

The Character of God

GOD IS LOVE/JEALOUS

LOVE = that settled purpose of the will in seeking the well-being of another; to place supreme value upon someone or something else, no matter what the costs.

BIBLICAL WORDS FOR LOVE

- OT *hesed* = unflinching, uninhibited covenant love; God's loyalty to his covenant obligations (Ex. 34:6-7; Neh. 9:17; Hos. 3:1)
- NT *agape* = self-giving, unmerited favor; the sum total of all the virtues (Lk. 6:35; 1 Cor. 13)

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY:

- It is God's nature to love, 1 Jn. 4:8, 16.

Note: Though God is love, love is not God. Despite popular thinking, love does not exhaust God's character. We should never idolize one of God's attributes at the expense of the others. Rather, each attribute is qualified by all the others, and all of God's attributes work harmoniously together such that He is one integrated being.

- God's love was active even before creation, Jn. 17:24
- Love between God the Father and God the Son is reciprocal, Jn. 14:31
- God loves all people, including his enemies, Mt. 5:45; Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:10
- As Redeemer, God especially loves believers, Mal. 1:2-3; Eph. 2:4; 1 Jn. 3:1
- God's love is the basis of election/adoption into his family, Dt. 7:7-9; Eph. 1:4-5
- Contrast human love with God's love, contrast Hos. 6:4 with 1 Chr. 16:34; Lk. 6:32 with Rom. 8:35-39
- God's love is the reason behind the incarnation, Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9; Tit. 3:4
- God's love is the motive for Christ's death, Jn. 15:13; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25
- God's love is not motivated by our love for him, 1 Jn. 4:10; Rom. 5:8

GOD'S LOVE IS SPONTANEOUS, SOVEREIGN, UNDESERVED, AND INTENSE – IT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSING.

JEALOUS = God's righteous possessiveness; his fierce desire for what is best for his people

- OT *qana'* = to be jealous, to be zealous
- NT *zeloo* = to be deeply concerned about; to boil, to bubble

Jealousy is “that zeal that protects a love relationship or avenges it when broken” (J. I. Packer); or “holy outrage mingled with love” (D. A. Carson).

BIBLICAL TEACHING:

- God's name is jealous, Ex. 34:14
- God reserves for himself the worship and obedience of his people, Ex. 20:5
- God's jealousy is aroused when his people forsake their covenant obligations, Deut. 4:23-24; Ps. 78:58
- Godly jealousy is a virtue, not a vice when it is used positively to show protective care and concern for others, 2 Cor. 11:2.
- God's jealousy sent Israel into judgment, Ps. 79:4-5, yet
- God's jealousy led him to restore Israel after judgment, Ez. 39:25; Joel 2:18; Zech. 8:2-3
- The Advent of the Messiah and the blessing of God's people is accomplished by the “zeal of the Lord,” Is. 9:7; 37:32

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Eph. 5:1 says to imitate God. In what ways can you imitate God's love specifically?
- Could an observer learn anything of God's great love from the love I show my spouse, family, neighbors?

- Read Rom. 12:11. What would others say I am zealous for in my life?
- Is it always appropriate to limit the biblical concept of love to “sacrificial giving” without respect to our interpersonal relationships? Doesn’t the idea of love include reciprocity?
- What really gets you excited about serving God/others?
- Read 2 Cor. 11:2-4. How do you demonstrate a godly jealousy for other believers who are being deceived about the fundamental truths of the gospel?

GOD IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE

OMNIPRESENT = all of God is everywhere all of the time. There is no place or time in which God cannot be found. Hence, God has unlimited access to the whole of creation all of the time.

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY: Ps. 139:7-12

God’s enduring presence means he:

- cannot be contained, 1 Kgs. 8:27; Is. 66:1; Acts 7:48-50; 17:24; Eph. 1:23
- is in every part of space, Jer. 23:23-24
- protects us in the midst of evil circumstances, Ps. 118:6-7
- replaces our fears with strength and courage, Ps. 23:4
- revives us when we sin, Is. 57:15
- empowers us to serve him, Mt. 28:19-20; Dt. 31:6, 8; Jos. 1:5; Heb. 13:5
- wants our worship and praise wherever we are, Jn. 4:20-24

CONSIDER: God is geographically or spatially present to everyone. However, he is relationally present to different people under different circumstances, Ps. 51:11; Mk. 15:34; 2 Thess. 1:9.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:

1. We can cultivate our relationship with God wherever we are and whenever we choose. *He is ever-present to respond.*
2. We can be sure he understands our present circumstances and frustrations with the future. *He is ever-present to carry our burdens.*
3. We can rely on him for grace and forgiveness when we sin. *He is ever-present to pardon.*
4. Because God is everywhere all the time, loneliness is never really something we will objectively experience. *He is ever-present to relate.*
5. We can cast all our anxieties on God because he cares for us (1 Pt. 5:7). *He is ever-present to sympathize, Heb. 4:15-16.*
6. Any successes we have enjoyed is because he was there to enable them. *He is ever-present to empower for service.*
7. We can turn to God in prayer no matter where we are. *He is ever-present to listen.*

REFLECTIONS:

- When have you especially felt God’s presence in your life? Explain.
- What measures can you take to rest in God’s presence when trials and temptations occur?
- Memorize/Meditate: Ps. 139:7-12 or Mt. 28:19-20

GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS

MERCY = Greek, *eleos*; Hebrew, *hesed*

Negatively: *something withheld, restricted, or restrained; not giving what is deserved.*

Positively: *God’s active compassion to the needy; the outpouring of pity and kindness; God’s goodness toward those in distress. God’s tenderness of heart toward the needy.*

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

God’s mercy is *that quality of compassion and pity aroused by the physical, spiritual, or psychological suffering or misfortune of another*, 2 Sam. 24:14; Ps. 56:1; Mt. 9:27-29; 2 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 2:27; Heb. 4:16; Jm. 5:11

- God's saving mercy:
 - is exercised freely toward whomever he pleases, Rom. 9:15-18, 23
 - makes room for His gracious provision of Christ, Eph. 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pt. 1:3
 - motivates us to live sanctified lives in service to him, Rom. 12:1
 - is the only hope for a defiant human race, Rom. 11:30-32.
- Also, God's mercy
 - restrains his anger toward us when we do sin, Deut. 13:17; Ps. 78:38; Dan. 9:9
 - is an essential characteristic of being Jesus' disciple, Mt. 5:7
 - gives religious practices substance and meaning, Mt. 12:1-2, 7; Jm. 1:27
 - is the basis upon which we extend mercy to others, Mt. 18:21-35; Jm. 2:13
 - never-ends; the end of one mercy is the beginning of another, Lam. 3:22-23; Ps. 119:132

GRACE = Greek, *charis*; Hebrew, *hen*

The stronger helping the weaker; favor bestowed, or granted; giving what is not deserved; unmerited blessing; enablement, power, gift.

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

- God is gracious in the OT as well as the NT, Gen. 21:1; Ex. 34:6; Ps. 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2
- Since grace is the opposite of human merit and effort, Rom. 3:23-24; 11:6, then faith is the only appropriate response to grace, Rom. 4:14, 16; Eph. 2:8.

God's grace:

- redeems and forgives, Eph. 1:7
- empowers for Christian service, Acts 6:8; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pt. 4:10
- gives relief from trials, not by removing them, but by enabling us to endure them so Christ is exalted in our weaknesses, 2 Cor. 12:7-10
- is the source of success in ministry, Acts 14:26-27
- makes living godly lives possible, Tit. 2:11-12
- is ever-present to help in our need, Heb. 4:16; 1 Pt. 5:10

To Consider: Mercy is not giving us what we do deserve, while grace is giving us what we do not deserve. Both are necessary in God's plan for our salvation and sanctification.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:

- Memorize/meditate/apply one verse from above on God's mercy and one verse on God's grace.
- Prayerfully consider the following:
 - Who among those I know could I show special care and mercy toward this week?
 - Am I gracious to my brothers and sisters in Christ by allowing them the time and space they need to grow, or do I expect them to conform immediately to my way of thinking or behaving?
 - Do I show mercy or disdain for the immature believer?
 - Am I compassionate and gentle with non-Christians, or impatient and repulsed?
 - Who among those I know could I be a blessing to so that I might enable them in their service to God?
 - Am I merciful in my attitude toward my friends or family when I don't agree with them, or am I judgmental?

GOD RIGHTEOUS, GOD JUST

Righteous/Just: God embodies the standard of what is morally right and consistently acts in accord with his perfect and holy character. "The justice of God is the righteousness of God in action" (Bruce Demarest).

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY:

- Key passages: Ex. 34:6-7; Is. 5:20, 23; Dt. 32:4; 2 Chr. 12:6; Ps. 11:7.
- Abraham speaks of God's character as righteous and fair, Gen. 18:25.
- Isaiah writes that God alone declares what is right, Is. 45:19.

- Read Jer. 9:23. What are three things we often turn to for help in times of trouble? Read Jer. 9:24. Instead of turning to our own resources in troubled times, who are we to turn to?
- God is fair. He is not partial or unjust in his judgments. He shows absolute justice to each person, 2 Cr. 19:7; 2 Sam 22:26-28; Job 34:11-12; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Pt. 1:17.
- God rewards righteousness, Ps. 58:11; 62:12; Pr. 19:17; 25:21-22; Jer. 17:10; Eph. 6:8.
- Because God is righteous and just, he punishes unrighteousness, Ps. 7:11; 2 Pt. 2:4-9; Rom. 6:23; Heb. 2:2-3.
- God rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked. If there were no reward for righteousness, or punishment for wickedness, morality would not count for much and hell would just be an empty threat, Pr. 10:16; Rev. 20:11-15.
- God's justice isn't always immediately obvious to us, Jer. 12:1; Ps. 73.
- Yet, God hears the cries of his people and will set the record straight in the end. Lk. 18:1-8; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:6.
- Read Rom. 1:17; 3:21-26. How is God's righteousness shown in the gospel? Christ's death? Is. 53:4-6.
- Read 2 Cor. 5:21. What is your true standing before God as a believer?
- Read Jm. 1:20; 2:21, 25; 5:16. How does James describe a righteous person?

REFLECTIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

- Describe a time when you didn't think your circumstances were fair. How did you respond? Did you blame God?
- Read 1 Pt. 2:20b-23. What was Jesus' response to unjust suffering?
- In our secular society where morals and truth claims are said to be relative and not absolute, how can it help you to know there is a God who is the standard of what is right and true?
- Read Mic. 6:8; Jer. 22:3. In what tangible way(s) can you begin to implement God's justice in your family, neighborhood, community, job, etc.?
- Read Amos 5:21-24; Jm. 1:27. Is there a social dimension to your righteousness, as well as a personal one? Explain.
- Read 1 Jn. 1:9. How can God be "just" in forgiving our sin?

GOD HOLY

Meaning

- Hebrew (qados) = to cut, separate; separation from common or ordinary use or contact
- Greek (hagios) = to be separated from and devoted to; both a relational quality and a moral quality.

"God is holy" has a twofold sense:

1. relationally: God is separate from all that is finite and earthly; he is our Father *in heaven*
2. ethically/morally: God is separate from all that is unclean, impure, and defiled.

God is absolutely independent of and distinct from creation and absolutely devoted to his own honor and goodness. God is wholly other and holy other.

Why would it be important to define the holiness of God both morally and relationally?

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

- God's transcendent majesty and absolute moral perfection: Hos. 11:9, "For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you."
- Read Ps. 113:4-6. God's transcendence is often expressed in spatial terms: Num. 24:16, "the Most High;" Gen. 14:18, "God Most High;" Ps. 47:2, "Lord Most High;" Ps. 83:18, "the Most High over all the earth;" Dan. 4:2, "the Most High God;"
- But, God is also immanent (near): Dt. 4:39; Jos. 2:11; Is. 57:15; Jer. 23:23, 24

Each person of the triune God explicitly called holy:

- God the Father is called the "Holy One" thirty nine times in the OT.
- Jesus called the "Holy One" by angels, Lk. 1:35; demons, Mk. 1:24; apostles, Jn. 6:69; prophets Acts 2:27.
- God the Spirit called Holy no less than 90xs in the Bible.
- Read Is. 6:1-5; Rev. 4:8. No other attribute of God is repeated three times.
- Read Ps. 45:7; Ps. 5:4-5; Hos. 9:15; Mal. 1:3; Rev. 2:6. How does God relate to the wicked? Note, however, God's hate is not like ours. It is principled indignation, always conditioned by his holiness and justice.

Likewise, God's abilities are always conditioned by his holiness, he cannot be tempted by evil (Jm. 1:13), nor can he lie (Heb. 6:18).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS/REFLECTIONS:

- Read 1 Pt. 1:15-16; Lev. 19:2; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:4. What does God command us to be? Do you think this means morally or relationally? Read 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1.
- Read Heb. 12:14. Is holiness an option in the Christian life?
- ☑ God delights in us as we reflect his moral character in every thought, attitude, word, and deed. Therefore, we are to imitate God, and thereby glorify his holiness and goodness (Eph. 5:1; Mt. 5:48; Lk. 6:36; Col. 3:9-10).
- Read Zech. 14:20-21; Eph. 5:26-27; Rev. 21:10-11. Holiness reveals the character of the coming kingdom where there will no longer be any notion of separation from, but pure and unceasing devotion to.
- In what areas of your life can you better demonstrate personal holiness (morally, relationally)? How do you plan to make this change?

GOD UNCHANGING

MEANING: God always remains the same. He never grows or develops. He never becomes better or worse, greater or less. God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises. There is no quantitative or qualitative change in God. God is not a static being, but a stable being. Yet, He dynamically operates in ways consistent with his being and character, and he does feel emotions.

BIBLICAL TEACHING:

God is unchanging in:

- his essential being, Ex. 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 1:11-12
- his character, Ps. 119:90; Is. 54:10; Mal. 3:6
- his purposes, 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 110:4; Is. 14:24, 26-27; 46:10-11; Rom. 11:29
- his Word, Is. 40:8; Ps. 119:89, 152; Jn. 10:35
- his promises and warnings, Num. 23:19; Is. 1:19-20; Heb. 6:17

The emotions of God

He rejoices (Is. 62:5), is grieved over sin (Ps. 78:40; Eph. 4:30), gets angry (2 Kgs. 22:17), hates the wicked (Ps. 45:7), pities his children (Ps. 103:13), loves (Is. 54:8; Ps. 103:17; Jn. 3:16), and feels compassion (Lam. 3:22).

PROBLEM PASSAGES:

God is said to "repent" or change his mind, Gen. 6:6-7; Ex. 32:10-14; 1 Sam. 15:10-11; Jer. 18:8-10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:9-10.

Toward a response: God consistently deals with people on the basis of his changeless character and people's responsible moral choices, which he omnisciently included in his eternal plan. In the short scheme of things it appears God is reacting to his creation. But, in the long run, nothing falls outside the divine blueprint. God has some built-in contingencies in his sovereign plan which he is in complete control over all of the time. For example, God's declarations of judgment would come true provided situations remain the same (Ex. 32:9-14; Is. 38:1-6; comp. Jonah 3:4 with Jonah 3:10). However, it is people who change, not God. His purposes, plans, and promises will stand forever. As truly sovereign, he ordains the means as well as the ends. Moreover, God is not bound to use the same strategy to accomplish his purposes. Some things God permits, while other things he directly performs. This is not to say that if God had it to do all over again, he would do things differently. Only, God brings about some of his good purposes conditionally or indirectly, while others he unconditionally or directly accomplishes.

REFLECTIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

- The importance of God unchanging: Imagine what it would be like if God could change?
- If God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, then he is faithful:
 - to forgive our sins once and for all, Is. 44:22; Col. 2:13-14; 1 Jn. 1:9
 - to rescue us from temptations, 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Pt. 2:9
 - to preserve us to the end, 1 Thess. 5:23-24; Heb. 10:23
 - to keep his promise of salvation to us, Mal. 3:6; Jm. 1:17-18

- Our souls are continually becoming, striving, seeking, and longing for rest/resolution, whereas God is never anxious, stressed, or fatigued, Is. 40:28; he is “our rock, our fortress and deliverer” Ps. 18:2.
- Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ remains the same forever, Heb. 13:8.

GOD ALL-POWERFUL

Read: Job 42:2; Ps. 115:3; Is. 14:26-27

MEANING: *God accomplishes everything he chooses. He is capable of doing all those things which are logically possible and consistent with his perfect nature.*

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

- God’s name [*El Shaddai*] implies strength/power, Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Is. 1:24; Amos 4:13; Jn. 17:11
- God says of himself and angels declare that he is all-powerful, Gen. 18:14; Is. 46:10; Jer. 32:27; Lk. 1:37.
- God’s power is incomparable to anything/anyone in all of creation, 2 Cr. 20:6; Is. 40:25-26; Eph. 1:19-20
- God’s power is displayed in miracles for redemptive purposes, Acts 3:1-4:4; 9:32-42
- God’s power is supremely demonstrated in accomplishing and completing our redemption, Is. 52:10; Mt. 19:26; Jn. 5:21; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pt. 1:5; Jude 24-25

God displays his power sometimes:

- directly: in creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), Gen. 1:1; spiritual recreation, 2 Cor. 5:17; judgment, Gen. 11:5-9; miraculous birth of Isaac and Christ, Gen. 21:1-2; Lk. 1:35; Gal. 4:29; resurrection of Christ, 1 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 1:19b-20; divine healings wrought by Christ, Lk. 5:17; 6:19.
- indirectly, in the cosmic disturbances which brought judgment upon Sodom & Gomorrah, Gen. 19; the plagues of Egypt, Ex. 8:2; 9:3, 14; 10:14; by revealing himself in creation, Rom. 1:20.
- both directly and indirectly through human agency and divine causation, Cyrus, Is. 45:9-13; Jews, Romans (= wicked men), our own sin, and God’s purposes, Acts 2:23.

LIMITATIONS TO GOD’S POWER

- Sometimes God is able to accomplish more than he actually does, Mt. 3:9; Rom. 9:22; Eph. 3:20
- But, some things God could never accomplish. He cannot:
 - change his mind so as to alter his purposes, Num. 23:19-20
 - lie, Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18
 - be tempted by evil nor tempt anyone with evil, Jm. 1:13
 - condone sin, Hab. 1:13
 - cease to exist, Gen. 21:33; Is. 40:28; Ps. 90:2
 - do what is logically impossible, 2 Tim. 2:13.

NOTE: All of these ‘inabilities’ are signs of strength rather than weaknesses.

REFLECTIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

God’s power gives us:

- *Confidence* that all His purposes will succeed, Job 42:2; Pr. 16:4; Dan. 4:35; Acts 4:28; 5:38-39; Eph. 1:11
- *Certainty* that all his promises will be fulfilled, Num. 23:19; Josh. 23:14; Rom. 4:20-21; Heb. 6:13-15; 10:23; 1 Pt. 1:5
- *Courage* that He empowers us for service and dispels our fears, Ezra 7:28; Mt. 14:27; Acts 1:8; 23:11
- *Comfort* that all His enemies will be defeated, Ps. 66:3; Rev. 11:17-18; 20:11-15
- *Cause* to continue developing Christian character, 2 Pt. 1:3-8; Phil. 2:13
- *Capacity* to engage and disable evil in our lives, Lk. 10:19-20; Eph. 6:10-13
- Read Eph. 1:19-20. When was the last time you earnestly prayed for God’s power to transform your life? Explain.
- Read Eph. 3:14-17. How often do you pray for God’s power to change your inner being so that your character reflects Christ’s presence more and more?
- Read Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:5. The gospel is “the power of God for salvation.” How much do you *really* depend upon the gospel to impact those with whom you are sharing?
- Read Mk 14:35-36. Just like Jesus, do you honestly want God’s will to be done *more than* you want your prayer request answered in a certain manner?

- Read 2 Cor. 12:9. What specific event can you point to that illustrates God's power made perfect in your weakness?

GOD ALL-KNOWING

MEANING: *God fully and perfectly knows all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act.* Ps. 139.

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY:

God's knowledge is:

- incomparable and beyond our capability, Is. 40:13-14; 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33
- infallible (cannot err), inerrant (does not err), and without limit, 2 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 147:5; 31:5; Jn. 14:6
- comprehensive Ps. 33:13, 14; Pr. 5:21; 15:3

Divine omniscience is the presupposition of all trustworthy prophecy, Is. 42:9; 46:9-10

Jesus selectively chooses how he will use his knowledge of future events by accurately foretelling:

- his suffering, death, and resurrection, Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34
- that Peter would find a coin in the mouth of a fish to pay the temple tax, Mt. 17:27
- specific events surrounding his final Passover meal, Mk. 14:13-15
- his betrayal by Judas Iscariot, Mk. 14:18-20
- the disciples' abandonment of him before his crucifixion, Mk. 14:27-30

God's knowledge is so comprehensive that it not only includes actualities, but potentialities; not only what will occur, but what may occur under certain circumstances

- 1 Sam. 23:7-13, God demonstrates his knowledge of mere possibilities
- Jer. 38:17-18, God has complete knowledge of all future contingencies
- Mt. 11:21-24, Jesus knows how people would have responded under different circumstances

DIFFICULTIES:

- Does God *really* forget our sins? Read Is. 43:25; Jer. 31:34.
- If God knows in advance what choices we will make, then in what sense are our choices free? Consider Peter's denial.

Three important facts regarding God's knowledge:

- 1) God holds only and all true beliefs, he cannot hold a false belief
- 2) God has perfect knowledge of the actual world which he has created
- 3) God knows all possibilities

IMPLICATIONS/REFLECTIONS

Because God knows all things actual/possible:

- he is not caught off guard by world events
- he knows us completely
 - our thoughts and motives, Pr. 24:12; our "secret sins," Ps. 90:8; our hurts and anxieties, Ps. 56:8; our unspoken words, Ps. 139:4; the exact number of days we will live this life, Ps. 139:16
 - he even knows the worst about us, but loves us nevertheless, Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:19-20; 4:19
- he is able to judge perfectly, Heb. 4:13
- *God's Knowledge and Our Prayers:*
 - Even though we are not smart enough to know all the facts or wise enough to process them, God will not grant something that is not good for us, Mt. 6:8; Is. 65:24.
 - God knows not only what we need, when we need it, but why we are asking for it, Jm. 4:3, comp. Mt. 6:9-10.
 - Because God knows all things actual/possible, he never makes mistakes in answering our prayers, never fails to plan ahead, or take into account all the possibilities that may occur and the eventualities that do occur.

Knowing that God knows all things actual and possible, we can:

1. anticipate each day with the confidence that God understands the challenges we face.
2. be renewed by confession and repentance at the end of our day, because he knows all that we have done.
3. rely on his clear vision of all our circumstances, regardless of how dark and cloudy they may seem.