

JUNE 7, 2020

LESSON 1

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD IS HOLY (ISAIAH 6:3)

### “Holy, Holy, Holy”

When Isaiah was commissioned to become a prophet, he was in the temple. He “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne” (Isa 6:1). During this theophany, angels flew all around God, calling to one another with this song of praise:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa 6:3).

By describing God in this way, the angels are declaring that God is the holiest person of all. No one can compare to him in terms of holiness, glory, or greatness.

This is a problem for us. In order to stand in the presence of God, we also must be just as holy as he is. In fact, Isaiah realized this as he stood in the presence of God. The prophet was overwhelmed with his own unworthiness in comparison with the greatness and majesty of our “holy, holy, holy” Creator.

### Holiness of God

The moral excellence of God that unifies his attributes and is expressed through his actions, setting him apart from all others.

—Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes*

### Characteristics of God (Sunday Evenings, June–August 2020)

Date	Lesson	Title	Citation
June 7	Lesson 1	God is Holy	Isaiah 6:3
June 14	Lesson 2	God is Love	1 John 4:8
June 21	Lesson 3	God is Angry (Righteously Indignant)	James 1:20; Hebrews 3:10
June 28	Lesson 4	God is Compassionate and Merciful	Exodus 34:6
July 5	Lesson 5	God Does Good	Acts 10:38
July 12	Lesson 6	God is Our Redeemer	
July 19	Lesson 7	The Peace of God	Philippians 4:7
July 26	Lesson 8	The Unity of God	John 17:23
Aug 2	Lesson 9	The Justice of God	Deuteronomy 32:4
Aug 9	Lesson 10	The Humor of God	Matthew 7:3–5
Aug 16	Lesson 11	The Wisdom of God	Colossians 2:3
Aug 23	Lesson 12	The Creativeness of God	2 Corinthians 5:17
Aug 30	Lesson 13	The Covenantal Love of God	Psalms 136

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa 6:5).

God cleansed Isaiah of his sin and then commissioned him to become his prophet (Isa 6:6–7).

### The Tabernacle

It wasn’t just his prophets whom God expected to be holy. He demanded this of all his covenant people. When God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, he entered into a covenant relationship with them from atop Mt. Sinai. But before the nation could come into his presence, they had to be consecrated (Ex 19:10–11).

The remainder of Exodus is about the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25–40). The word “tabernacle” literally means “dwelling.” In other words, the “holy, holy, holy” God wanted to be able to “dwell” among his people. He did this by entering the tabernacle in Ex 40.

In the closing verses of Exodus, God manifested his presence in the form of a cloud. There’s a word that describes this cloud. It’s not in the Bible itself, but Jewish literature calls it the Shekinah (pronounced shuh-KI-nuh). The Hebrew verb *shakan* is used in Ex 40:35 when we’re told that the cloud “settled” on the tabernacle. This is God’s presence.

Let’s jump to the New Testament for a moment. In the Gospel of John, when we’re told that Jesus came and dwelt among us in John 1:14 and that we saw his glory, that verb “dwelt” literally means “tabernacled.” What John is telling us is that, when Jesus came to die on the cross, he was God in the flesh, dwelling among humanity. And Jesus came so that we could dwell with God forever.

### “You Shall Be Holy”

Did you know God doesn’t need a tabernacle today? The church is the tabernacle. God dwells in every one of us who has entered into a covenant relationship with him through the blood of Christ (1 John 4:12).

In the book of Leviticus, God established the sacrificial system by which the people could remain in a covenant relationship with God. This predated and anticipated Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins (cf. Heb 10:1). In Lev 11:44, God demanded this of his covenant people:

“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Those words are especially familiar to us because Peter quoted them in 1 Pet 1:16. In this passage, he described us as God’s priests and covenant people. We are called upon to be holy, just as God and Jesus are holy. In fact, without holiness, “no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

“Who is like you among the gods, O LORD—

glorious in **holiness**,

awesome in splendor,  
performing great wonders?

—Ex 15:11

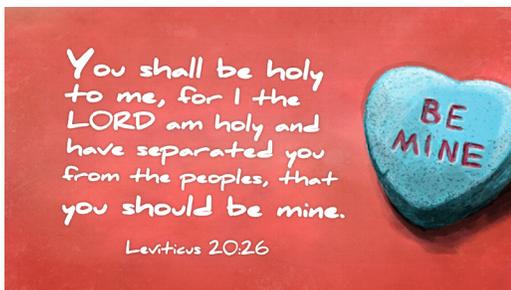
He who is mighty has done great things for me, and **holy** is his name.

—Luke 1:49

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

“**Holy, holy, holy**, is the Lord God Almighty!”

—Rev 4:8



JUNE 14, 2020

LESSON 2

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD IS LOVE (1 JOHN 4:8)

We use the word “love” to describe a wide range of ideas. For example, you can say to your spouse, “I love you” or “I love chocolate ice cream.” Hopefully, these qualities of love differ significantly!

### God’s Love for Humanity

Why did God create the universe? Because of his love for humanity. When God created Adam and Eve, his primary motivation was love. He gave them a magnificent world that was “very good” (Gen 1:31), perfect in every way. He placed them in a beautiful garden, the Garden of Eden, and provided them with marvelous fruits to eat.

The creation account in Genesis 1 starkly contrasts with the ancient myths swirling around as Mesopotamian creation stories. These taught that humans were created in order to serve as slaves to the gods.<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1 instead presents humanity as the culmination of God’s glorious creation, rather than an afterthought—or worse.

What God our Father wanted more than anything was a precious relationship with humanity. Unfortunately, sin got in the way. But right after Adam and Eve sinned, God revealed his plan to remedy the malady: Jesus our Lord (see Gen 3:15). God sent his beloved Son to die for the sins of humanity (John 3:16).

### “God Is Love”

Our Father in heaven doesn’t simply love us. He is love. According to 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” This means that love is an integral part of his character. Everything he does is motivated by love. This includes his act of creating us and providing a sacrifice for our sins. We didn’t deserve Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. He was sinlessly perfect, but he died for all humanity and thus restored our relationship with God.

In order to maintain our relationship with him, we must be holy and sinlessly perfect (cf. Heb 12:14). And sin, because we let it back into our lives, prevents us from doing just that! Thankfully, we can always access the blood of Jesus, and, through our repentance and faithful obedience, we can “abide in his love” (John 15:9–10).

<sup>1</sup> E. C. Lucas, “Cosmology,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 136.

### The Love of God

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were ev’ry stalk on earth a quill,  
And ev’ry man a scribe by trade;

To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Tho’ stretched from sky to sky.

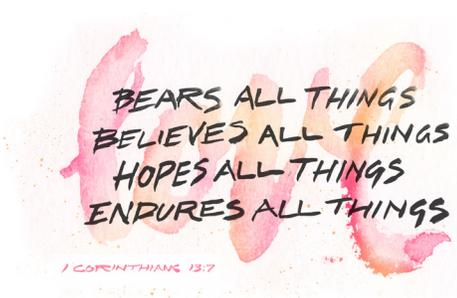
—F. M. Lehman

### Love the World, Or Not?

“For **God so loved the world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

**Do not love the world** or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

How do you reconcile these two passages, which seem contradictory?



### “Love One Another”

God created us in his image (Gen 1:26), which means we were made to love. This quality must be an integral part of who we are. This helps explain why parents have unconditional love for their children. When we act this way toward our offspring, we are simply imitating our Heavenly Father who loves us so much that he allowed Jesus to die for us. Here are some ways we can imitate God’s love.

#### Love Means God Comes First

The greatest commandment says we must love God more than anything else (Deut 6:4–5; cf. Matt 22:36–37). Jesus once asked Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” (John 21:15). He was asked this question because he had recently denied Jesus. By confessing his love, Peter was able to restore his relationship with his friend, Jesus.

#### Love Means We Are Forgiving

We don’t always get along with people. But we should still love them. In fact, it’s commanded! Jesus said, “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44). He went on to explain that, by doing this, we are simply imitating our Father in heaven. As children of God, we must love those whom we deem unlovable. After all, that’s what God did for us (Eph 2:4–5).

#### Love Means Church Families Care For Each Other

The great chapter on love—1 Corinthians 13—is often read at wedding ceremonies. And while this is certainly appropriate, we need to remember the original context: the church family. Chapter 13 is nestled between two chapters discussing the regulation of spiritual gifts. People were filled with pride over their ability to speak in tongues, while others couldn’t. This church family was dysfunctional!

As he began his poetic description of love, Paul said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Afterwards, he begins to describe love in the beautiful way he does (read 1 Cor 13:4–8a). Remember also Paul’s statement about our concern for others:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith* (Gal 6:10, emphasis added).

#### Love Must Reign Supreme in the Home

Husbands and wives are commanded to love one another (Eph 5:25; Titus 2:4). Sometimes, though, we use our family as punching bags, letting off steam when we can’t vent our frustrations on those we are really angry with (like a boss or coworker). But these selfish acts take their toll on a relationship. As with everything else, our children learn about love at home from Mom and Dad. “Where love is in the home, there’s happiness.”

JUNE 21, 2020

LESSON 3

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD IS ANGRY

(JAMES 1:20; HEBREWS 3:10)

When was the last time you got angry? I mean, *really* angry. Was it when one of your kids talked back? Or when your restaurant to-go order was all wrong? Or when someone pulled out in front of you along SPID, making you have to swerve out of the way?

### Israel Made God Angry

Do you know what makes God angry? Sin. He doesn't grow impatient with someone because they're slow at performing a task or they made a simple mistake (as we humans are prone to do). Our loving Heavenly Father grows angry over unrepentant hearts that openly rebel against him and disregard righteousness. His covenant people did this repeatedly throughout their history.

### A Failed Test (Ex 17:1-7)

No sooner had Israel been delivered by God from Egyptian slavery, that they made God angry. They doubted his love and protection. As they traveled from Egypt to Mt. Sinai through the wilderness, the people grew hungry and thirsty. What God wanted was for them to trust him. After all, he had just defeated the world's superpower for them by unleashing the Ten Plagues. Instead, though, the Israelites complained about their situation and indicted God as being uncaring and cruel (Ex 16:2-3; 17:2-3). God, of course, miraculously provided food (manna) and water to them, but he was terribly disappointed with their ingratitude and unbelief in his love for them.

This event was commemorated by naming the location Massah (and Meribah, which mean, "testing" and "quarreling" (Ex 17:7; see also Num 20:1-13). It is cited in Psalm 95:7-11, which, in turn, is quoted in Heb 3:7-11. This became the first of several rebellions that culminated in God letting this first generation of Israelites die in the wilderness (Num 14:29).

### The Golden Calf (Ex 32-34)

Later, after entering into a covenant with God, the nation of Israel once again openly rebelled against him. They built a golden calf and worshiped it. God became so angry with the nation that he threatened to destroy it and start over with Moses (Ex 32:10). Moses played defense attorney and begged God to relent from destroying them.

### Psalm 95:8-9

Do not harden your hearts,  
as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in  
the wilderness,  
when your fathers put me to  
the test  
and put me to the proof,  
though they had seen  
my work.

### **Refusal to Enter Canaan (Num 14)**

At last, Israel was ready to enter Canaan. But they didn't; and that's because they listened to the negative report of the 10 spies who said, "We can't take the land." God's response was severe:

"None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it" (Num 14:22-23).

Throughout the Bible, God's wrath is threatened against those who sin against him (Rom 1:18-23; 2:5-8; 1 Thess 1:10). God, who is perfectly sinless, holy, and perfect, cannot tolerate unrepentant sin.

### **"The Anger of Man"**

While it's not a sin to be angry (cf. Eph 4:29), we do need to be careful, because "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." What that means is we're not likely to be angry for the right reasons or do what's appropriate and right because we're angry.

Again, what makes you angry? Is it the mere inconveniences of life that compel you to fly off the handle? Or are your fits of anger directed at sinful behavior, either exemplified in yourself or others?

### **Jesus Got Angry, Too**

Like God, Jesus our Lord also became angry with rebellious hearts. He directed his anger primarily at people who knew better and yet had sinful attitudes toward him and others who were trying to please God. The religious leaders, for example, should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah and immediately accepted him. Instead, they plotted and planned to kill him.

Do you remember when Jesus threw out the moneychangers in the temple? He fashioned a whip from cords and drove them out. Why was he so animated and angry?

Jesus' audacious mission was to fix a broken world, to bring humanity and all of creation back into a right relationship to God. He did not have time or patience with the doctors and lawyers of religious law, who elevated themselves about others and rejected his announcement of the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The same God who grew angry at Israel is also our loving Father who is "slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). God is patient with sinners, wanting them to repent. But one day, his patience will run out (2 Pet 3:9-10).

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<sup>2</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Jesus Behaving Badly* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 53.

JUNE 28, 2020

LESSON 4

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD IS COMPASSIONATE AND MERCIFUL (EXODUS 34:6)

### The Compassion of God

It is one of the most oft-repeated verses in all of Scripture. Words from the beautiful verse, Exodus 34:6, make their way into several other passages in the Bible.

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

Other verses that use this same language include the following:

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love  
and faithfulness (Psalm 86:15).

Return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:13; see also Neh 9:17, 31).

### Merciful and Gracious

The first term used to describe God in Ex 34:6 is “merciful” (ESV, (N)KJV, NRSV). Sometimes translated as “compassionate” (NASB, NIV, NLT, CSB), it is derived from the noun for “womb.”<sup>3</sup> As you can imagine, this is a tender term to describe God’s character.

The second term, “gracious,” is used only 13× in the Old Testament as an adjective. Of those occurrences, it is paired almost always with the first term, “merciful.”<sup>4</sup> The reason why is because most of these occurrences are quoting or alluding to Ex 34:6. Appeals to God to be merciful (“Be gracious to me, God,” Ps 51:1) also allude to this beautiful verse.

<sup>3</sup> Willem VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1093.

<sup>4</sup> Twelve of the thirteen occurrences of “gracious” are paired with “merciful” (Ex 34:6; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17, 31; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). The only that isn’t is found in Ex 22:7.

### **Psalm 57:3**

He will send from heaven and  
save me;  
he will put to shame him who  
tramples on me.  
God will send out his  
**steadfast love** and  
his **faithfulness!**

### **Slow to Anger**

The expression, “slow to anger,” translates a Hebrew expression that literally means, “long of nose.” (The opposite—someone who is hot-tempered—is “hot of nose.”)<sup>5</sup> But God, whose anger is roused against sin (see **Lesson 3**), is “long of nose” toward those who seek his forgiveness.

### **Abounding In... Faithfulness<sup>6</sup>**

Throughout many of the psalms, faithfulness is linked with the “steadfast love” expressed in this verse (the Hebrew word is *hesed*, which we will cover in **Lesson 12**). These two concepts go hand-in-hand: When we need forgiveness, we can count on God, who always “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9).

### **The Compassion of Jesus**

Mercy and compassion are part of Jesus’ character, of course. Love for us motivated him to come to the earth and die for humanity. Every time Jesus is said to show compassion for someone, he does something for them. He never held the emotion in his heart and then refrained from helping.

- When he healed a leper, he first felt compassion for him (Mark 1:41).
- When he exorcised the demons from Legion, he told him to tell his friends “how...the Lord...has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19).
- Jesus, having compassion on the crowds, fed them (Mark 6:34).

As we imitate Jesus, we will do something to help those in need.

### **Compassion Doesn’t Mean Blanket Amnesty**

As much as we’ve focused on Ex 34:6, we should not ignore the next verse that reminds us of God’s justice:

“keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

While God and Jesus are quick to forgive, they cannot “clear the guilty,” i.e., those who blatantly sin and refuse to repent. We, like the Prodigal Son, can only return home after acknowledging, “I have sinned against heaven” (Luke 15:18, 21). But when we do, we will find our Father looking for us, feeling compassionate, running to meet us, so that he can embrace us (Luke 15:20).

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<sup>5</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2014), 652.

<sup>6</sup> The elided term, “steadfast love,” will be studied in **Lesson 12**.

JULY 5, 2020

LESSON 5

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD DOES GOOD (ACTS 10:38)

In his sermon to Cornelius and his household, Peter made this statement about Jesus: “He went about *doing good*” (Acts 10:38). Whatever Jesus did for people, it benefited them, including acts of healing or teaching. As we strive to imitate him, we too must do good to others.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us **do good** to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal 6:10).

Do not neglect to **do good** and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb 13:16).

But what exactly does it mean to “do good”?

### How to “Do Good” (Matt 19:16–21)

Do you remember Jesus’ initial response to the rich young ruler?

“No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19).

“There is only one who is good” (Matt 19:16).

Of course, Jesus wasn’t suggesting that he himself *wasn’t* good. He was, after all, sinlessly perfect (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). When Jesus says that God alone is good, he means that only God is perfect in every way, especially in regard to his blessings (see Matt 19:21). In this passage, the rich young ruler failed to live up to the goodness of God when he refused to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Matt 19:22). As expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, our acts of mercy must exceed expectations (Matt 5:20, 48), not merely meet the minimum requirement.

God “does good” to everyone. He demonstrates his goodness in so many ways—and not just to those who “deserve” it.

- In creation, God made everything perfect (Gen 1:4, 31; 1 Tim 4:4).
- His gifts are perfect and generous (James 1:17).
- He “sends rains on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45), demonstrating his perfection (Matt 5:48).
- He wants us to be happy, despite our own sinfulness (Jer 29:10).
- We can confidently rely upon God’s goodness (Ps 23:6; Phil 1:6).

### 1 Timothy 4:4–5

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

### **Ephesians 2:10**

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

When the rich young ruler asked about good deeds, Jesus listed the last six of the Ten Commandments (Matt 19:16, 18–19). The young man responded by saying, “All these I have kept.” *But had he really?* Jesus knew he really hadn’t; and that’s why this rich young man was challenged to part ways with his treasure and do some real good with it. Unfortunately, the young man refused (Matt 19:21–22). Just as Jesus knew this young man’s heart (cf. Mark 10:21), he knows our hearts, too.

Because we have clothed ourselves with Jesus in baptism, we have committed ourselves to a life of good works. You see, Christians have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10). When we serve others, we are simply fulfilling God’s intentions for our lives.

### **Membership Has Its Benefits**

While it is certainly true that God provides wonderful gifts and blessings to all people, we, his covenant people, are the recipients of special blessings. God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). These spiritual blessings certainly include forgiveness, the privilege of prayer, the peace of God in our hearts, and many others.

We share in these blessings because we have eradicated sin from our hearts. When we live for Christ, we “[taste] that the Lord is good” (1 Pet 2:1–3; Ps 34:8). Only after removing the “bad taste” of sin can we appreciate the sweetness of God’s spiritual blessings.

### **The Right Motivation**

Sometimes people help others because they hope their charity will be reciprocated. Imagine if we sought out people who can’t possibly pay us back for our kindness (Luke 14:12–14). That’s exactly what God did for us when he forgave us of our debt of sin. He didn’t have to save us. But he did it out a deep love for his creation (Rom 5:8).

Have you ever seen someone who need financial help, and you gave it to them anonymously? Maybe you’ve even been the recipient of such a gift. Jesus said that, when we are doing our good deeds, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Matt 6:3–4a). The reason why is because “Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” (Matt 6:4).

And so, the same blessing that is given in secret without selfish motives can be given by someone else who is only motivated by a desire for the accolades of others. In other words, it’s not so much the gift that’s important, but the attitude of heart with which it is given.

What are some “random acts of kindness” you could do this week? To whom will you give your selfless gifts? Make a list, pray over it, and plan it out. God will bless you for your kindness in his time and in his way.

JULY 12, 2020

LESSON 6

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## GOD IS A REDEEMER

We have been looking at the characteristics of God throughout this study that we have been going through. As we consider all of those characteristics and especially how they relate to us it is hard to imagine that there is one more important to us as this one.

Think for a minute what it really means to be redeemed. This means to be saved. One of the definitions that I found was to “*gain or regain possession of something in exchange for payment*”. If we consider what this really means to us as a Christian it is life changing. We were lost, more or less on a trash heap, yet God thought that we were important enough to “buy us back”. What was the payment for him to regain us? The death of Jesus on a cruel cross.

God has always been a redeemer. I want to spend the bulk of our time this afternoon in a discussion of Moses and the people that Joshua would ultimately lead into the Promised Land. Let’s head over to Deut 30 and take a look at a few things that we can see there:

Backing up just a bit, Moses warns the people near the end of Chapter 29 that (Deut 29:22-28)

<sup>22</sup> “Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the Lord has afflicted it, will say, <sup>23</sup> ‘All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.’ <sup>24</sup> All the nations will say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?’ <sup>25</sup> Then men will say, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. <sup>26</sup> They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. <sup>27</sup> Therefore, the anger of the Lord burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; <sup>28</sup> and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.’

This is the frame that we context the next chapter with. Let’s take a look at the first 6 verses of Chapter 30:

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, <sup>2</sup> and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, <sup>3</sup> then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup> If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. <sup>5</sup> The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

*<sup>6</sup>“Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live*

If we consider what we know about this people we could all probably agree that the things they had done/will do are things that may not deserve a redeemer. Moses knew this but he also knew that God would redeem them. We see this here starting in verse 2. Moses tells the people that if they obey the Lord that he will restore them from captivity, that he will have compassion on them, that he will gather them from where they have been scattered, that he will bring them back to the land, that he will prosper and multiply them, and that their descendants will love the Lord so that they might live.

We see very similar language to this in Jeremiah 29 where God tells the people there that he has a plan for them for a future and a hope. Mind you that these are all people that left God, worshiped idols, and were what we would consider “terrible sinners”.

So then here is a question. **We may not be worshipping idols but what kinds of things separate us from God? Are we unlike the people that Moses was addressing here?**

In the next section (verses 8-10) we see this from Moses:

*<sup>8</sup>And you shall again obey the Lord, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. <sup>9</sup>Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; <sup>10</sup>if you obey the Lord your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.*

Moses says that if they obey the Lord and observe all his commandments that he will prosper them but that they have to turn to the Lord with all their “heart and soul”. We have spent a lot of time over the years talking about the way that God loves us and we have also talked about the shortcomings that we sometimes have. Moses tells these people to turn to the Lord with all their heart and soul.

I think that this is a vital concept for us to consider today. **How do we turn to God with all our heart and soul? Does it require any sacrifice on our part?**

This speaks to a commitment. Moses is more or less telling these people that they need to decide to commit to God and that if they do that he will redeem them. God has blessed us with the sacrifice of his son (redemption) but we have to be committed to him. This is not a part time kind of thing.

The thing about making a commitment is this: It requires a conscious choice on your part. Think about exercise or a diet. You don’t just accidentally eat the right things and run a 5K. It takes work. It takes commitment on your part. When you actually make that commitment you gain from it. In a diet you may lose those 5 pounds that you want. In running you may run that 5K without a problem.

Moses relays that thought to the people here in verses 11-16:

<sup>11</sup> “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ <sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ <sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it

He tells the people that the commandments that they are to follow is

- a. Not difficult
- b. Not out of reach

What is he commanding them to do? To Love the Lord and to walk in his ways. He says that it is not out of reach like it was in heaven and we could not get to it. He says that it is not beyond the seas. He tells them that it is near.

**When you consider the commands of God today are they near?** They should be. We should have God’s word/commands on our hearts from the amount of time that we spend in his word. This very topic was discussed in 1 John 5:1-4:

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

John says that we know we are children of God (redeemed) if we keep his commandments but he also says the same thing that Moses says to the people. He says that the commands are not burdensome and that what we need to overcome the world is our faith?

**Faith in what?** Faith that when we turn to God and keep his commands that he will redeem us. If we have that kind of faith we can overcome the trials of the world.

You may say that having that kind of faith is a very hard thing. You may believe that faith to overcome the world is out of reach. Moses told his people that keeping the commands of God was not out of reach. Having faith that we can overcome the world is not out of reach for you and me either.

Staying in 1 John but backing up to chapter 2 we see this:

*2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

*<sup>3</sup> By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: <sup>6</sup> the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

This is a section that we looked at in our class just last week. Why can we believe that we can overcome the world?

- a. **Jesus is our advocate**- He has been where we are. He know what we go through here
- b. **Jesus is the sacrifice (payment) for our sin**- This is why we can be redeemed from the sins that we have
- c. **What do we have to do**- Keep his commandments (just like Moses told his people)

Jesus is the reason that we can overcome. Jesus is the reason that we are redeemed.

Moses goes on to tell the people in verse 19 of Deut 30 to "Choose Life". This is just like the conversation that Joshua would have with the people in Joshua 24. We all know the passage where he tells the people to choose whom they will serve. The people that Moses had warned would fall into worshipping the gods of those in the land that God had given them and Joshua issues a challenge a new. He challenges them to serve the Lord.

We know the rest of that story. They serve God during the days of Joshua and the elders that survived them but in Judges 2 we see that "There arose a generation that did not know the Lord".

So then the question is **how do we choose**? Do we choose with our words? Our actions? Both? We have to make that decision to be committed to God and when we choose that and commit to that (and everything that comes with it) he will redeem us.

God is a redeemer. I will leave you with this evidence:

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

*<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

JULY 19, 2020

LESSON 7

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE PEACE OF GOD (PHILIPPIANS 4:7)

“Peace” is typically considered to be the opposite of war or conflict. But it’s really more than that. The Hebrew term *shālôm* (pronounced shaw-LOAM) speaks to a person’s “health, prosperity, and peace with God, i.e., salvation.”<sup>7</sup> The OT sacrifices include the “peace offering” (Lev 7:11–36). These might accompany sacrifices for sin (e.g., 1 Sam 13:9; 1 Kgs 9:25), but the peace offering’s purpose was to acknowledge and celebrate the sacrificer’s relationship with God (**Figure 1**). In fact, often the term “peace offering” is translated as “fellowship offering” instead. We are celebrating our fellowship with God.

### Levitical Peace Offerings (Lev 7:11–36)<sup>8</sup>

Type	Purpose
1. Praise	To give thanks for specific acts that the Lord had done on the offerer’s behalf
2. Vow	To fulfill a vow in response to answered prayer
3. Freewill	Voluntary offering to the Lord

Figure 1.

### The Peace of God (Phil 4:7)

The opening salutations of most NT letters include a greeting of grace and peace. And many of them contain words of peace in the closing salutations as well. “Peace” was the typical Jewish greeting, doing double duty for both greetings and farewells.

Take the letter to the Philippians, for example. It starts with Paul’s typical greeting of “grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:2). Near the end of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Paul brings up the peace of God by making two claims about it (Phil 4:7). God’s peace 1) transcends human understanding and 2) “will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

<sup>7</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale OT Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 133.

### God's Peace Transcends Human Understanding

During turbulent times, we are prone to worry. Even though we are told not to in Phil 4:6, we still do anyway. But if we take *everything* to God in prayer, then—and only then—will we experience God's peace.

Imagine being like God and never getting rattled or nervous. That is incomprehensible and therefore “surpasses all understanding.” But verse 7 is contingent upon verse 6: You can only experience God's peace by “letting go and letting God.”

### God's Peace Guards Our Hearts and Minds in Christ

The peace of God will, like a garrison of soldiers, patrol and guard your heart against attack from the cares and concerns of the world. As Christians, we need to focus on “things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8, NLT). When we give our hearts and minds over to our Creator, we see the world from his perspective; and this allows us to find joy in everything, including trials and tribulations (cf. Phil 4:6; Isa 26:3; John 14:27; James 1:2-3). This experience of love, joy, and peace is only possible because of our forgiveness of sins and our restored relationship with God (Rom 5:1).

### The God of Peace (Phil 4:9)

In Phil 4:9, Paul tells us that if we put our Christian faith into practice, “the God of peace will be with you.” And so, within three verses, we have heard about “the peace of God” and “the God of peace.” This latter expression isn't used very often, but it occurs a handful of times near the end of Paul's letters.<sup>9</sup> We have God on our side to help us and support us every moment of every day (cf. Heb 4:14-16).

Although we live in a chaotic world, God wanted it to be perfect. Sin has forever marred it. The remedy is justification by faith through Jesus. And this doesn't simply remove enmity between us and God. It gives us “the peace of God” from “the God of peace.”

The beautiful verse, Jeremiah 29:11, was spoken to God's rebellious covenant people in order to comfort them during their captivity.

I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

The word translated “welfare” is the word for “peace.” And it was used three times in Jer 29:7, where God instructed Judah to pray for the “peace” (often translated as “welfare” or “peace and prosperity”) of whatever pagan city they found themselves in. (That's kind of like us today!) In vv. 12-13, he says we should always reach out to him in prayer. While we may not always like the circumstances we find ourselves in, we will be able to experience “the peace of God” that surpasses all comprehension—because we serve “the God of peace.”

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<sup>9</sup> Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; see also 2 Thess 3:16, which has “the Lord of peace”; Heb 13:20).

### Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ..

JULY 26, 2020

LESSON 8

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE UNITY OF GOD (JOHN 17:23)

One of the requirements for participating in an organized sport is wearing a uniform. Your Little Leaguer can't show up to the game without having put on his or her uniform and expect to play. That's just part of being on a sports team: everyone dresses the same.

The word "uniform" sounds a lot like the word "united," doesn't it? (They're derived from the same root.) People who are united have the same goals. They're part of the same team.

### Jesus' Prayer for Unity

Christians may not all dress the same, but we're definitely on the same team: the Lord's team. A local church assembly doesn't require that everyone dress the same (that would be really strange), but being part of a church family definitely requires us to be united. It is so important that Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, prayed for the unity of all believers, wanting us to:

"become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (John 17:23).

In fact, our Lord went on to say this love between him and his Father existed "before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

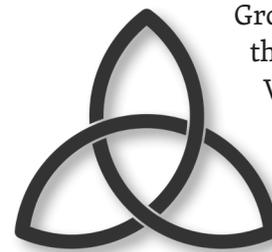
### God is One

According to Deut 6:4, God is the one and only God. And yet, the Bible also tells us that Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God. How can God be one and yet be three different persons?

This is described by the term "trinity," which is never actually used in the Bible. But the concept of the trinity most certainly is. One of the easiest places to see it is in the Great Commission, when Jesus said people were to be baptized "in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**" (Matt 28:19). Paul frequently refers to all three members of the Godhead together, as in 2 Cor 13:14.

The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ** and the love of **God** and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all.

It is difficult for us to get our arms around the concept of the trinity for at least two reasons. One, people sometimes have the idea that the



Growing up, I used the New King James Version. On the cover of my NKJV was the triquetra (pronounced try-QWEE-truh), which is

Latin for "three-cornered." It is often used as a symbol for the Trinity.

### We Are One

In John 10:30, Jesus said:

"I and the Father are one."

The Jews who heard this accused Jesus of blasphemy. They even intended to stone him to death (John 10:31). They knew that, by saying this, Jesus was claiming to be God.

### John 16:13

When **the Spirit** of truth comes, **he** will guide you into all the truth, for **he** will not speak on **his** own authority, but whatever **he** hears **he** will speak, and **he** will declare to you the things that are to come.

The Holy Spirit is a person, not an “it.”

Holy Spirit is an “it”—but this is not true! The Holy Spirit is a “he” (see John 16:13). Also, the concept of three personalities being one in their essence is—mind boggling!

We’re talking about God here, though. God is Spirit (John 4:24); he is eternal and transcendent. We as humans are not going to fully understand everything about him and his nature. Fortunately, Scripture makes it clear that all three members of the Godhead are distinct personalities and yet one in their essence.

- All three members of the Godhead were present at creation (Gen 1:1-2; John 1:1-3).
- All three were present at Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:13-17).
- All three share numerous divine attributes, including omniscience (Isa 40:13-14; John 2:24-25; 1 Cor 2:10-11).

### **God’s People Are One**

As sons and daughters of God, we are to imitate our Father. This includes the characteristic of unity. We have so much in common:

- We are heirs of the same inheritance (Rom 8:15-17).
- We are all born of God (1 John 5:1).
- We are united in our faith (Eph 4:4-6; Jude 3).
- We are sharers in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Heb 6:4).

### **United in Purpose**

Our church family must walk in lockstep with one another as we strive together for the gospel (Phil 1:27). Sometimes, churches have problems. People, after all, see things differently. This is why Paul tells us to strive to preserve unity among us (Eph 4:3).

### **United in Family**

Because God is our Father, we are all each other’s brother or sister and members of the same household (Eph 2:19). This familial relationship is by God’s design. It binds us closer together than even our physical family connections (Luke 14:26). We are all, after all, going to receive the same inheritance from our Father (1 Pet 1:4).

### **United in Sharing**

One of the most precious aspects of our unity is our care and concern for one another (Gal 6:10). We are servants of Christ, which means we are servants to one another. Paul says we should “outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10).

Of course, sometimes even physical families fight with each other. But imagine if we all had the same unity of spirit as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are so united together that they are one in their essence. This is what we as Christians must strive for.

### 1 Peter 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven **for you**.

AUGUST 2, 2020

LESSON 9

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD (DEUTERONOMY 32:4)

### Life Isn't Fair

In the early evening of July 4, 2020, a 7-year-old girl was walking along the street in her Chicago neighborhood. Suddenly, a light-colored vehicle pulled up and started shooting at a nearby house. Because this young girl happened to be in the general vicinity of the shooting, she was struck in the forehead with a bullet, and died.<sup>10</sup>

What would you do to make this right? If the person who shot her was caught, would that be justice? How would you feel if this had been your little girl? This innocent girl is dead: how can this be fixed?

How many of us like to be wronged? What is the typical response of the world when they have a wrong done to them? It is to take immediate revenge for the wrong that was done to them. As we have discussed here that is not the Godly way to handle a situation.

In this section we will discuss some of the ways that people in the Bible were wronged. We will also discuss ways that we may be wronged today. All of these will have a focus on the fact that God is a just God. That God is the one who rights the ways that we may be wronged in our lives.

It all starts from the beginning of the Bible.

### Cain and Abel (Gen 4)

In Genesis 4 we see a scene where there are two “sacrifices” that are made. Cain brings an “offering of the fruit of the ground” and Abel brings “the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.” God had regard for Abel and for his offering and he did not have regard for Cain and his offering.

Cain feels like he has been wronged in this instance. Verse 5 says that Cain “became angry and his countenance fell”. The passage describes a warning from God to Cain. He warns him that he should not be angry and that if he does not do well that “sin is crouching at the door.” He tells Cain that he must master it.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Graves, “7-Year-Old Girl Shot, Killed In South Austin Neighborhood On July 4th Evening.” Website: [chicago.cbslocal.com/2020/07/04/young-girl-shot-in-south-austin-neighborhood/](http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2020/07/04/young-girl-shot-in-south-austin-neighborhood/). Accessed July 22, 2020.

### Genesis 4:7

“If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door**; and its desire is for you, but **you must master it.**”

What then is the response of Cain? Cain and Abel are in the field and Cain kills his brother. At this point in the chapter we don't see what the reaction was of Adam and Eve but I am sure that as a parent that we could all imagine what our reaction might be. We do see the Justice of God shining through in this instance though.

These are the ways that God showed Justice for Abel and what happened to him:

1. Cain was cursed from the ground: This was his livelihood. This was how he made his way in the world. In this instance and because of the sin that Cain committed he was cursed.
2. Cain was to be a vagrant and wanderer on the earth: Cain would not be in one place. Cain essentially would not have a home that he could go to.
3. Cain would be hidden from the face of God: Cain went out from the presence of God (verse 16). Consider what he had done and the fact that it meant separation from God. This is the effect of sin for all who commit it. The saving grace for us is the blood of Jesus

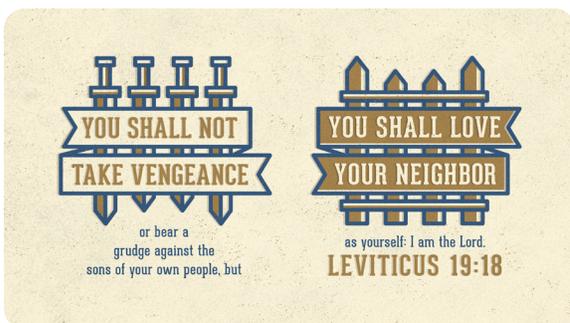
God makes clear that if anyone killed Cain, that he would take vengeance on them "sevenfold." He appointed a sign for Cain so that no one that found him would kill him.

In this section we see a couple of things. Cain feels as if he has been wronged and he takes it out on his brother by killing him. Abel is actually wronged and God meets out justice on his killer. Abel could not have looked for revenge himself but his family could have. That was not what happened. Note the fact that God says that those that would avenge Abel by killing Cain would have the vengeance of God "sevenfold."

Now as we consider this let's talk about ways that we may be "wronged" in this world and our reactions:

1. People may attack us: Cain attacked Abel. When we think about today there are many ways that people may attack us. They may attack us physically, they may berate us verbally, they may spread false stories about us, or they may just try to separate us from the people that we care the most about. What are we to do in situations like these? This sounds a lot simpler than it really is but what we have to do is continue to rely and trust in God.

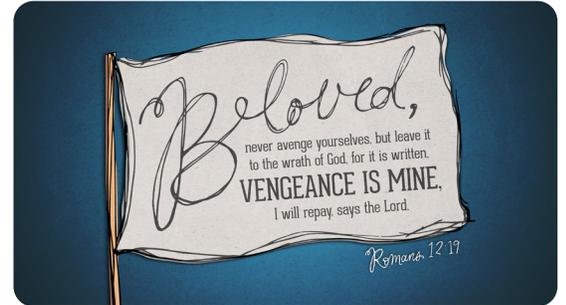
Peter had a sword in John 18:1-11. When Jesus was being arrested (to eventually be attacked and killed physically) Peter drew his sword and cut the ear off one of the people that were there. The sword did not magically appear giving us some insight into protection (another study/another time). Jesus instructed him to put the sword back in the sheath. This was not a time for Peter to avenge Jesus. This was not



a time for Peter to be offensive and take out those that would harm Jesus.

The thing is many of us “carry a sword.” It is not for us to avenge when things go wrong or we feel that we have been wronged. As we have seen in Romans 12:19 and Proverbs 25 vengeance belongs to God.

2. What should we do then? In Romans 12 and Proverbs 25 we see that we should do these things:
  - a. Never pay back evil with evil Be at peace with all men so much as it depends on you.
  - b. Be at peace with all men so much as it depends on you.
  - c. Never take you own revenge.
  - d. Treat your enemies well.
  - e. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.



I want to focus a few minutes on the last one that we see in that section. We see that we should not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good. This takes a lot of work on our part because there is a natural reaction that we may have to want revenge.

How then do we practically overcome evil with good? For that answer we go back to the beginning of Romans 12. In verse 2 the Romans are told not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed. This is a whole different way of thinking when you compare what our friends in the world may think.

So what does this accomplish then? It gives the Glory to God. I am reminded of Daniel Chapter 2 and the King’s forgotten dream. The King wanted someone to first tell him the dream and then interpret it. Of course his magicians told him that this was impossible. After praying with his friends Daniel was able to do what this king asked. Daniel gave all the credit and glory to God for this and as a result the King praised the God of Daniel.

When we react to things differently than the world, when we leave room for the Justice of God instead of our own revenge we look completely different than the world. This may be an opening for you to give Glory to God. This may be your chance to be an example of overcoming evil with good. This kind of faith may even lead your enemies to God. And even if it doesn’t, then you have been the Christian that you should have been.

3. What is the final answer to this question: In the book of Ecclesiastes we see wisdom. The wisdom of King Solomon. He covers several things throughout that book including the futility of life itself. He tells his readers in Chapter 9:10 that “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” I submit

that we should work to overcome evil with all our might and leave vengeance for the ways that we may be wronged to God.

In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 we see the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments... for God will bring every act to judgment, whether good or evil.

Cain felt like he had been wronged and took matters into his own hands. As a result he was separated from God. The same fate awaits us if we do the same. There will never be justice in the world, but know for certain that God will bring every act to judgment.

Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 10:28 not to fear those that can kill the body, but the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. That's enough motivation for me. What about you?

AUGUST 9, 2020

LESSON 10

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE HUMOR OF GOD (MATTHEW 7:3-5)

The Gospels help us see Jesus as a real person. He had friends whom he loved and enjoyed spending time with. While certainly he was focused on his preaching and ultimately dying on the cross, he was always a person with his own personality, which included humor.

For example, in the Sermon the Mount, Jesus' taught on judging others. He illustrated it by talking about someone having a big, humor-gous log in their eye while trying to remove a tiny speck in someone else's eye (Matt 7:3-5). Let me tell you—that's funny! By using this humorous illustration, Jesus' teaching on judging others instantly becomes memorable and easily understandable.

Why does the Bible use humor? Because every person innately understands humor (although not everyone has a *good* sense of humor). And just as with our other values and feelings, humor is a God-given characteristic that helps us understand God and our world.

### What Goes Around, Comes Around (Gen 25-29)

In the Jacob story, there's a play on the concept of older/younger siblings. When Jacob stole his older brother's birthright through deception (Gen 25:29-34; 27:1-29; cf. Heb 12:16b), he had no idea how this would come back to haunt him. Later in the story, Jacob fell madly in love with Rachel, the beautiful younger sister of the unattractive older sister, Leah (Gen 29:18, 20). But in that culture (just like with birthrights), the older sibling was expected to get married first (cf. Gen 29:26). On his wedding night, Jacob thought he had married the younger sister, Rachel, who had worn a veil during the wedding and when they went into their tent for the evening. But when he awoke the next morning, he saw he had married Leah.

### A Talking Donkey (Num 22:22-35)

Are you smarter than a donkey? Balaam wasn't! He mistreated his beast of burden when she didn't follow his directions. What he didn't know was, the donkey could see an angel of the Lord who was ready to kill Balaam. After her third beating, the donkey spoke: "What have I done to you?" (v. 28). Amazingly, Balaam answered her. "Because you have made me a fool!" No, Balaam, you made *yourself* into one.



### Valiant Warrior—Hiding (Judg 6:11–27)

While hiding from the oppressive Midianites, Gideon was called a “valiant warrior” by the angel of the LORD (vv. 11–12). Gideon’s fear plays a prominent role in his story, as he requires God to give him numerous signs of confirmation. In the end, though, it is the Midianite army of 135,000 soldiers who were terrified of a measly 300 soldiers—who weren’t armed with swords, but lanterns and trumpets!

### “If You Really Loved Me . . .” (Judg 13–16)

Judges contains numerous examples of humor and irony. Bigger than life, the judge Samson takes the cake. One time he used the jawbone of a donkey to kill a thousand Philistines (Judg 15:15–17). Samson teased Delilah mercilessly numerous times, as she tried to cajole the source of his strength from him. Eventually, the joke was on him, when he was so vexed by her constant nagging that he told his secret (Judg 16:15), was mistreated, and made a slave. But Samson got the last laugh: in his death, he killed more Philistines than he had in his life. He brought down the house—literally (Judg 16:30).



### Hanged on His Own Gallows

The book of Esther contains several examples of dramatic irony, all of which are aimed at the story’s villain, Haman. His nemesis was the Jew, Mordecai. When the king wanted to honor Mordecai, he asked Haman what he thought should be done for “the man whom the king delights to honor?” (Esther 6:6). Haman thought the king was talking about him, and so he thought up a long list of accolades to shower on “the honored man.” Was he ever surprised (Esther 6:10–11) when he ended having to parade Mordecai around the city! The last example of dramatic irony is when Haman died on his own gallows, which had been built for Mordecai (Esther 5:14–15; 7:8–10).

### “Stop, Rhoda! We’re Praying for Peter!” (Acts 12)

It was no laughing matter when James the apostle was killed by Herod Agrippa II, who then planned to do the same to Peter. But then, the narrative takes on a comical turn. An angel of the Lord came at night to rescue Peter, but had to walk the sleepy apostle step by step (vv. 7–9). “Wake up! Get dressed. Put on your sandals.” When he walks to the house where other Christians were praying for his release, Peter knocked on the gate. A servant girl knew it was Peter, but in her excitement, didn’t open the gate. She ran back to the praying Christians and told them. But they didn’t believe her!

### From Murderer to Deity (Acts 28:3–6)

While gathering up sticks for a fire, Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper. At first, the superstitious islanders thought he had to be a murderer and was being punished by the Greek goddess, Justice. But when they saw no harm came to Paul, “they changed their minds and said that he was a god.”

AUGUST 16, 2020

LESSON 11

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE WISDOM OF GOD (COLOSSIANS 2:3)

King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 3:12; 4:29). But do you remember when Jesus said that “something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42; Luke 11:31)? He was talking about his own wisdom being greater than Solomon’s.

To take it a step further, Paul asserts that Jesus is the wisdom of God. He told the Colossian disciples that he wanted them to have a full understanding of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). In an earlier letter, Paul had described Jesus as the embodiment of “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24, 30). Jesus doesn’t just have wisdom: he is wisdom!

Proverbs 8 personifies Wisdom as a capable craftswoman who was with God “before the beginning of the earth” and helped create everything (Prov 8:22-31). But this description is just as applicable to Jesus, who is also described as being the creator of the world (John 1:2-3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; cf. Ps 33:6). Jesus, who is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14), is also the Wisdom of God who created everything and sustains it by his power.

### The Source of Wisdom

Wisdom comes from God. That’s why James tells us to pray to God for wisdom (James 1:5). Our search for wisdom begins with God.

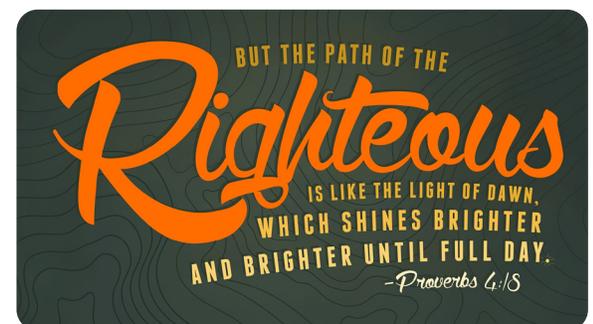
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov 1:7).

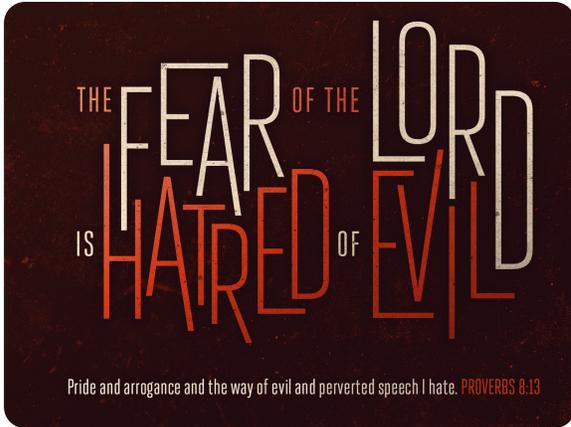
This verse serves as the main thesis of the book of Proverbs (see also Prov 9:10; 15:33; Ps 111:10). Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (close synonyms in the book of Proverbs) will help us to live happily and godly, according to Solomon (Prov 3:5-8). We rely completely on God for everything, trusting him “with all your heart.”

The world offers wisdom, too. But it is only “wise” insofar as it mirrors the wisdom of God. Think about it: God is the one who created everything. And so, it should stand to reason that he knows best how the world works. Jesus, as the embodiment of wisdom, lived out a sinless life. He is the ultimate example of what it means to live in accordance with Proverbs.

### “Knowledge” and “Wisdom”

What is the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom”?





## How to Use Wisdom

How are we supposed to know how to use wisdom to navigate through our daily lives? A study of the entire book of Proverbs would definitely be a step in the right direction. But consider also that the principles of righteous living found throughout the Bible will help us. Paul told the Ephesians that we should be as “children of light... try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph 5:10). We work and play in the world. Using the principles of God’s Word to live godly will help us do what is pleasing to the Lord—and benefit us, too.

## Don’t Be Gullible

So how do we know that the voices we’re listening to are reflecting God’s wisdom? We are going to have to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). In today’s “woke” culture, there are many voices condemning godly behavior (such as the promotion of the nuclear family structure and its accompanying family values, which include hard work and honesty) and promoting sinful behavior and attitudes (abortion, sexual immorality, foul language, even justifying violence and rioting nowadays). While it is true that Jesus said, “Judge not” (Matt 7:1), he also said that we should “not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). This includes the teachings people promote which are contrary to the Bible.

## Let the Gospel Transform You

Paul describes the darkness of a godless society in the first chapter of Romans (Rom 1:18–32). As the practical section of his letter begins in chapter 12, he says that we should not “be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you

may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). A mature Christian will let the gospel change him or her from the inside out. Otherwise the world will crush you and mold you into its image, rather than God’s.

James contrasts God’s wisdom “from above” with demonic wisdom (James 3:13–18). Wisdom from above will change our hearts and thus transform our behavior. We will act like Jesus, who epitomized the happy life. Just like Psalm 1 admonishes us, we should meditate on God’s Word and let it guide our paths (Ps 1:1–3).

## The Words of the Wise

Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise,  
and apply your heart to my knowledge,  
for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,  
if all of them are ready on your lips.  
That your trust may be in the LORD,  
I have made them known to you today, even to you.

—Prov 22:17–19

## The Greatness of God’s Wisdom

Paul praised “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” by describing it as “unsearchable” and “inscrutable” (Rom 11:33). This comes at the end of his defense of the gospel as God’s plan of salvation (Rom 1–11). In Christ, who is the wisdom of God, we can find forgiveness of sins and our true purpose for living.

AUGUST 23, 2020

LESSON 12

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE CREATIVENESS OF GOD (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17)

Have you ever gone to the grocery store, shopping for a loaf of bread, only to be bombarded with all the varieties? It's not as simple as getting either white bread or wheat bread. And that's because there's split top honey wheat bread, Essential Grains 100% whole wheat bread, slide protein bread (whatever that is), extra-thin sliced white bread, French toast bread, sourdough bread, pumpernickel bread.

And then, it's time to move on to the ketchup aisle...

### Physical Creation

Our world brims with variety. We can see it everywhere we look. The sheer mind-boggling number of colors, animals, fruits, vegetables—and everything else—amazes and delights us. And it's all a reflection of the creativeness of our creator, God.

### Colors

Our world is not simply black and white. But if it were, we would still be able to see a tremendous amount of variety, because the human eye can distinguish between more than 500 shades of gray. We can see as many as 10 million colors in the world. But that doesn't mean those are all in existence: there are billions of shades and mixtures of the primary colors, red, yellow, and blue.

### Animals

Consider the animal kingdom. There are over 10,000 species of birds, an estimated 34,000 species of fish, and over 900,000 different kinds of insects. There are nearly 40 species of cats, but only one species of dogs. However, there are over 360 recognized breeds of dogs that have been developed by humans over the centuries.

### Fruits and Vegetables

Let's go back to the grocery store. Want some fruit? Not only do blueberries, strawberries, cantaloupe and apples look quite different, but they taste nothing alike. And if you're looking for a vegetable to go with your meal, you can choose between broccoli and cauliflower, potato or sweet potato, collared greens or spinach, eggplant, beets—and over 1,000 other varieties of veggies that all look and taste so uniquely different from each other.



In the mid-17th century, Isaac Newton determined that there are seven colors in the rainbow. Red, yellow, and blue are primary colors, which means they cannot be produced from other colors, but can be mixed to produce the rainbow's other colors, including orange, green, or shades of purple (indigo and violet).

### Eternity in Our Hearts

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, **he has put eternity into man's heart**, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

—Ecc1 3:11

### Humanity

And then there's all of us. *Homo sapiens* are the only humans in existence. We all ultimately descended from the same original parents, Adam and Eve (see Acts 17:26), but throughout the millennia, we have become various races of the one human race. We have different skin color, use different languages, have unique cultures, and live all over the globe. Of the 7 billion people on the planet, no one has exactly the same DNA or fingerprints.

God, who made all this variety—and far, far more—is the genius behind all of this. What the world's variety shows us is God's creativity. When we create and innovate, build and construct, we are simply imitating our Heavenly Father, who made the universe with such amazing variety that it overwhelms our senses.

Take music, for example. What do you enjoy listening to? I love Classical music, but there are numerous varieties of it. Other separate genres include rock, country, bluegrass, jazz, hip hop—just to name a few.

We all have different experiences that shape us throughout our lives, molding our personalities, developing our talents, and making us unique. And yet, we also have, at our core, the same fundamental physical needs for food, clothing, and shelter. We also crave the same basic psychological needs, including love, acceptance, and a sense of purpose.

### Spiritual Creation/Recreation

And here's something else we all have in common: we're all sinners in need of forgiveness. This means we all have the same spiritual needs, including God's forgiveness, acceptance and guidance (Jer 10:23).

God isn't finished with us quite yet, because spiritually, God has continued his creative work. While everything in the world was made in six days (Ex 20:11), God has extended his creation by recreating us spiritually in the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). According to 2 Cor 5:17, "anyone [who] is in Christ... is a new creation." When we sinned, we destroyed and corrupted ourselves spiritually. But through the sacrifice of Jesus, we can

put off the old self with its practices and...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Col 3:9–10).

When Paul wrote, "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17), he was talking about our new life in Jesus (2 Cor 5:21). He enabled us be "born again" (John 3:3) by his sacrifice on the cross. When we are baptized for the remission of our sins, we rise to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). And it doesn't stop there, as "our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).



AUGUST 30, 2020

LESSON 13

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

## THE COVENANTAL LOVE OF GOD (PSALM 136)

In **Lesson 2**, we studied about the love of God. In this lesson, we're going to consider the "covenantal love" of God, which is something a little bit different. These two words—"covenantal love"—translate a single Hebrew word, *hesed*, which is "one of the richest, most theologically insightful terms in the Old Testament."<sup>11</sup>

*Hesed* is used nearly 250 times in the Old Testament (over half of these instances are in the Psalms) and is translated in numerous ways in our English Bibles, including "goodness," "kindness," "mercy," "grace," "love," "steadfast love," "unfailing love" and "loving-kindness."<sup>12</sup> As you can see by how many different ways to render it, the exact meaning of *hesed* is difficult to bring precisely into English. Entire books have been written about this word, one of which helpfully provides a working definition:

When the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything.<sup>13</sup>

Most often, the Bible describes God's *hesed* toward his covenantal people (see Ex 15:13; Num 14:18; Isa 63:7; Pss 25:7; 89:2). But it also describes the Israelites' covenantal love for God (Jer 2:2; Hosea 6:4, 6) and between people (Gen 32:10).

### Psalm 89

*Hesed* is used 7 times in Psalm 89 (vv. 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49). It is a celebration of God's love and commitment to his covenant people. Because he knows how the nation of Israel throughout its history sinned repeatedly against God, the psalmist admits they don't deserve God's love. But he praises God for it and prays it will continue.

<sup>11</sup> Mounce's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, Bill Mounce, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 378.

<sup>12</sup> J. N. Oswalt, "God," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2008), 248. The kjv uses 14 English terms to translate *hesed*.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Loving-kindness* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2018).

### Psalm 136

Throughout Ps 136, the phrase, “for his *hesed* endures forever,” is used repeatedly. This is a historical psalm that recounts God’s protection and guidance of his people from the exodus until the conquering of Canaan. It celebrates God’s loyalty to his people.<sup>14</sup>

### Ruth

In the book of Ruth, God’s *hesed* takes center stage. The term is only used three times (Ruth 1:8; 2:20; 3:10), but these are key places.

- **Ruth 1:8.** Despite faulting God with the tragedy of losing her husband and two sons, Naomi prayed for God’s “kindness” toward her Ruth.
- **Ruth 2:20.** After finding out that Ruth has begun gleaning in Boaz’s field, Naomi praises God for his “kindness.” She knew that Boaz was a close relative and could legally “redeem” them.
- **Ruth 3:10.** Boaz thanks Ruth for her “kindness,” since she chose him to marry and didn’t go searching for a younger suitor.

At the end of the narrative, we see God credited with providing for Naomi’s wellbeing (Ruth 4:14). And God was also at work bringing about the great King David for his covenant people (Ruth 4:22).

### Larry’s Application

As we conclude this study on “Characteristics of God,” I think this is a great one for us to close our study with. Let’s consider a few of the ways that we can look at our own lives and see that the *hesed* of God is everlasting, that God is full of mercy, and how we should live our lives as a result.

**1. God has cared for us since the beginning.** In Psalm 139, we see beautiful words regarding the way that God has cared for people. David says that God has “searched me and known me” in v. 1. David describes how God knows him and that, no matter where he goes, God is there. David takes comfort in that fact. And so should we, knowing that God knows us better than we know ourselves.

What an awesome thought and a beautiful passage for us to consider. When things are going bad for us we should know that God is already in the future. God knows what we have needed since before we were formed. One of the things that God knew that we would need is a Savior and he planned that long before we were ever even here.

**2. God cares for his covenant people.** Consider Psalm 89. Beginning in verse 19 we see God speaking and in verse 20 he says, “I have found David my servant; with holy oil I have anointed him.”

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<sup>14</sup> See also Pss 106:1; 107:1; 118:1.) It is interesting that Paul also speaks of God’s love as lasting forever (1 Cor 13:13).

Verse 23 says, “But I will crush his adversaries before him.” Verse 28 says, “My lovingkindness [*hesed*] I will keep for him forever and my covenant shall be confirmed to him.” In verse 34, God reminds us that “My covenant I will not violate nor will I alter the utterance of my lips.” And finally, in vv. 36–37 we see that

His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful.

Has God violated his covenant with David or has his throne been established forever? One of the things that I always try to point out in scripture is Jesus. We know that on Earth that Jesus was descended from David. Through Jesus this covenant has remained. Jesus is on his throne forever. It is a comforting thought that God cares for and keeps his promises, especially to his covenant people. If God keeps his promises and cares for his covenant people, then there are promises to us that we can know for certain that God will keep.

**3. God shows mercy.** Along those very same lines is the fact that God shows mercy. None of us are perfect. Paul says this to the Roman brethren in Romans 3:23 when he says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is a big deal for us to understand that we do sin and that as a result we find ourselves separated from God. Paul would tell these brethren that they were justified “as a gift” (verse 24). Romans Chapter 5, Titus 3, and Ephesians 2 explain this further; but I want to look at the passage in Ephesians 2. Paul begins by telling them that “you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (2:1) but he gives them the good news in Eph 2:4–10. They’ve received grace!

Because of the mercy of God and his love, we have been saved. It is a gift of God. The thing about mercy is that we could never deserve it on our own. We could never do enough to warrant it. God grants it to us, his covenant people, because of the great love that he has for us.

**4. What should we do about it?** We all know the story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25–37. To recount it, there was a lawyer who wanted to test Jesus and asked him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what was written in the law and the lawyer answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus told him that this was correct and that he should do that and live. The lawyer then asked, “Who is my neighbor?” at which time Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

A traveler fell victim to robbers. He was beaten, stripped, and left half dead, with no way to help himself. We have all been in situations where there was no way that we could help ourselves.

So, in this story, a Priest and Levite walk by and they both stay away from the person that needs the help. The priest and the Levite would have been considered religious elite. They would have been considered the people that would be expected to do the right thing. They were the people that all would have expected to stop and help. That was not the case.

The Samaritans were generally considered sinners and a mixed race. They did not deal with or have any connection with the Jews. This would have been the last person on earth that the people who Jesus was talking to would have expected to stop—yet he did. Not only did he stop and help, but he also made sure that, even after he was gone, this poor victim with a great need would be cared for. This was the person that was the neighbor in this story. This was the person that showed the kind of love that God expects from us.

**We should love and care for people from the beginning.**

There are many people that may need help, physically or spiritually. We can be there to lend a hand. It does not always mean money. There are lots of ways that we can help. Get to know the people around you because it may not be as obvious as what we saw in the Good Samaritan. Once you find a need, fill it. Encourage others to do the same. I would venture that the Inn Keeper in our story was affected by what was done by the Good Samaritan. Can you affect others positively by your acts of kindness, too?

**We should keep our promises.** God has kept his promises to us. We in turn should keep our promises to God and to others. The Good Samaritan promised that if the Inn Keeper had to spend any other funds that he would pay those as well. Through the promise that he made this poor soul continued to receive the help that he needed. When we became a Christian one of the promises that we made was to serve God. A big part of that is being a neighbor to those around us. What are we doing to keep that promise?

**Finally, we should show mercy to others.** This is apparent in the Good Samaritan. He did not have to stop. By all accounts he should not have stopped when you look at the totality of the circumstances, yet he did. We have a chance to show mercy to others. One of the ways that we can do that is by helping people that we know have no way to return any help to us. This poor beaten man could never repay the Samaritan, yet he had compassion and mercy on him. Just like God has for us.

We can never repay the mercy that was shown to us by God, but if we truly want to be like God, we will strive to have the same characteristics that he displays to us, maybe none more important than this one: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:36-40).