their fellowship, love was at the core of their fellowship and truth was the very constitution of the Godhead.

Having established that this is where everything begins and finds its complete fulfilment we can now see the *manifestation* and revelation of God's nature by examining it in the context of God's heart, therefore we must now consider the biblical teaching about the heart. What we will do in a later session we will be to examine how these attributes look when God moves from within Himself to reach outside of Himself to impact men and women which he does through His heart. It is very important therefore that we have a firm grasp of the teaching of the heart. Secondly, we will observe how those attributes of the divine nature look like when God reaches out of Himself to relate to His creation but this will take place in our third study together. This amazing movement in the Godhead when He reaches out of Himself to engage with humankind requires the exercise of His character and attributes. The traditional way of speaking about God's attributes recognises the two stages I have given to you – prior to creation when the focus is internal- the triune God fellowship together in love and worship together in holiness in utter fulfilment and unity. The theologians spoke of immanent attributes or incommunicable attributes. Creation brought a powerful and irreversible change. God's focus is now extended to focus on His created men and women. Theologians now speak of communicable and transitive attributes. This is quite simple and makes sense. Theologians perceived that some attributes God does not communicate to His

creatures and they are called incommunicable attributes. All that is left for us to do is to identify the attributes of God and thus Scriptures about God will fit into place giving us greater clarity in our understanding of this amazing God of the Bible. To understand with greater clarity does not remove from God his awe or mystery! God satisfies the heart of man on every level –His affections, emotions, desires, His imagination, His conscience, his MIND and his will. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to inform the mind and to awaken the affections. There is no conflict here unless we undervalue the ability which God has given us to think.