

Knowing God

By James Boice

James Boice:

Well, thank you. Let me say again what I joy it has been to be here and to continue in this series, as we're going to do tonight. Just about half an hour ago, I was on the telephone talking with my wife and one of my daughters was there and I got some good news about one of my daughters who just got a new job and it reminded me of something that happened when she was just a baby. We had her in the early spring and as we got on toward summer, she was still only a month or so old. We wanted to get her some clothes for the summer. We didn't have what we needed, and so we loaded her into the back of the car in one of those little plastic infant seats that you've probably seen in order to drive out of Center City, Philadelphia, where we lived out to an area where we knew there was a store that would have what we thought we wanted.

And as we were driving out in the car, she fell asleep, as children often do with the motion of the car. And when we got there, I took her out and she was still asleep and I carried her in to where my wife and I were going to go shopping. And she hadn't woken up by that time. And one of my great rules about raising children is never wake them up. The second is like unto it. Don't feed them because then they get all their energy back and cause trouble. But I decided not to wake her up. And so I was looking around for a place where I could put her down. She was getting heavy. I didn't want to put her on the floor because I thought people would trip over if I did that.

If I put her on the counter, I thought somebody would wake her up while they were trying to buy something. So as I was looking around this children's department I saw in the middle of it a circular dress rack. It was about 4ft around and it was about 4ft off the floor and I thought, oh,

this is just ideal. So I just picked her up and put her down. Now, what I didn't notice when I did that is that she fit right in. A little plastic infant seat was yellow and she was wrapped up in a yellow blanket which had fallen off mostly. She was in a little stretch suit and the dresses that were on display on this rack were yellow and green, and I didn't think anything of it. I just put her down there and I turned around. I went over to the counter where my wife was beginning to pick out some clothes.

And about five minutes later or ten minutes later, I suppose I turned around just to see how she was doing. I haven't heard any noise, but as I turned around, a whole group of women were gathered around this dress rack, and I could see it in a moment why they were there. My daughter was beginning to wake up. And you know how that is with the children. They don't always just wake up suddenly and open their eyes. They just slowly begin to wake up. And that's what she was doing. She was moving. Her arms were going like this, and her feet were beginning to go. And I turned around just in time to hear one woman say to her friend, I think it runs on batteries. And then her friend said to her, Well, they certainly do make them real nowadays, don't they?

Well, I sometimes think of that when I'm in church services because there's a great deal of evidence of the life of God there in Christian people. And I think often that the world looking on from the outside would look at that and say, Well, that's just artificial. It's running on batteries or something of the equivalent. It's just a matter of people being worked up in a certain way. And sometimes, of course, that is true, but how you tell the difference between artificial life and real life is that real life goes on growing, and that's what happens with God's people. They go on

growing. So year by year they go on from faith to faith and from strength to strength. And that's really a wonderful thing to see. Certainly is a wonderful thing for me to see it here at Biola when I come back, as I do every few years or so.

Now we're talking about what this world needs today and especially what our culture needs today. And I tried to point out in our first session together that what we really need in America today is people who know God. And I mean by that not just people who know about him, people who can mouth certain things, people who come from a certain religious background and know all the clichés. But people who really do know God and know Him in such a way that they're changed by that knowledge. Changed in the sense, of course, that they are drawn from sin and drawn to righteousness. But above all, change so that they become strong with something of the strength that God has. And the reason I emphasize that is that it is only people like that that are going to make any difference in the world.

If you don't have that kind of knowledge of God and that sense of the very presence of God with you and in you changing you to make you strong. Well, then, as the world changes, you will change with the world. And all that means is that you'll go along like so many alleged Christians do in our time adopting the world's standards and living like the world and being indistinguishable from it. And, of course, that's no help at all. And what we need is people who really can stand against that. And because they can stand, they are able to make a difference. They're the only people who in the final analysis really count. Count positively for change. So we talked about that in the first session, and then we began to look at the doctrine of the Bible,

which is what we did this morning because it's only in the Bible that we're going to learn about God.

Trying to point out that there are different kinds of knowing. There's knowing about in the sense of mere awareness. It's what Paul talks about in Romans 1, when he says the unsaved world has that knowledge because it's revealed in nature. God has made His existence very plain. And it's because of that that God can judicially and righteously judge them because there's enough knowledge there for any honest person to seek God out, but people don't want to do that. But that's not saving knowledge. That's not what we're talking about. There's knowledge that goes a little bit further. This is knowledge that involves information. It's the kind of thing you can get by reading theology books. It's the kind of information you can get by dialoguing with people. That's what God must be like.

And sometimes even the pagans had some not entirely bad ideas about that. But that's not saving knowledge either. There's also a knowledge of experience we would perhaps suggest by that sensing something holy. German, by the name of Rudolf Otto, wrote a book which is translated into English by a title like that called *The Idea of the Holy*. And Otto links up all kinds of spiritual experiences of something which is beyond ourselves and certainly there can be that kind of knowledge of God. But that isn't saving knowledge either. Saving knowledge of the knowledge of God we find in Scripture when, as we read it, we find God Himself actually speaking to us, which is not, of course, anything surprising. If this is God's book, that is where he speaks.

And his Holy Spirit, the living Holy Spirit, takes that book as we study it and speaks to us so that we actually encounter God. We find out what he's like on the deepest level, and because we really are finding out what God is like on that level, we are changed by it. If you're not changed by it, you really haven't come to know God. And then we come tonight to the doctrine of God itself. And for that, I want to turn to another passage of Scripture. Now, if you have your Bibles, I'd like you to look back now to the Old Testament again. We started out in Proverbs in the 9th chapter. Then we went to the New Testament. We were looking at 2 Timothy 3. And now we go back to the book of Exodus. And I'd like to look at the third chapter of Exodus where Moses, you know this chapter I'm sure, has this great revelation from God at the burning bush. And it's where God gives his name to Moses.

We want to see what's involved in that name. I want to read a few verses. I think I'll read about as far as verse 15. Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. So Moses thought, I'll go over and see the strange sight, why the bush does not burn up. When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush. Moses, Moses. And Moses said, Here I am. Do not come any closer. God said, Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I'm concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Now the cry of the Israelites has reached me and I've seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses said to God, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? And god said, I will be with you, and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. Moses said to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers have sent me to you and they ask me, what is His name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

This is a great revelation, not only of the name but also of the character of God. And it's for that reason that I'd like us to study it here tonight, and I want to put it in this context. I want to talk about a number of the attributes of God that we find in this chapter. But I want to say at the beginning that if you know anything about your own heart, you know that left to yourself. You

really resist God for those attributes. Let's just say people don't have any trouble with the idea of God as long as they can remake God into their own image. But the problem you see with coming face to face with God in the Bible is that we come face to face not with a God made in our image, but rather a God who stands over us and who is infinitely greater than anything we can imagine and whose very characteristics condemn us in one way or another.

And so this is the reason why the world left to itself always flees from God. Some years ago I heard a story which I think captures what the world does. A mountain climber was making his way up a steep ascent of rock, and suddenly he lost his grip and he began to fall. He was on an incline, so he slid down the edge of his very steeper center rock, and he was afraid he was going to be killed because he knew at the edge of it there was a cliff. And if he went over that cliff, he was going to fall the whole way to the bottom and he would be killed. So he was trying to break his fall, and he wasn't succeeding very well. But just as he came to the edge before he fell over, he threw out his hand and he managed to catch a little branch that was growing there. And there he was hanging on by his hands of this branch.

Now he thought it would be easy to get back up on top again. But he discovered he couldn't. The angle was just such that he could not quite get himself back up over the edge. So although he had broken his fall and he hadn't fallen and been killed yet, he knew it was just a matter of time before his grip would weaken. And you have to let go. And when he let go, he'd fall. Now, he wasn't very religious, but he thought this was a good time to become religious if there ever was one. So he looked up into the sky where he thought God might be. And he called out in the direction of Heaven, is there anybody up there who can help me?

He really didn't expect an answer, but much to his surprise, the voice came back and this great big voice said, yes, I am here and I can help you, but you got to trust me. First of all, you have to let go of that branch. There was a great long pause while he thought it over, and then finally he said, Is there anybody else up there who can help me? Now, that's the way it is with men and women you see. We don't mind a God as long as it can be a God that we choose, a God that suits us. But the problem with a real God is that we can't remake him into our image. Rather, it's his job to remake us into his image.

And for that, we have to find out who he is. Now, Moses had his troubles. God gave him this name. I am who I am. And not only did Moses have his troubles, but let me say, all theologians ever since have had their troubles with that name. If you ever study this, you may know that theologians are greatly divided as to what that name actually means. For one thing, we don't even know precisely what that name is. And there's a very good reason for that. The name usually we call it Jehovah. And the theologians often call it Yahweh. Is a name composed of just four Hebrew consonants. It's called the Tetragrammaton, which means four letters. And the problem with the name is that there are no vowel points with it.

Now, in the ancient Hebrew, there were no vowel pointings for anything, but that would be bad enough. But later on, when the Mazarites actually added the vowel pointing to the Hebrew text, they did not add the right vowel points to this word, this name for God whatever it may be. The consonants were there, but the vowels weren't added, and as a result, we don't know how to pronounce it. Now, they had a very good reason for that. At the time, the Mazarites began to

point the Old Testament text. The name of God was considered so Holy, so *sankrasack* that nobody was supposed to pronounce it. And therefore, in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, when you were reading through them and you came along and there was that name staring you at the face, you weren't supposed to say that name, but rather you were to substitute something else instead.

And there's a little clue to the reader. What the Mazarites did was substitute the vowel points for the name Adonai, which simply means Lord. It's a title as a reminder to the readers that when they came to the name of God, they weren't to say the name of God. But they were to say Adonai instead. So we come to that today. There's the vowel pointings for the word Adonai. We know how to pronounce Adonai very well. But nobody knows what the real vowel pointings were for this word. Is it Jehovah? Is it Yahweh? Is it something else? Nobody really knows, and furthermore, they're not absolutely sure why God answered in this way. Let me suggest some of the things that they've said.

Some of the scholars have said, well, you have to understand that in Hebrew culture. As a matter of fact, in any one of these ancient cultures, to know the name of someone in some sense was understood to give you power over that one. If you could call them by name, you somehow could summon them to do your bidding. It's even more pronounced in the case of naming someone. If you actually can give somebody else a name, then you really are the master. That's why Adam was given the task of naming the animals because he was appointed God's vice region over the animal kingdom. He had authority over it, and therefore he had authority to name them.

And they said, Well, that's probably what's involved here. You see, when Moses says to God, what is your name? That's a way of saying, if you will just tell me your name, God, then somehow you'll be at my disposal. And when I get down there to see Pharaoh and I get into trouble, somehow I can just call on you, and I need you. Now, lots of people think about God that way. They want a God who is there to be called upon when they need him. But the rest of the time, of course, they're quite happy to go their own way. And these scholars have said, Well, if that's what's involved here, what God is saying to Moses when he replies, I am who I am is this. Moses, it is none of your business what my name is. You're not here to call me to serve you. Rather I'm here to call you to serve me.

You just go down there and you say, I am who I am, whoever I happen to be, that's the God who has sent you. The only problem with that, you see, is that later on in the verse I read, it says, this is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. And it doesn't seem to make sense to me for God to say the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation is this, it's none of your business what my name is. So I don't think that is quite the solution.

Some others have said, Well, it has to do with the power of God. God is sending Moses down there, and God is going to act very powerfully through him to bring the people out of Egypt. So when God says to Moses, I am who I am or whatever that may actually be, what are you saying to Moses is this Don't you worry about what my name is, the important thing is that I'm going to act powerfully to bring the people out. You just go down there and watch me work. Of course, that's closer, because that is what God did. And yet I don't think that's the answer either. You see

the clue to this, and I think most of the scholars would agree. Most of them, the majority is that this word, however, it's to be pronounced is very closely related to the Hebrew verb to be.

And therefore it's translated as I read it in most of the Bibles, and certainly in the New International Version, I am who I am. It's the verb to be. In other words, it's speaking of the sheer existence or being of God. And the essence of it is God is the one who exists. God has always existed. God exists in and of himself. And if I could put it in terms that bring the meaning of that down to us, God is self-existent. His existence doesn't depend on anybody else, and he is self-sufficient. He does not need anybody else. God is who God is. Now, that's hard to come to grips with, but that's the point at which God began with Moses, because that's the thing Moses needed to see. And that's the thing we need to see, too.

You see, A.W. Tozer, a pastor in Chicago years ago, Christian Missionary Alliance pastor wrote a book on knowing God, in which he talked about this matter of God's self-existence and self-sufficiency and above all, his self-existence, because he said, the problem, you see, is that we in our way of thinking in our scientific method or even in our ways of knowing generally always reason from cause to effect. When we see something happen, we don't think we understand it unless we could analyze the causes that made it what it is. And once we can analyze the causes, then we say, we really know it. And when you write a dissertation, a historical dissertation, for example, you're examining a period of history. What you do is analyze the causes that produce what happened at that particular period.

And when you can analyze those causes, then you say, Well, this is the effect. I really understand the effect now that's the way we operate in almost everything. That's what knowledge really means to us. But now what happens when you deal with God? When you deal with God, you're dealing with something that is not an effect of a prior cause. Nothing caused God. And what that means, you see, is if our way of knowing is linked to that relationship between cause and effect, then there is a profound sense, a very important sense in which God, as he is in Himself, is never going to be absolutely knowable to you and me. We're never going to be able to say God is like this because God just is. And that's a problem to us and we don't like it.

It's not only a problem to us generally. It's a problem that even the scholars acknowledge. Some years ago, I read a book by Robert Jastrow, who is the director of the Goddard Space Flight Center. He's written a number of popular books on astronomy, and he wrote a book called God and the Astronomers kind of a fascinating thing. It was an analysis of the shift in thinking in scientific circles between what before this was known as the steady state theory to the theory of an expanding, changing universe. Steady state theory meant things are always the same and always have been the same and all the relationships exist in the same way and always have. And the expanding universe threw all of that out of kilter because if the universe is expanding and they can track it and the rate at which has expanded, it must have gone back to an initial beginning that's very popularly called in the press.

And in writing the big bang theory, there was an initial origin in which everything came into being and started, but beyond which, in your analysis, you cannot go. And the fascinating thing about Jastrow's book is that he analyzes what the greatest scientists of the age were thinking and

saying at the time that change was taking place. And the thing is, they didn't like it. Even Einstein didn't like it because, you see, it meant that somewhere in our scientific explorations that there was a Big Bang, there was a point beyond which we could not go. We could not explain how that Big Bang came about because as far as we know, that was the starting point of everything. Now, if we have that problem on the scientific level, we certainly have that on the spiritual level when we're talking about the nature of God.

Don't you have that trouble with God? No, let's be honest. Doesn't it bother you that you can't explain God or that you can't figure Him out or that He does things that just don't seem to make sense to you, and He doesn't always explain Himself? Come on, be honest. That bugs me no end. I want to know. I sometimes say when I get to Heaven, I have 100 questions that I'm going to ask, and I'm going to start one, two, three because as far as I know, I'm not getting any answers to those things. That doesn't mean I won't ever get any answers. But I do know that when I'm dealing with God, God is who he is, and he does what he will do. And there's a profound sense in which you and I are never, ever going to figure that out. Absolutely.

And the point I'm making, you see, is that we don't like that. We don't like to deal with God like that. We deal with people because they're like us. We can handle that cause and effects. We don't like what they're doing. We manipulate the causes, get them to change. Can't do that with God. God is who he is. He doesn't change. He does it his own way. And you and I have to fit in with that whether we like it or not. It also means, of course, that God doesn't need helpers. He's self-sufficient. We don't like that either. We always want to help God out. We think it should be mutual you see. I get in a hole, He helps me out. He gets in a hole, I help him out. I scratch His

back. He scratches my back. That's the way we would like it, because that's the way we operate here.

God does not need helpers. God does not need worshippers. Toser says, in that book if tomorrow morning, every single person on the face of the Earth should in some way instantly become an atheist and deny the existence of God, the glory of God will not be diminished in the slightest. God is still the glorious God whether we acknowledge them or not. He doesn't need worshippers. He doesn't need helpers. Jesus said, Look, God is able to these stones to raise up children to Abraham. He does not need us, and we don't like that. Now, the glory of it, of course, is a God chooses to use us. He even calls his coworkers with Himself. And that's a glorious thing. But God doesn't need it you see. And we have to come to terms with that if it were to realize how great God is. There's a second thing that's thought about God in this, and that is that God is sovereign.

God is not only who he is, God is also being who He is, the one who is telling Moses what to do. God is calling Moses. And he says to Moses, in no uncertain terms, I have chosen you to go down to Egypt and say to Pharaoh, Let my people go. And through you, I am going to bring my people out. Moses doesn't quite get it at first you know. He says, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? And God says to Moses, you didn't hear me, Moses. I didn't say I was sending you down to Egypt, so you could bring the people out of Egypt. I'm sending you down to Egypt, so I can bring the people out of Egypt. And at that point, Moses begins to get he says, oh, well, at least give me your name. And so I know who it is who is operating when they say Who's doing this?

But you see, the point is that God is sovereign. Now, you and I don't instinctively, naturally like God's sovereignty. We don't mind it so much as long as it applies to other people, because that keeps you in check you see, and we don't even mind it so much as it applies to world events. I'm glad God controls the world somewhat because it keeps order out there. And I can go on and live my life and not get into trouble and all of that. The problem with sovereignty is that if God is sovereign and he must be sovereign if He's God. God, therefore, is sovereign over me. He is my King. He is my Lord, and of course, being a sinner, that's the very thing I don't like. That's what Adam didn't like.

Adam was there in the garden and God gave him an enormous amount of opportunity to do what he wanted. He was there to rule the created order. He could name the animals. He could go where he wanted. God didn't put restrictions on them, except for this one thing. God said, I'm going to put a tree there in the garden. And you're not to eat of that tree. The day in which you eat of it, you're going to die. Do not eat of it. That tree is a symbol of the fact that although I'm giving you a great deal of authority, you are not autonomous. You are not God. I am God. You're just a creature. And therefore, although it's only in this one thing that I'm restricting you, I am restricting you there so that you know that I am God and you are not.

And when the devil came along, you know what the devil said? He began by questioning God's benevolence. Eve then he questioned God's word. God said this, but you will not surely die. And then finally he dangled the real apple. And it was this, you know, God knows that in the day you eat of it, you're going to be like God knowing good and evil. And that's what got to Eve. And that's what got to Adam. Because that's what they wanted to be, you see, was to be like God.

They wanted to be sovereign themselves. And in order to do that, what they had to do was eat of that tree. And so that's what Adam and Eve did. Now that's what our hearts are like you see. We read in the word what God says, and that is fine if you want to live that way. But me, I am the captain of my soul. I am the master of my faith, like Frank Sinatra, I am going to do it my way.

And that's what sin is. And so when we come face to face with the true God, not the God that we remake into our image, but the true God, we do not like him for His sovereignty. As a matter of fact, we resist that with all the strength at our disposal. As non-Christians, we run away entirely. Even as Christians, we fight it sometimes every step of the way. I think of Jonah fighting that God came to Jonah said, I'm going to send you to Nineveh to preach there, and he said nothing doing, I don't like those people. You're sending me to Nineveh is because you want to save them. You don't have to send me down there. If you're going to send them to hell, you can do that without me.

If you're sending me down there to preach a message of judgment, it's because you're going to convict them of their sins, so they'll repent and they will be saved. And I don't want that. So he ran away and God had to manifest his sovereignty over Jonah. Many of us run away exactly like Jonah did. Here's another attribute of God we find in the passage. God's Holiness. You see, when Moses came near the burning bush, God said, Take off your sandals for the place where you were standing as holy ground. Here's a dissertation topic for you. Study the idea of holiness in the Bible. It's one of the most difficult terms there is. Why? Because it has to do with God's very essence. The Germans say it's what makes God Gottist anders totally other different from ourselves.

You say well doesn't have to do with righteousness morality and all that. It has something to do with that. But it's a far bigger idea than that. Has to do with majesty. Awe. It's the sort of thing that when we come into God's presence, we are overcome. We repent. We abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. That's what happened to Isaiah when he caught that vision of God high and lifted up in the temple and His glory filled the temple. And the Seraphim were there. And all of that, he didn't say, oh, isn't that interesting? I got a vision of God. I always wonder what God was like and what heaven was like. And besides, here I'm writing my book. I'm up to the 6th chapter, and I think it's bogged down a little bit there in chapter five, I want to write a long book. I've got to have something to keep people reading. I need a real zinger in chapter six.

Why I'll describe heaven. That isn't what Isaiah did. When Isaiah saw God in His Holiness. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty is what the Seraphim were singing. What did Isaiah do? Isaiah said, Woe is me, for I'm a sinful man. I have unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Woe is me because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. He said, That's the way it works. Habakkuk is another one. Habakkuk, at the beginning of his book raises a moral question. He says, how can God do this? And the book is really an answer to that, but at the very end, when you have that great prayer in the third chapter, and Habakkuk is explaining the reaction that he had when God finally did speak to him and reveal himself.

Habakkuk said, When God spoke to me, I was so overcome with His Holiness that I almost got sick to my stomach. My knees began to bang together and my stomach was doing flip flops. That's what was happening to me. Now, that's my own translation. You have to look that up and see how he actually says it, you see. But that was the idea when Peter caught just a glimpse of

the Holiness of God in Jesus Christ. What did he say? He said, Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. You see to know God in His Holiness is to know ourselves and our sin, to know Him in His glory and His Majesty. And it's to realize how insignificant we are unless God gives us that significance in Jesus Christ, which he does. Let me give you one more attribute of God, and then another quick one. And then I want to wrap it up. How about God's omniscience?

That certainly comes in here. God says in verse seven, I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I've heard them crying out, I know what's going on God says. I know everything. All hearts are open before me. I know not only what's on the outside and can be seen. I know what's on the inside and can't be seen. I am the omniscient God. Oh, omniscient. You see again, the problem with that is that it means that God knows us. I really don't mind if God knows you. Doesn't bother me in the slightest. But to think that God knows me knows me thoroughly, knows all the things I hide inside. And furthermore, that one day, because God is a God of truth, all of that is going to come out. That is profoundly disturbing. I spend much of my life trying to hide what I am from other people.

Don't I? Don't we do that? You know you're starting to date somebody and you go out on the first date and you try to make as good impression as you can. Try to be sophisticated, interesting, witty, good looking. Get your hair fixed. Guys get a haircut sometimes not so much anymore. They do whatever they can do, so to make the best impression they can. So you have a good day, good impression. You go back home afterwards and you say, boy, we got to get together again. You say you like to go out next week? Yes. Okay. Great. They're all excited about that. But then you get back and you think now I made such a good impression. What's going to happen when

she when he finds out I'm not exactly like I pretended to be on that first date when I made such a good impression.

So when the second date comes around, what you try to do is confess a little bit, but not too much. He will say something like this. He'll say, Now, I know you think I'm a pretty sophisticated, intelligent, good looking guy, certainly knows his way around and it's true, you know I am. But I wasn't always that way. Years ago. First year, when I went to high school and you know I was in 9th grade, I was so awkward. I was embarrassed to be around girls. And then he doesn't say anything else. He stops at that point because what he really is waiting for is for a similar confession on her part. And he wants her to say, well, no doubt you think I'm very sophisticated and glamorous than I am because that's the only kind of girls they have here at Biola.

But before I came to Biola and had the Biola experience, I wasn't nearly as attractive and sophisticated as you find me to be tonight. And so they had a little bit of mutual confession there, you see. And then the next time they have a date instead of confessing what they were like for eight years ago, way back in high school, before they went to high school, they confess what they were like when they first came. And then they confess some of the problems they have at the present time, you see, and what each one is looking for is mutual acceptance from the other as he or she confesses what he or she is really like. And yet, you know, I am convinced that's what we go through, that even in the best of relationships, even in the best of marriages, where a couple really get along well and have been getting together a long, long time, there is always an element in us which we do not ever confess to anybody because we are ashamed of it.

So we always are covering it up. We cover it up in all sorts of ways by all of these faces that we put on, all these acts that we go through because we want people to think that we're really somebody and we know in our hearts we're really not. And if we have that trouble, you see, with other people, what do you do with God before whom all hearts are open, all desires known. To know the omniscient God is a very unsettling experience. Now let me say finally, the little brief one is that God is also immutable. You know what that means? It means God doesn't change. You say, Why should that be a problem? Well, years ago, Jonathan Edwards, the great American Puritan theologian, wrote a book called *Men Are Naturally God's Enemies*, a long essay, really.

And in it, he answers that question. He's talking about some of these other things sovereignty, holiness, omniscience, and so forth. And he gets to the point where he says, Men and women also hate God for his immutability. Then he asks the question, Why should we hate God for his immutability? And then he answers it. He said, I'm glad you asked that question. The reason men and women hate God for his immutability is this. It means that God does not change. And the meaning of the fact that God does not change is that God does not change in any of his other attributes. You see, God is the self-existent self-sufficient one, and He will always be self-existent, and He will always be self-sufficient.

You are never in all eternity going to be able to figure God out perfectly and say, Well, if only I do this, I can make God do something because it will not ever work that way. God is not only sovereign today. God will always be sovereign, and the time will never come when he ceases to be because God is immutable in His sovereignty. You see, we could put up with it if it might change, maybe the time would come you see, when God would cease to be sovereign, it would

be like the chairman of the board. Ok. He's the chairman of the board now, but chairman of the board, they get old. They retire. Maybe when he retires, I can take his place.

But it isn't like that you see. God as the sovereign God forever. I am who I am. God is Holy and He will not change in His Holiness. It doesn't make any difference for you to say, well, but I don't like His standards. I think I'd like to do something else. It's not your world. It's God's world. God sets the standards. You have to come to terms with that. You say, well, I'll wait. Maybe He'll change his mind. No, He doesn't change His mind. If it's sin today, it's going to be sin tomorrow, it is always going to be sin. As far as His omniscience goes, God is never going to forget. The time is never going to come when He gets senile and He begins to forget what you're like or what you've done.

But the point I want to make you see is that although I'm trying to be honest here because I think Christians have to face up with the problem. Although God, as He is in Himself, is something that we do not naturally like or are not naturally drawn to, this is nevertheless the very God we need. We need a God who is self-existent and self-sufficient. We are not self-sufficient or self-existent. That's why we need help. What kind of a God is it? Who needs help? We need a God who doesn't need help, who exists in and of Himself, who is who he is. That's the kind of God we need. We need a sovereign God, not a God that can be manipulated, but a God who rules and can be counted on to rule. We need a Holy God, a God who has a moral standard which we are willing to learn and live by will mean happiness in our lives. And we need an omniscient God, a God who knows us and who knows us thoroughly.

A God who knows what we're like. He knows our weaknesses. He knows what we need. He needs the help we need. He can direct our lives. He knows what He's put us here for. He knows what we can accomplish. And above all, He knows what He's going to make of us because what he is going to do is make us like Himself. There are a lot of attributes of God which we are never going to share. Theologians call them the incommunicable attributes. Self-sufficiency is one of them. We are never going to be self-sufficient, and so on. There are other attributes like that. But there are attributes that God does share and in which we are going to become like Him. And that includes His Holiness and His love and His mercy and His Grace and all of those wonderful things that have reached out to us and the gospel and saved us.

Do we need people to know God? You bet we do. Who can stand for God? Yes. But above all, people who because they know God, are like God and can make His presence felt in the world. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for this chapter we've been studying, and we confess as we always do when we come to Scripture, that there's a great deal there that we don't understand even yet. And if we spent years pondering over it, there will still be things that we won't understand because we will never fully understand you. And yet you've revealed certain things about yourself. And we want to be among that number who do act upon what they do understand. Our Father, we confess because we have a sinful nature that these matters, these attributes, which are of your essence, are a problem for us, because we still want to rule our own lives and go our own way and sin and all of those things.

And our Father, you are what we need. And we know that you've shown us that in the gospel you've saved us through Jesus Christ. We would pray that you would empower us, each one as

Boice: Knowing God

we pray in our own heart to become by your grace, increasingly, day by day, more to what you would have us be in order that we might please you and be effective as your agents in an ungodly world. We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, Amen.