

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

A. INTRODUCTION

What ought to be the outcome of a serious study of the Bible concerning the character of God? Undoubtedly such a quest should be deeply effecting in the sense that,

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (Prov. 9:10)¹

Yet supremely, such wisdom/understanding, by its very biblical nature, should inevitably lead to true praise and worship in its highest form.

Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things;
Let this be known throughout the earth.
Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (Isa, 12:5-6)

In other words, the right understanding of God obtained, through His self-revelation, is, to use Jonathan Edwards' terminology, to be refunded back via the creature by means of heartfelt adoration and worship.

On the other hand, to study the being of God in a detached and impersonal sense is surely to be guilty of one of the most irreverent pursuits possible. A secular and profane regard for God does not have to involve the explicit taking of His name in vain, or even open blasphemy. All that is required is the cool, detached consideration of God's character that results in indifference and apathy; such is one of the great snares that is involved in the academic study of Bible truth. Here can be found irreverence at its most sophisticated level, for while the truth about God may be rightly comprehended cognitively speaking, yet God is nevertheless given a slap in the face, so to speak, because the student refuses to bow, acknowledge, and worship.

However, because the reverent study of Jehovah/Yahweh is the highest pursuit for man to aspire to in terms of a hoped for embrace of ultimate truth, the authentic believer in God pursues the revelation of this unique holy Being. He not only wants to comprehend the reality of such a singular, almighty Jehovah, but also embrace this knowledge with the total commitment of his soul, whatever the consequences may be. He earnestly desires to "love the LORD his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might"

¹ The synonymous parallelism in this verse equates "fear" with "knowledge," the "LORD" with the "Holy One," and "wisdom" with "understanding." The Hebrew קדושים, quadoshim, for "Holy One," being plural for majestic emphasis, may find later expression in the thrice holy God of Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

(Deut. 6:4). Herein lies the distinctive attitude that the biblical Christian should manifest. He is distinguished by the mature, vital, experiential knowledge of God that comes, first according to His own self-revelation, second as a result of passionate pursuit for this same God, third through the faith embrace of redemption mediated through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and fourth by means of resultant intimate union with this same Son of God. All four factors, in this order, are indispensable for the true Christian insofar as his understanding of the Holy One of Israel is concerned.

So throughout the corridors of Bible and church history, the choicest of saints have manifested true piety at the level of their comprehensive reverence and love for God, expressed not in some glib fashion, but rather by means of fervently expressed, heartfelt devotion and worship that enters into the sheer wonder and glory of God's character.

1. Some encouraging examples from human history.
 - a. The knowledge of God according to Moses.

The self-revelation of God to Moses commenced in the wilderness of Midian. "The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and behold the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed" (Exod. 3:2). Drawing near to investigate this theophany or christophany, Moses is instructed by "the LORD, . . . Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:4-5). Similarly at Mt. Sinai, God descended amidst fire, smoke, thunder, lightening, and the earth quaking (Exod. 19). Then Moses desired to behold His glory at which he was told, "You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live!" However, "while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen (Exod. 33:20, 22-23; cf. 34:5)." As a result of this close encounter, upon descending from Mt. Sinai, Moses' face shone though with diminishing intensity (Exod. 34:29-35; cf. II Cor. 3:7-18).

When the glory of the LORD descended upon the newly crafted tabernacle, "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting" (Exod. 40:34-35). So this same LORD subsequently stood before Moses and Israel on many further occasions (Exod. 17:6; Lev. 9:5; Num. 12:5; 22:23-26), especially by means of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:21-22; 14:24; 33:9; Num. 12:5; 14:14; Deut. 31:15), even until his viewing of Israel on Mt. Nebo and subsequent death (Exod. 34:1). It is not so surprising then that Moses is described as "very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

b. The knowledge of God according to Job.

Suffering Job strenuously maintained his innocence, in terms of the charges of guilt by his self-righteous condemning friends, to the point where he implicitly charged God with complicity; to this God replied: "Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:8). So God responded with a revelation of His greatness that is both humbling and mouth-stopping (Job 38:1-40:2; 40:6-41:34). Specifically, God reveals Himself as sovereign over inanimate and animate creation. More to the point, as the creator of "Behemoth" (40:15) and "Leviathan" (41:1), God responds, "who then is he that can stand before Me? Who has given to Me that I should repay him?" (41:10-11). As a result Job's self-defensive spirit gives way to a mood of profound humiliation and quiet subjection. Thus he confesses: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add no more. . . . I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4-5; 42:5-6). Job does *not* appear to have received an explanation as to the cause of his prolonged suffering, especially Satan's background involvement (1:9-12; 2:1-6). Nevertheless it was a profound, impressive confrontation with God, particularly His majesty, sovereignty, and infinite wisdom (37:22-23; 40:9-10), that led to submissive rest in Job's soul and consequent blessing (42:10-17).

c. The knowledge of God according to Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 1:28, cf. 3:23, the prophet declares, after a remarkable, glorious, humbling encounter with God: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking." But what exactly was this revelation of God's glory revealed in vs. 4-28? It was a theophany that commenced with a distant appearance, "a storm wind coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire," v. 4. Then there appeared four distinctively faced living creatures (cf. Rev. 4:6-8), also perhaps being representative of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the four gospels, in the midst of which was bright fire and flashing lightening, vs. 5-14. These creatures are then described as being posted at the four sides of the chariot of the Lord with its jewel-like, bi-directional wheels, vs. 15-21. Over the four living creatures was a crystal platform, above which was a radiant throne, vs. 22-26a. And on the throne was "a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the outward appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of his loins downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance,"

vs. 26b-28a. Not surprisingly, when the Apostle John was confronted with the “Son of Man” in a similar manifestation of dazzling glory, he “fell at His feet like a dead man” (Rev. 1:12-18). Such an encounter with the full glory of God, even as Paul experienced on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-11; 26:12-15), inevitably results in responses of profound unworthiness, total submission, and speechless praise.

d. The knowledge of God according to John Calvin.

At the commencement of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin’s doctrinal starting point is “The Knowledge of God” as Creator and Redeemer. However such understanding is never to be divorced from personal encounter.

What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather, our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence; secondly, with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from him, and having received it, to credit it to his account. For how can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him?—that whatever you undertake, whatever you do, ought to be ascribed to him? If this be so, it now assuredly follows that your life is wickedly corrupt unless it be disposed to his service, seeing that his will ought for us to be the law by which we live. Again, you cannot behold him clearly unless you acknowledge him to be the fountainhead and source of every good. From this too would arise the desire to cleave to him and trust in him, but for the fact that man’s depravity seduces his mind from rightly seeking him.

For, to begin with, the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself; furthermore, the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wander astray, or rashly and boldly to go beyond his will. It thus recognizes God because it knows that he governs all things; and trusts that he is its guide and protector, therefore giving itself over completely to trust in him. Because it understands him to be the Author of every good, if anything oppresses, if anything is lacking, immediately it betakes itself to his protection, waiting for help from him. Because it is persuaded that he is good and merciful, it reposes in him with perfect trust, and doubts not that in his loving-kindness a remedy will be provided for all its ills. Because it acknowledges him as Lord and Father, the pious mind also deems it meet and right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments. Because it sees him to be a righteous judge, armed with severity to punish wickedness, it ever holds his judgment seat before its gaze, and through fear of him restrains itself from provoking his anger. And yet it is not so terrified by the awareness of his judgment as to wish to withdraw, even if some way of escape were open. But it embraces him no less as punished of the wicked than as benefactor of the pious. For the pious mind realizes that the punishment of the impious and wicked and the reward of life eternal for the righteous equally pertains to God’s glory. Besides,

this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but, because it loves and reveres God as Father, it worships and adores him as Lord. Even if there were no hell, it would still shudder at offending him alone.

Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law. And we ought to note this fact even more diligently: all men have a vague general veneration of God, but very few really reverence him; and wherever there is great ostentation in ceremonies, sincerity of heart is rare indeed.²

e. The knowledge of God according to Stephen Charnock.

Of Charnock's premier work *The Existence and Attributes of God*, the original editors, Edward Veel and Richard Adams, rightly declare: "In a word, he handles the great truths of the gospel with that perspicuity, gravity, and majesty which best becomes the oracles of God; and we have reason to believe, that no judicious and unbiased reader but will acknowledge this to be incomparably the best practical treatise the world ever saw in English upon this subject."³ Complementary to this major treatise are *A Discourse of the Knowledge of God* and *A Discourse of the Knowledge of God in Christ*, based upon Jon 17:3, which well reflect the author's constant concern for profundity of thought that leads to discernment in application.

To know a living God with a dead heart is at best but a carnal knowledge, a dead knowledge, unsuitable to a living object, which calls for lively actions. . . . Such a knowledge [with a living heart], which ravisheth the mind, quickens the prayers, seasons the converse, and fortifies against temptations. Such a knowledge as wraps up the soul in admiration, spirits the will to operation, allures it with a close union with the truth discovered, till it be like a leaven working in the will, and shaping the whole man according to its own mold. The fixing our eye on God by a spiritual knowledge derives a tincture from him, dyeing our souls into his own likeness; if the life doth not differ from that of an infidel, the knowledge, though as high as an angel's, is no more saving than that of a devil.

Try your knowledge of God by your affections to him. What strong desires are there for the enjoyment of God and Christ; what delight in approaches to him; what propensities of the heart in spiritual duties? Do they spring from affection, or move by the fears and jerks of conscience? Doth the knowledge of Christ in his mediation, natures, offices, as the only remedy for our lost souls, kindle desires, holy affections, unexpressible heart-breakings for him, as we find David's heart often flying up upon this wing? Is there a love to God rising out of a sense of his love to lost man? God cannot be known as an infinite, and unbounded, and outflowing goodness without a flight of our affections to him. It is as impossible

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, II, 2.

³ Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, I, p. 125.

that a good spiritually known should not be beloved, as that any good should be beloved that is not known. Every common witness of God in the works of creation “fills the heart with gladness” (Acts 14:16-17), much more every spiritual witness of God in the work of redemption apprehended by the soul.

Try yourselves whether you have the knowledge of God or no; try it not so much by the notions you have of God and his truth as by the operation of it, and the draught [deep supply] of the perfections of God in your own souls. The greatest heads have often had the worst hearts. . . . When we cast our eyes upon God, let us reflect upon ourselves, and see whether the temper of our hearts answer the notions in our heads. Can any man say, I know God to be merciful, and I have an imitation of it; God is holy, and I have a draught of it; God is omniscient, and I have a deep sense of it in my actions; God hath a sovereign dominion, and I have an obedient frame; God is true in his word, and I have a sincerity answering to divine truth, a faith in his promises, a fear in his threatenings; there are some lineaments [characteristics] in my heart answering in some measure to the perfections of my Creator.⁴

- f. The knowledge of God according to Jonathan Edwards.

Overall, it is abundantly clear that Jonathan Edwards’ was passionately theocentric in his life and ministry. Thus he writes that, “it is evident, that true virtue must chiefly consist in LOVE TO GOD; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best.”⁵ His *Religious Affections* is emphatic that love of God, his being or character, should be the great interest of the believer.

The divine *excellency* of God, and of Jesus Christ, the word of God, his works, ways, &c. is the primary reason why a true saint loves these things [love, affections]; and not any supposed *interest* that he has in them, or any conceived benefit that he has received or shall receive from them. . . . This infinite *excellency* of the divine nature, as it is in itself, is the true ground of all that is good in God in any respect; but how can a man truly love God, without loving him for that *excellency*, which is the foundation of all that is good or desirable in him? They whose affection to God is founded first on his *profitableness* to them, begin at the wrong end; they regard God only for the utmost limit of the stream of divine good, where it touches them, and reaches their interest. They have no respect to that infinite glory of God’s nature, which is the original good, and true fountain of all good, and of loveliness of every kind. . . . In a gracious attitude, men are affected with the attribute of God’s goodness and free grace, not only as they are concerned in it, or as it affects their interest, but as a part of the glory and beauty of God’s nature. . . . A true saint, when in the enjoyment of true discoveries of the sweet glory of God and Christ, has his mind too much captivated and engaged by

⁴ Ibid., IV, pp. 18-19, 48-49, 84-85.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works Of Jonathan Edwards*, I, p. 125.

what he views without [outside of] himself, to stand at that time to view himself, and his own attainments.⁶

- g. The knowledge of God according to C. H. Spurgeon.

While recollecting Spurgeon's reverent exuberance at the heartfelt knowledge of God, expressed on page 29, further consider this same preacher's exaltation, when musing on vacation, concerning God's greatness with regard to Psalm 8:1. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens."

How excellent is thy name! No words can express that excellency; and therefore it is left as a note of exclamation. The very *name* of Jehovah is excellent, what must his person be. Note the fact that even the heavens cannot contain his glory, it is set *above the heavens*, since it is and ever must be too great for the creature to express. When wandering amid the Alps, we felt the Lord was infinitely greater than all his grandest works, and under that feeling we roughly wrote these few lines:

Yet in all these how great so'er they be,
 We see not Him. The glass is all too dense
 And dark, or else our earthborn eyes too dim.
 Yon Alps, that lift their heads above the clouds
 And hold familiar discourse with the stars,
 Are dust, at which the balance trembleth not,
 Compared with His divine immensity.
 The snow-crown'd summits fail to set Him forth,
 Who dwelleth in Eternity, and bears
 Alone, the name of High and Lofty One.
 Depths unfathomed are too shallow to express
 The wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord.
 The mirror of the creatures has no space
 To bear the image of the Infinite.
 'Tis true the Lord hath fairly writ his name,
 And set his seal upon creation's brow.
 But as the skillful potter much excels
 The vessel which he fashions on the wheel,
 E'en so, but in proportion greater far,
 Jehovah's self transcends his noblest works.
 Earth's ponderous wheels would break, her axles snap,
 If freighted with the load of Deity.
 Space is too narrow for the Eternal's rest,
 And time too short a footstool for his throne.
 E'en avalanche and thunder lack a voice,
 To utter the full volume of his praise.
 How then can I declare him? Where are words

⁶ Ibid., pp. 275, 277, 278.

With which my glowing tongue may speak his name?
 Silent I bow, and humbly I adore.⁷

This challenges us also to think more deeply concerning the vital role of serious reflection on the character of God. Here Spurgeon relates how an excursion into a mountainous region of Europe stimulated his faculty of meditation. His mind was exercised to such a degree that he was constrained to give poetic expression to his inner contemplations. Of course Spurgeon was not so influenced by our news-bite culture that encourages rapid comprehension of editorial vignettes and video clips. However, here our poverty is exposed, by way of contrast, with these modern times. There can be no condensed learning of God; the very thought is an insult to His transcendent majesty. Rather we have to learn, from the likes of Spurgeon, what it is to slow down and meditate on the truth of His Being, to ruminate over, to ingest and digest the revelations concerning His holy character, to wonder overwhelmingly, to “be still [cease striving] and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

2. Some discouraging examples from human history.

In the realm of the academic consideration of the character God, that often maintains a close alliance with speculative philosophy, there is a vast amount of literature that will stimulate the intellect without in any way challenging the soul to respond with heartfelt submission and worship. One such example, that certainly ought not to be considered radical, is a semi-classic work of this century by E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is – A Study In Traditional Theism*. Notwithstanding the author’s claim that his purpose is purely academic, which excuse is perhaps supposed to placate the Almighty in terms of an attitude of detachment, yet in 205 pages there are references to only twelve passages of Scripture, while copious notes refer to Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Bertrand Russell, Barth, etc.⁸ More recently, evangelical Ronald H. Nash in his *The Concept Of God – An Explanation Of Contemporary Difficulties With The Attributes Of God*, like Mascall, expresses a similar excuse that, “these reflections about God will probably not inspire much in the way of reverence

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, I, p. 89.

⁸ E. L. Mascall, a Catholic priest and university lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion, upholds “traditional theism” which he insightfully describes as follows: “The traditional approach [in the comprehension of God] judges man by the measure of God, the ‘modern’ approach at least tends to judge God by the measure of man. The famous Aberdonian epitath-

‘Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde;
 Ha’e mercy o’ my soul, Lord God,
 As I would do, were I Lord God
 And ye were Martin Elginbrodde’-

puts in a nutshell the anthropocentrism of this type of thought. How different in effect is the ejaculation attributed to St. Augustine: ‘O my God, if I were God and thou Augustine, I would wish that thou wert God and I Augustine.’” *He Who Is, A Study In Traditional Theism*, p. 196.

or personal piety.”⁹ Not surprisingly, in 106 pages this author does not make so much as one reference to a supporting verse or an exegeted passage of Scripture! Again, Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas receive fulsome attention, and to be honest, who along with Charnock would ever think to deny their secondary consideration. But when wrestling with the attributes of God and many of the problems related to His being leads to an ever so slight patronage at best of Scripture, then there is something radically wrong that only a return to the primacy of the Word of God can remedy.

3. Some consideration of the parched contemporary scene.

D. A. Carson has written concerning “The Urgent Need of the Church” by first summarizing a variety of matters that seriously interest Christians at the commencement of this twenty-first century. These include sexual immorality, AIDS, violence, abortion, corporate corruption, acquisitiveness, and materialism, that necessitate evangelism, church planting, ethnic missionary outreach, etc. Nevertheless,

the evangelism that has dominated much of the Western world—does not seem powerful enough to address our declension. Perhaps what we most urgently need, then, is disciplined, biblical thinking. We need more Bible colleges and seminaries, more theologians, more lay training, more expository preaching.¹⁰

However, as important as these remedial items are, Carson further explains that,

[t]he one thing we most urgently need in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better. When it comes to knowing God, we are a culture of the spiritually stunted. So much of our religion is packaged to address our felt needs—and these are almost uniformly anchored in our pursuit of our own happiness and fulfillment. God simply becomes the Great Being who, potentially at least, meets our needs and fulfills our aspirations. We think rather little of what he is like, what he expects of us, what he seeks in us. We are not captured by his holiness and his love; his thoughts and words capture too little of our imagination, too little of our discourse, too few of our priorities. In the biblical view of things, a deeper knowledge of God brings with it massive improvement in the other areas mentioned: purity, integrity, evangelistic effectiveness, better study of Scripture, improved private and corporate worship, and much more. But if we seek these things without passionately desiring a deeper knowledge of God, we are selfishly running after God’s blessing without running after him.¹¹

Hence, the overall concern of this study manual is that, in spite of the activism and finely honed methodology of modern evangelicalism, there is in reality only a veneer thin exterior of biblical Christianity that betrays a foundational weakness of immense

⁹ Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept Of God - An Explanation Of Contemporary Difficulties With The Attributes Of God*, p. 10.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

proportions. When the lives of the greatest saints are studied, one matter that stands out above all else is the frequently noted characteristic that, quite apart from their biblical orthodoxy, they were known to have “something of God about them,” some indefinable aura that marked them out as having drawn close to God, in a manner that may be likened to Moses’ encounter on Mt. Sinai. Such a transforming experience results from learning more profoundly about God, and the consequent holy glow is therefore not so easily shrouded.

This was the case when the sons of Israel were surprised at the shining appearance of Moses’ face when he descended from intimate fellowship with God (Ex. 34:29-30). So that for we Christians who claim to have been reconciled to God, whatever resultant manifestation might ensue, whether it be a trembling and shudder of the soul, a state of blissful composure and rest, a quiet and holy spirit, or an eruption of joyful praise, yet above all else a quality of godliness should be discernable to all who converse and interact with us. Such an evident knowledge of the triune God, substantiated even by a watching fallen human race, is the fervent prayer of Jesus Christ for his disciples when, in interceding with the Father, he is desirous “that they also may be in Us [the Father and the Son]; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me” (John 17:21).

Yet today, the spiritual poverty of godliness in the lives of professing evangelical Christians is such that we seem clothed more in tissue thin, scanty, tawdry religious garments rather than the distinctive, rich, and pure robes of God’s righteousness, imputed and imparted. After all, should not imputed righteousness produce a certain resonance and glow of godliness? Thus Sinclair Ferguson well describes our sorry plight as follows:

When we look back on what the masters of the spiritual life have written and said, it is hard to escape the conclusion that we have been the victim of a confidence trick in our century. Over the past few decades, the evangelical church has been gripped by a series of issues and concerns that have been of marginal, or at best of secondary importance. Conferences, seminars, and books on a whole series of issues of ‘vital concerns’ have dominated center stage and determined the agenda in many churches and for many individual Christians. *But strikingly absent has been concentration on God himself.* Indeed, on the rare occasions when this absence has not been the case, we have sat up to take notice as though something out of the ordinary were being said! What has happened, in effect, is that we have redefined the Christian life and the meaning of eternal life in terms of any number of particular issues. We have not listened to the insistent voice of Jesus Christ telling us that it means the knowledge of God [John 17:3; I John 5:11, 20].¹²

It is for this reason we return to Stephen Charnock since he remains supreme as the master teacher concerning the attributes of God, notwithstanding his seventeenth century style. While nobody could charge him with having a lack of fine reasoning skills and philosophic insight, yet his priority for a reverent and exhaustive

¹² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *A Heart For God*, pp. 4-5.

exposition of Holy Scripture is accompanied with penetrating practical application that results in both truly awesome regard for God's being and a humbling conviction of one's present ignorance in this realm. As an example of his classic Puritan manner, and apart from his extensive *Existence And Attributes Of God*, again consider the complementary *A Discourse Of The Knowledge Of God* and *A Discourse Of The Knowledge of God in Christ*,¹³ consisting of 161 pages which, although slightly prolix according to a style acceptable during the Puritan era, yet are without equal in their breadth and depth of spiritual substance, and as a consequence are profoundly rewarding to the determined student. Both of these discourses, according to Charnock's customary method, are first based upon careful exegesis of John 17:3, followed by a wider doctrinal application and extensive practical conclusion. Consider the following representative examples.

Ignorance of God is the cause of all sin in the world. This is the fountain of all the sin that ever was; of the first sin (II Cor. 11:3). . . . Therefore daily endeavor to increase in the knowledge of God. Our main work in the world is to increase in the knowledge of sin, that we may more vehemently detest it; and the knowledge of God, that we may more closely embrace him and resign up ourselves to him. . . . There can be no growth in grace without an increase in the knowledge of God. God is the object of grace, and the object must be known before any act upon it can be exercised; and as the object is cleared, the acts about it are more vigorous. There may be indeed a knowledge without grace; but there can be no increase of grace without an increase of knowledge, as the heat of the fire cannot be made more intense without a supply of fuel.

The discovery of God was the great end of Christ's appearance upon the earth, his office. He was to declare things "hid from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35); to unfold the mysteries and secret counsels of God, and remove the shades and veils between him and the understandings of men, and reveal things which God never revealed before. . . . The knowledge of Christ is urged in Scripture, not as the ultimate term of our knowledge, but as the medium of our knowledge of God; for the term mediator, and the office of prophet, evidence this. . . . We are to know Christ, as he is the only person appointed to direct us to the knowledge of God; therefore, though Moses and Elias were with him upon the mount of transfiguration, *i.e.* though the law and the prophets pointed to Christ and declared something of God, yet we are ordered by the voice of God to hear him only, as the great instructor of the world: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).¹⁴

However, if we as professing Christians have difficulties or questions concerning the nature of God, then what type of wisdom is it that gives greater attention to human opinion, however sanctified or learned it may be, than that of God's own objective revelation of Himself? In this area of the study of God's attributes, as with other Christian doctrines, there is always a real danger that we will become gradually seduced, though quite imperceptibly, by historic movements and the speculations of well-meaning men that yet are subject, like ourselves, to human fallibility and sinful

¹³ Charnock, *Works*, IV, pp. 3-163.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 87-88, 133.

bias. Hence, we can become so fascinated and enticed by human opinion about the nature of God, indeed so full of notions of certain prominent men, that secular, humanistic, philosophically derived concepts are imported into our appreciation of His glorious Being. The result is that God can gradually become a human projection, a finite self-extension into the infinite, rather than Jehovah's self-revelation from heaven. Of course this was the theory of the German materialist philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, who in his *The Essence Of Christianity*, proposed that, "religion has its origin in man's wish, it is a product of man's wishful thinking. As man's wishes are, so are his gods."¹⁵ Indeed, to the degree that man arrives at notions of God via speculative, subjective, skeptical liberal theology, in which environment Feuerbach was steeped, then of course he was correct. For as Lord [Francis] Bacon declared: "Rationalists are like spiders, they spin all out of their own bowels."¹⁶

When arrogant human reason confronts transcendent truth, especially with regard to the Bible and the nature of its holy and infinite God, then it may be likened to Alexander the Great's legendary encounter with the Gordion knot in Asia Minor. When the Greek king of Macedon could not unravel the mysteriously intertwined cord that showed no loose ends, in frustration he drew his sword and divided the knot by force.¹⁷ So when finite man attempts to assert himself over the infinite God of Scripture, in vainly attempting to unlock this Mystery, he employs vaunted autonomy and the force of reason to destroy God!

But for the Christian who yields to God's revelation of Himself in Scripture as impeccable truth that is outside and over him, rather than peccable conjecture that is under and subject to him, then Feuerbach was fundamentally wrong. And no doubt it was for this reason that Paul, having a legacy of scholasticism, wrote: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). We need to remember that, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached [revelation] to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21). Hence, our great need at the moment is not simply a systematic

¹⁵ Otto W. Heick, *A History Of Christian Thought*, II, p. 197. Consider a similar analysis: "Feuerbach accepts the classical attributes which are found in the literature of the [Christian] tradition. Love, justice, and personality, for example, can legitimately be attributed to God. Indeed, all the attributes which describe human nature can be applied to God insofar as God is nothing else than human nature freed from its individual limitations. All the attributes of the human nature *ipso facto* become attributes of the divine nature." Frank N. Magill, ed., *Masterpieces Of Christian Literature In Summary Form*, p. 698. It is significant that a synthesis of Hegel and Feuerbach by Karl Marx known as dialectical materialism became, not surprisingly, the atheistic root of atheistic communism.

¹⁶ Lord [Francis] Bacon, cited by John F. Hurst, *History Of Rationalism*, p. vii.

¹⁷ J. B. Bury, *A History Of Greece*, p. 756. According to an oracle, it was said that whoever unraveled the knot would rule over Asia. Alexander's questionable fulfillment was indeed followed by his rule over Asia, though he suddenly died at the age of 32 at the peak of his military career as the result of a fever that followed a drunken feast.

understanding of God's perfections, but much more a constant expository unveiling of the glories of God that does justice to His whole person according to the analogy of faith, or the proportion of emphasis in the Bible. We need twentieth century preachers who passionately embrace Charnock's emphasis and method, though quite apart from his antiquated style, because they have, to borrow R. C. Sproul's title, *One Holy Passion – The Consuming Thirst To Know God*.¹⁸ But further, we also need congregations, sufficiently serious in their desire to know God, who encourage their pastors to satisfy the deep thirst of their souls, instead of opposing preaching and teaching ministry that in fact challenges superficiality and deep-rooted carnality.

1 Praise to the living God!
 All praised be his Name
 Who was, and is, and is to be,
 For aye the same.
 The one eternal God
 Ere aught that now appears:
 The first, the last, beyond all thought
 His timeless years!

2 Formless, all lovely forms
 Declare his loveliness;
 Holy, no holiness of earth
 Can his express.
 Lo, he is Lord of all.
 Creation speaks his praise,
 And everywhere above, below,
 His will obeys.

3 His Spirit floweth free,
 High surging where it will:
 In prophet's word he spake of old:
 He speaketh still.
 Established is his law,
 And changeless it shall stand,
 Deep writ upon the human heart,
 On sea, on land.

4 Eternal life hath he
 Implanted in the soul;
 His love shall be our strength and stay
 While ages roll.
 Praise to the living God!
 All praised be his Name
 Who was, and is, and is to be,
 For aye the same.

Medieval Jewish Doxology

¹⁸ R. C. Sproul, *One Holy Passion*, 185 pp. Here is an easy-to-read introduction to the attributes of God written in the modern idiom by an infectiously enthusiastic evangelical theologian.