



Week 7 - God: His Attributes

The most important truth conveyed in the Scriptures is the nature and character of God. Our understanding of God contributes to our understanding of all of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Let's look at a few of the attributes of God, which describe the qualities of the Godhead. We can, for example, study God's attributes of greatness, and attributes of goodness.

Attributes of Greatness

Spiritual

The spirituality of God relates to His nonmaterial, invisible nature. God is not limited by existing in a single location, and He is not destructible. Therefore, He can be worshipped and encountered anywhere (John 4:21; Acts 17:24).

Personal

God is self-conscious, and He can have reciprocal relationships with other beings. He describes Himself by name (Exodus 3:14). He has a will, and He is capable of feelings and choosing. In contrast, the god of many Eastern religions is a mindless, impersonal force.

Infinite

God is all-powerful (omnipotent), so He can accomplish whatever He desires (Psalm 115:3). He is all-knowing (omniscient), so He has complete knowledge of all things (Psalm 147:5). His presence is everywhere (omnipresent), so His influence and power affect everything (Psalm 139:7-12, Jeremiah 23:24). Finally, God is eternal, so His existence has no beginning or end (Isaiah 44:6; Revelation 1:8). God's infinite character gives us comfort since we can always commune with Him wherever we go, and He is in complete control of the world and our lives (Matthew 10:29).

Consistent

God's character never changes: "God is not a man, that He should lie; nor a son of man, that he should repent [i.e. change His mind]; has He said, and will He not do it?" (Numbers 23:19). This consistency gives us comfort in His faithfulness and in the trustworthiness of His promises. Where the Bible seems to indicate that God changed His mind, these passages simply relate God's interactions with humans in human terms.

Immanent and Transcendent

God's immanence represents His activity and existence within the universe. God acts within all creation, including human nature, and throughout history. From our existence to the very laws of

physics, all endure due to His sustaining power (Jeremiah 23:24; Acts 17:27-28). God's immanence also relates to His intimate relationship with his children. As the Psalmist said, "the nearness of God is my good."

God's transcendence represents His existence outside of and independent from the universe. God can act in creation outside of the normal sustaining laws of physics to work miracles. His transcendence also means that we cannot fully comprehend God; we can only know that which He has chosen to reveal to us through nature, the incarnation and the special revelation of Scripture.

Attributes of Goodness

Moral Purity: Holiness, Righteousness and Justice

God's holiness speaks to His complete goodness. The holy angels celebrate this aspect of His nature: "...and day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty'" (Revelation 4:8). Holiness also relates to God's separateness from all of creation, particularly to His inability to coexist with evil. God's holy nature disrupts our fellowship with Him until our sin is removed, which God so graciously accomplished for us through the cross of Jesus Christ.

God's righteousness relates to the perfection of His law: "For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness" (Psalm 11:7). God's law is perfect. It reflects His character, and it rewards those who seek and obey it (Matthew 6:33). Since God created the universe, His moral laws reflect the reality of social life just as physical laws govern physical interactions. God's righteousness also reflects the goodness and consistency of His actions (Jeremiah 9:24).

God's justice speaks to the consistent, fair way that He enforces his laws: "And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity" (Psalm 9:8). All evil will ultimately be punished and good rewarded. God's just nature is not threatened by injustices in the world today, since He does not always immediately enforce His moral order.

His patience gives people and nations time to change (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Integrity/Truthfulness

God always represents truth: "God is not a man, that he should lie" (Numbers 23:19). He is a real God (genuineness), unlike the false idols of pagan cultures. God always speaks the truth (veracity), and He always acts true to his promises and character (faithfulness).

Love

"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Love is basic to God's nature (1 John 4:8), and it represents His eternal giving or sharing of Himself. God exhibits His love in His concern for us, who cannot give anything in return that He has not already given us. God's grace represents His forbearance in not dealing with us on the basis of our merits, but on the basis of our needs. God's mercy represents his loving compassion for His people, manifested in many ways but especially through His not giving people the punishment they deserve. Simply put, His grace gives us what we don't deserve, and His mercy keeps us from getting what we do deserve.

Finally, God's love is connected with His patience as He restrains His judgment, waiting for people to repent of their sins (2 Peter 3:9).

Bottom Line

We study theology to gain a fuller intellectual understanding of God. However, to understand God's character, we must live in obedience to Him and exercise childlike faith. Then, we experience the reality of God as an everyday reality.

Review:

1. What is the most important truth conveyed in Scripture?
2. What are some of the attributes of God's greatness?
3. What one word best describes God's creatures?