

Spurgeon Room Studies ~ Knowing God ~ Fall 2018

Session 3 – The Attributes of God (continued)

I. Holiness—God is Light

- *Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3.5-6)*
- “The ground is ‘holy,’ not because there is something special or dangerous about it as such, but because Yahweh is there, the supremely holy one. God’s messenger is to stand back, to remove his shoes in respect. He is afraid to look at the face of God.”¹

A. Holiness is not first of all a moral quality. Its fundamental idea is **separation**. God is absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty.² This may be seen in the vision of Isaiah, Chapter 6, where God is described as thrice holy, underscoring this aspect of His nature.

1. This is a quality that separates God from all creation.

There is none holy as the LORD, none besides Thee. (1 Samuel 2.2)

Who is like unto thee, O LORD among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15.11)

- “When Scripture calls God, or individual persons of the Godhead, ‘holy’ (as it often does: Leviticus 11.44-45; Joshua 24.19; Isaiah 2.2), the word signifies everything about God that sets him apart from us and makes him an object of awe, adoration and dread to

¹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, 2002, p. 27.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1939, p. 73.

us. It covers all aspects of his transcendent greatness and moral perfection and thus is an attribute of all his attributes, pointing to the “Godness” of God at every point.”³

- “God’s holiness is his beauty. In one of the most memorable phrases in Charnock’s work on God’s attributes, he argues, ‘Power is his hand and arm, omniscience his eye, mercy his bowels, eternity his duration, his holiness his beauty.’”⁴

2. But His transcendent holiness is matched by His willingness to dwell with His humble servants who tremble at His word. (Cf. Isaiah 57.15; 66.2)

- B. The holiness of God also has an **ethical** dimension. Separation involves a distance from sin. It is necessary for God to act on our behalf in Christ to overcome our sin.

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.
(Habakkuk 1.13a, cf. 1.12)

Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (Isaiah 6.5 KJV). Isaiah cried out with these words when he beheld God in his majestic glory But God removed his uncleanness, symbolically communicating forgiveness to him.

- It is true, God does tell us to back away from His holiness. But He also acts to make us holy in order to draw us to Himself.

II. Goodness

There is none good but one, that is, God. (Matthew 19.17)

³ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, 1993, p. 43.

⁴ Mark Jones, quoting Stephen Charnock, *God Is*, Crossway Publishing, Wheaton, 2017, p. 165.

*The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works.
(Psalm 145.9)*

- A. The most common meaning of goodness in Scripture is benevolence—a good will or intention carried out. “A good person is one who acts to benefit others.”⁵

*‘As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for **good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50.20-21)*

- God is the final standard of goodness. All that He is and does is worthy of approval.
- When philosophers address this they often speak of goodness as an impersonal, absolute concept, as in Plato’s understanding of ‘the Good.’
- But the God of Scripture is absolute *and* personal. Goodness characterizes Him.
- “The biblical writers never say that God is good because he says he is good, and that he says he is good because he is good. That would be narrow circularity. Rather, they describe and praise God’s mighty acts of deliverance, his kindness in providence, and his grace in salvation.”⁶

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. (Nahum 1.7)

Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14.17)

⁵ Frame, op. cit., p. 410.

⁶ Ibid, p. 408.

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

As far as the east is. From the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103.8-11)

O taste and see that the LORD is good. (Psalm 34.8)

- This indicates that some action (to believe, consider, meditate, etc.) is required on our part to experience God's goodness.

B. Goodness and Mercy—the **mercy** of God is that aspect of His goodness that meets us as sinners deserving of judgment.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me ... (Psalm 23.6)

- In fact, *His mercies are new every morning*, if we will but look up to see them. They must be called to mind. (Lamentations 3.21-25)
- Mercy is God's grace and goodness to those who deserve judgment.

C. Goodness and Love—the love and goodness of God overlap significantly, but goodness is more general. It can be directed toward creation and is coordinate with God's common grace. His love is more directed toward persons.

- God's love includes affections and actions (emotion and will).
- God's love differs according to its objects. Enemies, the world (in general), the redeemed.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he

makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust... You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5. 44-45, 48)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ... (John 3.16a).
This universal love for a world that is in opposition to him does not imply a universal salvation.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood... (Revelation 1.5b)

- God's saving love—*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5.8)*

III. **Glory—God's Ultimate Goal**

- “Jonathan Edwards understood this to be the end for which God created the world, the reason why we and everything else exists. What is our chief end, our *raison d'être*? It is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. ‘Glory’ is one of those words so common in our Christian vocabulary that we use it assuming we all know what we’re talking about. But it is very difficult to define— much used and little understood. If God’s glory is his ultimate goal, it is important to try to comprehend it, even if but a little.”⁷

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (Psalm 19.1-2)

“Glory is God’s visible presence among people.” Frame

- Moses’ famous request of God, “Please show me your glory,” was met by a revelation of the proclamation of God’s name: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for

⁷ Ernest R. Boisvert, *God, Grandchildren and Golf*, 2017, p. 173.

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."

- This revelation reappears and is developed throughout Scripture finding fullest expression in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Exodus 33.18; 34.5-7) 175 With the incarnation of Christ, John tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."