

## **Examining Christian Doctrine**

### **Lesson 9: The Attributes of God Part 3**

In our study, we have been in the process of answering three questions as it relates to God: Does God exist, and if so, is it possible to know him, and if we can know him, what is he like? We've explored the first two questions having to do with God's existence and knowability. For the past two weeks we've been looking at the attributes of God to answer the question "what is God like?".

In studying the attributes of God, we have broken them down into three parts:

1. God's Grandeur: Self-Existence and Omnipresence
2. God's Greatness: Omniscience and Omnipotence
3. God's Goodness (Moral Attributes): Justice and Love

We've looked at the attributes of God's Grandeur and the attributes of God's Greatness today we will explore the attributes of God's Goodness. In doing so, we will be looking at the Justice of God and the Goodness of God.

#### **Attributes of God's Goodness: God's Justice**

In exploring God's Justice, we will also explore the attributes of God's Holiness, Righteousness, and Judgment.

**The Justice of God:** The justice of God speaks to God being a 'just' God and to his ability to act justly and fairly. It emphasizes His absolute righteousness, fairness, and impartiality in all His actions and judgments. It reflects God's unwavering commitment to moral integrity and upholding His divine standards of right and wrong. It also means that God himself is the final standard of what is right.

God is just and He always acts in a way consistent with the requirements of His character as revealed in His moral standards and laws, covenantal laws, and revealed spiritual principles. God also enacts justice on behalf of the poor, oppressed and victims of injustice (Psalm 103:6), but also enacts justice on the wicked, evildoer, the unjust, and the oppressor. For those who oppose God, he is the judge whose justice demands that they be held accountable, but for those who are oppressed, he is a judge whose justice demands that they be fought for and looked after.

Scripture attests to God's righteousness and justice:

- "All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- "Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right? (Genesis 18:25)
- Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! (Isaiah 30:18)
- "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. (Isaiah 61:8)

#### **God is Righteous**

Righteousness and justice go hand-in-hand, even though the English terms are different, in both the Old and New Testaments there is only one word behind these two English terms. In many modern contexts, 'justice' is centered on our relationship with others, and 'righteousness' is centered on our relationship with God.

God's righteousness means that God is right and perfect in moral character. He sets the standard of rightness and always is and acts according to what is right. God's standard of righteousness is moral perfection in thought, word, and deed, to fall short of this is to be unrighteous.

The book of Romans emphasizes the righteousness of God and shows that God is righteous in His dealings with both sinners and believers. The righteousness of God is the starting point and the theme of the gospel message. God's righteousness, rejected by sinning humanity, was perfectly fulfilled by Christ incarnate. Thus, Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to the account of those who receive salvation and the 'gift' of righteousness.

## God is Holy

Both justice and righteousness are products of God's holiness. God himself is the Most Holy One. He is called the "Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22). The word "holy" or "holiness" in the Bible carries the idea of being set apart, consecrated, or dedicated for a sacred purpose. It is often used to describe God's character, His sanctuary, or objects and people set apart for divine use. That God is holy means he is endlessly, always perfect. In this idea, God is 'set apart' from anything less than divine perfection. It emphasizes his absolute moral purity, separateness from sin, and his transcendent nature.

God is 'set apart' and absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty.

- Exodus 15:11 "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

God is 'set apart' from evil and sin.

- Isaiah 59:2 - "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

God is Holy and demands that his people be holy as well

- Leviticus 11:44 I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.

God is praised as holy by the heavenly creatures

- Isaiah 6:3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

## God's Divine Judgment (Wrath of God)

As a result of God's holiness, it is seen as necessary that he treat people according to what they deserve. Thus, it is necessary that God punish sin, for it does not deserve reward. God's judgment is His righteous response to sin and rebellion. It is not a capricious or vengeful anger but a divine expression of His holiness and justice against unrighteousness. It is a manifestation of His opposition to sin and His commitment to uphold righteousness.

Though we find that God enacts judgment and acts wrathful in the scriptures, 'wrath' is not an attribute of God. His wrath and judgment is the rightful expression of his holiness and justice in the face of sin and evil.

- We find God's judgment in events such as the flood account in Genesis as response to "*every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.*" (Gen. 6:5).
- We see the curses of the law and God's judgment against Israel as they disobeyed and broke the covenant. This led up to the ultimate judgment against their rebellion in the form of the exile from the land.
- We see individual examples of God's judgment such as Uzzah when he touched the Ark (2 Samuel 6:7), and Achan's sin in Joshua 7:25.
- We also see various judgments given to heathen nations through the prophets such as judgments on Edom, Assyria, Babylon, Moab, and Egypt. The reason for these statements of judgment were in response to the nation's sinful ways, such as idolatry, oppression, violence, pride, etc.
- We also have in the New Testament pictures of judgment such as the coming destruction on the Temple in Jerusalem, Ananias and Saphirah in the book of Acts, as well as judgment against the wicked and sinners in Revelation.

So we find all these instances and mentions of God's wrath and judgment but we must remember that God is not a God of wrath. God never takes pleasure in the punishment of people. God's judgments are a response of his divine justice, we're told that God is 'slow to anger', we find that many times his judgments are restorative, and usually they are a last result after much warning to people that they may escape judgment.

A final note we should mention that for the Christian, the wrath and judgment of God has no bearing on us, for Jesus suffered the wrath of sin for us on the cross. Because of God's grace and mercy, we have a covenant with God that contains no wrath. *"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:9). Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)*

### **Attributes of God's Goodness: God's Goodness**

In exploring God's Goodness, we will also explore the attributes of God's Love, Mercy, and Grace.

**The Goodness of God:** God's goodness is at the core of who he is. The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is good. It is the intrinsic nature of God to do good and to desire to show kindness, generosity, and benevolence toward all of his creation. We are told that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).

We see God's goodness exemplified in many ways:

1. God's Goodness in Creation: Genesis 1:31 - "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."
2. God's Goodness in Providing for His Creatures: Psalm 145:9 - "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."
3. God's Goodness in Salvation: Psalm 100:5 - "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."
4. God's Goodness in His Mercy and Forgiveness: Psalm 86:5 - "You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you."
5. God's Goodness in His Provision and Care: Matthew 7:11 - "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"
6. God's Goodness in His Promises: Romans 8:28 - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
7. God's Goodness in His Character: Nahum 1:7 - "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."

### **The Love of God**

The love of God is a central theme throughout the Bible, encompassing His unconditional affection, mercy, compassion, and benevolence toward humanity. It is a profound expression of God's character and nature, revealing His desire for relationship, reconciliation, and redemption with His creation.

The Scripture explicitly states that 'God is love' - 1 John 4:8: *"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

The love of God is a multifaceted expression of the essence of his person, reflecting His deep and abiding affection for humanity. God's love is unconditional, undeserved, and unending, extending to people regardless of their merit or worthiness. The love of God is significant because it demonstrates His faithfulness, goodness, compassion, and desire for relationship with humanity. It is the foundation of God's redemptive plan, culminating in the ultimate expression of His love through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's love provides comfort, assurance, and hope to believers, assuring them of His presence, care, and provision in every circumstance.

Throughout the Old Testament we find that the Psalms frequently affirm that “the Lord is good” (Psalm 100:5). We also find the idea of God’s ‘lovingkindness’ as foundational to God’s relationship to Israel. The Hebrew word for this is the word “hesed”. Hesed encapsulates the Old Testament concept of God’s covenantal love and faithfulness toward His people. It denotes God’s loyal and enduring love that remains steadfast despite human faithlessness and disobedience.

In the New Testament we find God’s love specifically demonstrated in his willingness to redeem his creation through Jesus Christ, bringing about restoration, reconciliation, forgiveness and

- John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This verse encapsulates the essence of God's love in sending Jesus Christ to redeem humanity, highlighting its sacrificial and unconditional nature.
- Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse emphasizes the initiative and depth of God's love, demonstrated through Christ's sacrificial death on behalf of sinners.
- 1 John 4:8-10 - "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." These verses affirm that God's very essence is love, demonstrated through the sending of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity.

### **The Mercy of God**

Mercy is a characteristic that flows out of God’s love and goodness. Because God is love, and because he is good, by nature God is merciful. God is a God who delights to show mercy:

- Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

Mercy is something that God shows to people who are deserving of his judgment and wrath, but in mercy he withholds his judgment. Mercy is often emphasized where people are in misery or distress. David says, for example, “I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercy is great . . .” (2 Samuel 24:14). When Paul speaks of the fact that God comforts us in affliction, he calls God the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

We are to imitate God’s mercy in our conduct toward others: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). Jesus in dealing with the Pharisees’ condemnation of him eating with the tax collectors and sinners quoted Hosea 6:6 when he told them, “*go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’*” (Matthew 9:13)

We are also told that God’s mercy plays a part in our salvation: he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:5)

### **The Grace of God**

Grace is another characteristic that flows out of God’s love and goodness. Because God is love, and because he is good, God gives grace to undeserving people. It is often said that mercy is withholding from people something negative that they do deserve and grace is giving people something good that they don’t deserve.

Grace, by definition is God’s unearned and undeserved kindness and favor. Grace happens when someone does something for you out of the goodness of their heart. Grace is God giving people something good in which they have not earned it or deserved it. In scripture, grace is contrasted with a wage. A wage is something that is earned, but grace is something that is given. Grace does not speak to the goodness of the one who is receiving it, but it speaks to the goodness of the one who is giving it. Thus, God gives grace to the undeserving. We see this played out in a general way with God’s ‘common grace’ – Goodness extended to all of humanity.

God's grace is also specifically seen in both the Old and the New Testaments. One false view that some people hold is that in the Old Testament God is a God of wrath, and in the New Testament God is God of grace. This simply is not true.

Throughout the Old Testament we see:

- God's covenantal promises to people such as Abraham and David came through grace.
- God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage came through grace.
- God's provision of his people in the wilderness came through grace.
- God's preservation of a remnant even when Israel disobeyed came through grace.
- God gave prophetic warnings and calls to repentance as an act of his grace.
- God restored and renewed Israel after the exile as an act of his grace.

This notion of grace extends into the New Testament as we see a full revelation of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

- John 1:16-17 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Jesus shows us that the Father is a God of grace, and he extends this grace to the undeserving. This is exemplified by Jesus in his interactions with the undeserving throughout the gospels, people such as eating with tax collectors and sinners, the woman caught in the act of adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus, and more.

Ultimately the grace of God is shown in the Gospel and the New Covenant. God promised a New Covenant to Israel:

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

This New Covenant of Grace (vs. Law) came through the act of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. This was a graceful act which because of it, offers salvation, justification and righteousness by grace to those who receive Jesus' atoning work.

- Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."
- Romans 3:23-24: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."
- Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."
- Acts 15:11: "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."
- Romans 6:14: "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."
- Romans 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!