

Tools for Teens



The Person We Call God



By Scott Estell, M.Div.

Course Description

This is one course in the *Tools for Teens* curriculum. *The Person We Call God* is a study of the attributes of God with an emphasis upon the practical implications of each. As a result of this study, the student should have a greatly increased appreciation for the awesomeness of our God and an understanding of how such knowledge affects every aspect of his life.

(1 Quarter)

About “Tools for Teens”

Tools for Teens is a complete discipleship course designed to ground teens in biblical/theological content. The authors of this material believe in the following:

- Teens must be able to understand the **doctrines of the Bible**.
- Teens must be able to understand the **content of the Bible**.
- Teens must be able to understand the **historical roots** of Baptists, Christianity, and Fundamentalism.
- Teens must be able to **relate to one another, authorities, and their community** from a biblical perspective.

This publication is to be **distributed free of charge**. This material is **to be distributed in unaltered condition** with this statement. If one desires to distribute this material in another language format (i.e., a language other than American English), then written authorization should be obtained by contacting the publisher.

Scott Estell
9100 Lee Road
Brighton, MI 48116
© 1997 by Scott Estell

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the
HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.
Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Last revised: May 1, 1999

Table of Contents

Lessons

What is an Attribute?	1
God is Sovereign	4
God is Omnipotent	8
God is Omniscient	13
God is Omnipresent.....	17
God is All-Wise.....	20
God is Holy	24
God is Love.....	28
God is Merciful.....	33
God is Gracious	37
God is Just	42

Review

Review Quiz	47
-------------------	----

Resources

Resources	50
-----------------	----

What is an Attribute?

WHETHER YOU REALIZE IT or not, you are about to embark on one of the most important journeys of your life—a study of the person we call God. There is no more noble pursuit. As God Himself says in Jeremiah 9:23–24:

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.

It is generally agreed that the best way to understand the God of the Bible is to study His **attributes**. This is what we will be doing over the next ten weeks. Before delving into each individual attribute, however, we must first understand what an attribute is. In this lesson, we will define what an attribute is, attempt to classify God’s attributes, and determine which, if any, of God’s attributes is the most basic one.

What is an Attribute?

Simply put, an attribute is a word which **describes** what someone or something is like. Human attributes may describe either external (tall, thin, handsome, etc.) or internal (shy, flamboyant, timid, etc.) traits. Such is not the case, however, with divine attributes. Since God is spirit (John 4:24) and, thus, invisible, He has only internal attributes. In other words, His attributes are descriptions of His personality or character, not of His physical appearance.

We use the word “attribute” when referring to God’s character qualities because attributes are words which we “attribute” to God. To attribute is to ascribe or assign something to someone. We ascribe or



assign various words to God which describe what He is like.

God's attributes are not like the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which, when put together, make God what He is. Rather, each attribute completely describes what God is like. In other words, God is not part holy, part love, etc.; rather, He is completely holy and completely loving, etc.

God's attributes are intrinsic to His being. In other words, they are the character qualities which make God what He is; He would cease to be God without them. God is what His attributes are.

Classification of God's Attributes

In order to better understand God's attributes, it is sometimes helpful to classify or categorize them. God's attributes can be divided into two distinct categories:

Attributes of Greatness

Attributes of greatness include those attributes which God possesses exclusively. They are descriptive of God and God alone. Theologians sometimes refer to these as "incommunicable" because they cannot be communicated to (i.e., shared with) mankind. In this series, we will study four of God's attributes of greatness: sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

Attributes of Goodness

Attributes of goodness include those attributes which God possesses to a perfect degree and which may be found (albeit imperfectly) in mankind. Theologians sometimes refer to these as "communicable" because they can be communicated to mankind, though not to the same degree in which they are found in God. In this series, we will study six of God's attributes of goodness: wisdom, holiness, love, mercy, grace, and justice.



The Supreme Attribute

Theologians have debated for centuries as to whether or not God has a supreme attribute, i.e., one which is more basic to His character than all the rest. Though God possesses all of His attributes to a perfect degree, there does seem to be one attribute which best characterizes the person we call God and which governs or regulates the other attributes. It is the attribute known as **holiness**. As we will learn more fully in Lesson Seven, the basic idea behind the word “holiness” is that of separation. God is separate from everything else in both a metaphysical and moral sense. There is a vast chasm between God and man. This gap is commonly referred to as the Creator/creature distinction. As mentioned above, God’s attributes of greatness are absolute—there is no human corollary to them. Furthermore, though God’s attributes of goodness are reflected in man, the reflection is so dim that it almost defies comparison. Thus, fundamental to a basic understanding of God and His attributes is a proper understanding of the attribute of holiness.

Conclusion

What is an attribute? An attribute is a word which describes what someone or something is like. God’s attributes can be classified into two categories: His attributes of greatness (not found in man) and His attributes of goodness (found in man, though in a very limited degree). The attribute of holiness is God’s most basic attribute.



God is Sovereign

He Rules Over All

In our first lesson, we learned that God’s attributes can logically be divided into two categories: His attributes of greatness and His attributes of goodness. In this second lesson, we will begin our examination of the former by studying the attribute of greatness known as sovereignty.

The Meaning of Sovereignty

The word “sovereign” is a compound word, consisting of the verb “reign,” meaning to **rule**, and the prefix “sove,” meaning **all**. Put the two together and you have the basic meaning of sovereignty: *to rule over all*. God is sovereign, that is, He rules over all. He is the “master of the universe,” the “God of gods and Lord of lords” (Deuteronomy 10:17), the “King of kings” (Revelation 19:16). As David exclaims:

Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. - 1 Chronicles 29:11–12 (see also Psalm 22:28 and 103:19)

To put it in even simpler terms, God is the “boss” of everything. By virtue of the fact that He has created all things, He has the right to rule over them. God does as He pleases with His creation (Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 46:10, Daniel 4:35).



Things Over Which God is Sovereign

As the literal meaning of the word “sovereign” indicates, God rules over everything. This includes such things as:

The weather

He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. - Job 36:32

Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. - Jonah 1:4 (see also Jonah 4:8)

God, not “Mother Nature,” is the source behind every meteorological phenomenon.

The animal kingdom

But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. - Jonah 1:17 (see also Jonah 4:7)

And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. - Jonah 2:10

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. - Matthew 10:29

The plant kingdom

Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. - Jonah 4:6

Human rulers

The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. - Proverbs 21:1 (see also Revelation 17:17)

[H]e sets up kings and deposes them. - Daniel 2:21

All human sovereigns are given their authority by the Sovereign and are merely instruments in His hand to accomplish His purposes.



**Some Objections to
Divine Sovereignty
Answered**

In spite of the fact that the Bible clearly teaches God's sovereignty, some have attempted to deny it or at least "water it down," finding it difficult to reconcile divine sovereignty with human freedom (How can a man be genuinely free if God is in complete control of him?) and the presence of evil (If God is in control of everything, why does evil exist?). In response to the former, Ryrie states: "Sovereignty/freedom forms an antinomy ('a contradiction between two apparently equally valid

continued . . .

Implications of Divine Sovereignty

What practical impact does God's sovereignty have upon you and me? Here are two suggestions:

Because God is sovereign, He has the right to tell us what to do.

Because God is sovereign, He has the right to tell us what we should do, when we should do it, where we should do it, how we should do it, with and to whom we should do it, and why we should do it. The only proper response to God's demands is unconditional obedience. This starts with surrendering oneself to God at salvation and continues throughout one's Christian life by obeying the commands of Scripture.

Because God is sovereign, we can rest secure.

God controls all things. Nothing happens without His permission. This fact should give us great comfort. We don't have to worry about anything. It's all in His hands. Our only concern should be to do what He tells us to do and leave the results with Him.

Conclusion

God is sovereign, that is, He rules over all. His realm includes such things as nature, the animal and plant kingdoms, and human rulers. Because God is sovereign, He has the right to tell us what to do. Also, His sovereignty should make us feel secure.

For Further Discussion

1. Are storms, earthquakes, and hurricanes simply random natural events?
2. How does God's sovereignty affect our view of such events?



principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles'). Antinomies in the Bible, however, consist only of apparent contradictions, not ultimate ones. One can accept the truths of an antinomy and live with them, accepting by faith what cannot be reconciled; or one can try to harmonize the apparent contradictions in an antinomy which inevitably leads to overemphasizing one truth to the neglect or even denial of the other" (Ryrie, pp. 43–44). In response to the latter, Tozer writes: "In His sovereign wisdom God has permitted evil to exist in carefully restricted areas of His creation, a kind of fugitive outlaw whose activities are temporary and limited in scope. In doing this God has acted according to His infinite wisdom and goodness. More than that no one knows at present; and more than that no one needs to know" (Tozer, p. 110).

3. Is there one molecule of the universe that is not under the sovereignty of God? That is, is there anything truly random (given to chance) in the universe?



God is Omnipotent

He is All-Powerful

IN LESSON TWO, we began to study the attributes of God's greatness by examining the attribute of sovereignty. In this third lesson, we will look at a second attribute of God's greatness, namely, His omnipotence.

The Meaning of Omnipotence

The word "omnipotence" is a compound word, consisting of the prefix "omni," meaning *all*, and the root "potent," meaning *powerful*. Put the two together and you have the literal meaning of the term: God is omnipotent, that is, He is all-powerful. He is "God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1). God has all power. He can do anything.

Is anything too hard for the LORD? - Genesis 18:14

I know that you can do all things. - Job 42:2

Ah, sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. - Jeremiah 32:17

Technically-speaking, God cannot do absolutely anything. Because He is God, He cannot do anything that is inconsistent with His nature or character. For example, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) or be tempted to sin (James 1:13). Furthermore, God only does that which is consistent with His will. For reasons known only to Himself, God has chosen not to do certain things. For example, if Christ so chose, He could have given personality to a stone (Matthew



3:9) or summoned angels to rescue Him from the cross (Matthew 26:53). “God can do all that He wills, but He will not do all that He can” (McCune, p. 93). God also cannot do/make logical impossibilities. For example, He cannot make a square circle or $2+2=5$. Thus, when we say that God is omnipotent, we mean that God can do anything consistent with His nature and will.

The Display of God’s Omnipotence

God has demonstrated His omnipotence in a variety of ways. Here are some of them:

God’s omnipotence is displayed in Creation.

Imagine being able to instantly produce something simply by uttering a command. This is what God did. He created all things out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) with nothing more than the spoken word.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.
Psalm 33:6, 9 (see also Genesis 1 and 2)

Note: God’s power is never diminished. When He was through creating, He did not rest because He was weary. God does not get tired (Isaiah 40:28).

God’s omnipotence is displayed in preservation.

God was not only powerful enough to create the universe, He is also powerful enough to sustain and preserve it.

In him all things hold together. - Colossians 1:17

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. - Hebrews 1:3

God’s power to preserve the universe includes the power to sustain our very lives. Notice the words of Job:



If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust. - Job 34:14–15

God's omnipotence is displayed in **salvation.**

Perhaps the greatest display of God's power occurs when He supernaturally changes the very nature of the human heart at the moment of salvation, transforming a rebellious, hell-bound sinner into a righteous, heaven-bound saint. Notice the words of Christ in Matthew 19:23–26:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

God's omnipotence is displayed in **sanctification.**

Not only is God powerful enough to save a soul, He is also powerful enough to keep a soul saved. This is the doctrine known as eternal security.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. - 1 Peter 1:3–5

God's omnipotence is displayed in **resurrection.**

Just as God's power is able to impart spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead (regeneration), so His power is able to impart physical life to those who are physically dead.

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. - 1 Corinthians 6:14



The Implications of God's Omnipotence

What practical impact should God's omnipotence have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is omnipotent, we are totally dependent on Him for everything.

Were it not for God, we would never have come into existence, nor would we be able to remain in existence as long as we have. Furthermore, were it not for God, we would never have come to faith in Him, nor would we be able to maintain our faith in Him. He deserves the praise for our physical and spiritual life. May we never think that we are not dependent on Him for these things.

Because God is omnipotent, we should revere Him.

God is awesome in power. The only natural response to His awesomeness is awe or reverence. This was the response of the Psalmist when describing God's power in Creation:

Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the peoples of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. - Psalm 33:8-9

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. This means that God is able to do any thing consistent with His nature and will. God's omnipotence is displayed in several ways including creation, preservation, salvation, sanctification, and resurrection. Because God is omnipotent, we are totally dependent on Him. Furthermore, we should revere God for His omnipotence.

For Further Discussion

1. If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He prevent evil and disasters?



2. Can God make a rock so big He cannot lift?



God is Omniscient

He is All-Knowing

THUS FAR, we have studied two of the attributes of God's greatness: sovereignty and omnipotence. In this lesson, we will look at a third attribute of God's greatness—His omniscience.

The Meaning of Omniscience

The word "omniscience" is a compound word, consisting of the prefix "omni," meaning *all*, and the root "science," meaning *knowledge*. Put the two together and you have the literal meaning of the term: God is omniscient, that is, He is all-knowing. He knows everything. God has all knowledge; thus, He is the source of all the knowledge possessed by mankind.

[Peter] said, "Lord, you know all things." - John 21:17

[God] knows everything. - 1 John 3:20

God does not learn sequentially like we do. In fact, God does not learn at all. He has always known all things past, present, and future instantaneously. God knows all things in "one indivisible, simultaneous act of intuition" (McCune, p. 95). God's knowledge even includes possibilities. In other words, not only does God know what will happen, but also what could happen. Here are two examples:

David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has



heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there. - 1 Samuel 23:10-13

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day." - Matthew 11:21, 23

Things Which God Knows

What are some of the specific things which God knows?

God knows the **number and names of the stars.**

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. - Psalm 147:4

The fact that there are billions upon billions of stars in the universe displays the vast knowledge of God.

God knows the **number of hairs on your head.**

Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. - Matthew 10:30

The implication of this truth is that God knows the smallest details of our lives.

God knows man's **thoughts, words, actions, and motives.**

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. - Psalm 139:1-4



Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two *you have chosen*. - Acts 1:24

God knows everything we think, say, and do, and why we think what we think, say what we say, and do what we do.

Implications of Divine Omniscience

What practical impact should God’s omniscience have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is omniscient, we are **accountable to Him**.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. - Hebrews 4:13 (see also Psalm 33:13–15)

At the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10–15, 2 Corinthians 5:10), every church age believer will have to answer to the God who created and saved him concerning everything he thought, said, and did from the moment of conversion.

Because God is omniscient, we should be motivated to **forsake sin and pursue righteousness**.

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. - Proverbs 15:3 (see also Psalm 90:8)

There is both a negative and a positive aspect to God’s omniscience. Negatively, God sees all the wickedness that we do and judges us accordingly. This is a sobering thought. As Tozer states: “That God knows each person through and through can be a cause of shaking fear to the man that has something to hide—some unforsaken sin, some secret crime committed against man or God” (Tozer, p. 57). Positively, however, God also sees all the good that we do and rewards us accordingly. Both of these aspects should compel us to shun evil and do right.



Because God is omniscient, we should invite His scrutiny.

As we saw earlier, David begins Psalm 139 by declaring God's omniscience. Notice how he ends the very same Psalm:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. - Psalm 139:23-24

David realized that he could not possibly hide anything from God. Consequently, he invited God to "search him out" in order to make known to him where he was failing. Such should be our response to God's omniscience. We have nothing to hide before God. It is futile for us to even try. Therefore, we ought to invite God to scrutinize every part of our being in order to show us where we fall short.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is omniscient, or all-knowing. God knows all things past, present, and future, whether actual or possible, instantaneously. Some of the things which God knows include the number and names of the stars, the number of hairs on our heads, and the thoughts, words, actions, and motives of mankind. Because God is omniscient, we are accountable to Him. Consequently, we should be motivated to forsake sin and pursue righteousness. Furthermore, we ought to invite God's scrutiny upon our lives.

For Further Discussion

If God is omniscient, how is it that Jesus said that He didn't know some things?



God is Omnipresent

He is Everywhere

THUS FAR, we have studied three of the attributes of God's greatness: His sovereignty, His omnipotence, and His omniscience. Today, we are going to learn about a fourth such attribute—God's omnipresence.

The Meaning of Omnipresence

The word "omnipresence" is a compound word, consisting of the prefix "omni," meaning *all*, and the root "present." Put the two together and you have the literal meaning of the term: God is omnipresent, that is, He is all-present or everywhere. Being infinite, or unlimited, God is not limited by space. Unlike you and me, God cannot be localized. His presence fills the entirety of the universe at every moment.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. - Psalm 139:7–12

"Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD. - Jeremiah 23:24



Though God is present everywhere, the manifestations of His presence vary. For example, God's pres-

On Immanence and Transcendence

Closely related to the attribute of omnipresence are the attributes of immanence and transcendence. God is immanent, that is, He is present within His creation. However, He is also transcendent, that is, He is present above, beyond, or apart from His creation. Jeremiah 23:23 alludes to both of these facts: "Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away?" An overemphasis on either of these truths leads to theological error. To emphasize God's immanence over His transcendence leads to panthe-

continued. . .

ence in man differs from His presence in animals (His image is reflected in the former, but not in the latter.). Likewise, His presence in the saved differs from His presence in the unsaved (He indwells the former through His Holy Spirit, but not the latter.). In like manner, His presence in heaven differs from His presence on earth or in hell (Heaven is His permanent abode.).

Implications of Divine Omnipresence

What practical impact should God's omnipresence have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is omnipresent, we cannot escape from Him.

"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. - Jeremiah 23:24

Like David in Psalm 139, we must acknowledge the fact that we cannot hide or run away from God. Jonah learned this lesson the hard way. Rather than trying to run away from God, we should find ourselves running *to* Him.

Because God is omnipresent, we can take comfort in His presence.

If you are a believer, God's Holy Spirit permanently indwells you (1 Corinthians 6:19). God is always with you! This should be a source of great comfort, especially in times of difficulty.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. - Matthew 28:20

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. - Hebrews 13:5

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is omnipresent or everywhere. His presence fills the entire universe at all times. Because God is omnipresent,



ism (the belief that the universe is god, not that God is a person who created the universe and is, thus, separate from it).

To emphasize God's transcendence over His immanence leads to deism (the belief that God is so separate from His creation that He is not personally involved in it).

we cannot escape from Him. For the Christian, God's omnipresence should be a source of great comfort.

For Further Discussion

1. Is God present in hell?
2. Is Jesus omnipresent? If He's in heaven, how can He be everywhere else?



God is All-Wise

He Makes No Mistakes

HAVING CONCLUDED our study of the attributes of God's greatness (those attributes which belong exclusively to God alone and are not found in mankind), we now turn our attention to some of the attributes of God's goodness (those attributes which are found in God to a perfect degree and are found in mankind to a limited degree). The first such attribute we will study is the fact that God is all-wise.

The Meaning of All-Wise

What exactly do we mean when we say that God is all-wise? In order to answer this question, we must first distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the possession of facts. Wisdom goes a step further. Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. Thus, one can possess a lot of knowledge and yet be unwise. Likewise, one can have relatively little knowledge and yet be wise. This does not imply, however, that knowledge is unimportant. We should make every effort to acquire as much knowledge as possible, for it is only by possessing knowledge that we can make proper use of it. God is both omniscient and all-wise. He knows all the facts and knows how to properly use such facts. Being omnipotent, He has the ability to properly use them.

Whereas knowledge is amoral (morally neutral; neither moral nor immoral), wisdom is not. One can use knowledge either properly or improperly. Because God is morally perfect, He always uses His knowl-



edge perfectly. In other words, He makes no mistakes. Everything He does is right. Nothing God does can be improved upon. Nothing can be added to or taken away from what God does in order to make it better.

The Display of God's Wisdom

There are two primary means whereby God has chosen to display His wisdom:

God's wisdom is displayed in **creation**.

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. - Psalm 104:24

The incredible organization and complexity of nature is no accident. It reveals the Creator's wisdom.

God's wisdom is displayed in **redemption**.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. - Ephesians 3:10

The Results of God's Wisdom

Because God is all-wise, everything He does produces a two-fold result:

God's wisdom results in **His glory**.

I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. - Ecclesiastes 3:14

The primary reason why God does anything is to bring honor and glory unto Himself. Being God, He has no other choice but to do so. He would be unjust were He not to give Himself the honor and glory which He so richly deserves.



God's wisdom results in **man's good**.

God's wisdom benefits believers.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. - Romans 8:28

Because God loves His children, everything He does in relation to them is for their ultimate good. Though under no external compulsion to do so, God chooses to do "special" things for the believer's benefit. These things primarily center around the believer's redemption from sin and all the benefits that result from such. This is part of the doctrine known as "special grace."

God's wisdom benefits unbelievers.

Though completely undeserving, unbelievers are also beneficiaries of God's wisdom. This is part of the doctrine known as "common grace."

"All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for His own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time" (Tozer, p. 60). A perfect example of this two-fold result of God's wisdom is seen in the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Obviously, Lazarus' resurrection was very beneficial to several individuals, especially to Lazarus. Notice, however, the ultimate reason for this great miracle, as declared by Christ prior to the fact: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). God does all that He does for His glory and our good.

Implications of Divine Wisdom

What practical impact should God's wisdom have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is all-wise, we should glorify Him.

To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! - Romans 16:27



As mentioned above, God employs His wisdom in order to glorify Himself. Our response should be to ascribe unto Him the honor and glory due Him.

Because God is all-wise, we should never question what He does.

Whenever we consider what God does, we must remember that we are looking at such from a very limited perspective. Being finite, we do not know all that God knows. Therefore, we must not to question God's character by accusing Him of being unwise in His dealings with us. No matter how "bad" something might seem to us, it is in reality a good thing. Though we may not presently understand how, God is being glorified and man is being benefitted by it.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is all-wise, that is, He makes no mistakes. Everything He does is right. God's wisdom is primarily displayed in creation and redemption. God's wisdom results in His glory and man's good. Because God is all-wise, we should glorify Him and never question what He does.

For Further Discussion

1. How could anyone ever call things like natural disasters, wars, or disease good?

2. What should our attitude be when bad things happen to us?



God is Holy

He is Perfectly Pure

IN LESSON SIX, we began our study of the attributes of God’s goodness with a look at the fact that God is all-wise. Today, we will examine another attribute of God’s goodness—His holiness. As you may recall, we touched briefly upon this attribute in Lesson One, identifying it as God’s supreme attribute.

The Meaning of Holiness

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” - Isaiah 6:3 (see also Revelation 4:8)

The basic idea behind the word “holy” is that of **separation**. God is separate from everything else. He is unique. This is true in two respects:

God is separate from everything else in a **metaphysical sense.**

There is no other being like God. As Exodus 15:11 declares:

“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (see also 1 Samuel 2:2)

God’s transcendent holiness is the basis for what has been called the Creator/creature distinction. God’s essence or being transcends that of His creation to an infinite degree. Any comparison that is made between ourselves and God is simply a finite represen-



tation of what is in reality an infinite chasm. God is so great that He defies comparison.

God is separate from everything else in a moral sense.

All of creation is tainted by sin to varying degrees. God, however, is totally separate from sin. “[God] is, as it were, allergic to sin and evil” (Erickson, p. 285). As 1 John 1:5 declares:

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (see also Habakkuk 1:13)

Holiness in God involves not only the absence of evil, but also the presence of good. Negatively, God never does anything wrong; positively, He always does everything right. He is perfectly pure.

Implications of Divine Holiness

What practical impact should God’s holiness have upon our lives? Here are three suggestions:

Because God is holy, we should glorify Him.

Whatever the attribute, we should glorify God for who He is. This is especially true when it comes to the attribute of God’s holiness.

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. - Revelation 15:4 (see also Psalm 99)

What are some ways by which we can specifically glorify God for His holiness? Here are two:

In prayer

When teaching His disciples how to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ told them to begin their prayers by acknowledging God the Father’s holiness:

“This then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed [or holy] be your name.’” - Matthew 6:9



Holiness and Separation

(2Co 6:14–7:1; 2Jo 10–11)

God's holiness is the theological basis behind the doctrine known as "separation." Because God is holy and, thus, separate from sin, we, His children, should take measures to separate ourselves from sin. Separation takes place on two levels: corporately (or ecclesiastically) and personally. Corporately, we as a church have a responsibility to separate from any church or religious organization which practices theological compromise (liberals) or which associates with one which does (new evangelicals). Personally, we as individual believers have a responsibility to separate from evil by developing personal standards of conduct designed to prevent us and/or those around us from being tempted to sin in the first place.

In song

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. - Psalm 30:4

Notice that the above verse is a command. Thus, failure to praise God for His holiness in song is a sin.

Because God is holy, we should acknowledge our unholiness.

When one begins to comprehend just how holy God is, his response should be similar to that of Isaiah and Peter:

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." - Isaiah 6:5

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" - Luke 5:8

Because God is holy, we should be holy ourselves.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." - 1 Peter 1:15-16 (see also Matthew 5:48)

God is perfectly pure. As believers, it should be our desire to be the same. Though we continually fall far short of this lofty goal, we must still seek to be holy until the time when we will be morally holy.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. - 1 John 3:2–3

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is holy—He is separate from His creation in both a metaphysical and moral sense. God is perfectly pure. Because God is holy, we should glorify Him, acknowledge our unholiness, and be holy ourselves.



For Further Discussion

1. What makes it possible for a holy God to associate with sinful people?
2. How can we practice separation without isolating ourselves?
3. How should the holiness of God affect the way our worship services are conducted?
4. Why does God tell us to do something (be holy) that is impossible to do?



God is Love

He Does What is Best for Us

THUS FAR, we have looked at two of the attributes of God’s goodness: His wisdom and His holiness. Today, we are going to examine a third—His love.

The Meaning of Love

Love is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. According to most people, love is the warm, fuzzy feeling you get when you’re with someone you really like. According to Scripture, however, love is something altogether different. Rather than a feeling, love is a **choice**; rather than an emotion, it is an act of the **will**. In other words, love is not some passive feeling that suddenly and inexplicably comes over you. Rather, it is an **active** choice that is purposefully and thoughtfully made. Love is not something you “fall into”; instead, it’s something you “jump into.” There is no such thing as “love at first sight.” All of this does not imply, however, that love is devoid of feeling. Feelings are a natural *by-product* of the choice to love, but they are not love itself.

The Love of God

First John 4:8 and 16 tell us that “God is love.” Love is part of God’s nature or essence. In other words, God would not be God without it.



God's love has many distinct characteristics. Below are some of them:

Characteristics of God's love

*God's love is **unconditional**.*

God's love comes with "no strings attached." There are no "if's" in God's love. God does not love us only if we meet certain requirements. He loves us regardless of who we are or what we do. He loves us because He chooses to love us. Period.

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you. - Deuteronomy 7:7-8

"I will . . . love them freely." - Hosea 14:4

Note: Though the above verses refer specifically to the nation of Israel, they do illustrate the fact that God loves freely or unconditionally.

*God's love is **undeserved**.*

Before we were saved, we did not love God in the least bit.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us. - 1 John 4:10

Before we were saved, we hated God. We were His enemies.

When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son. - Romans 5:10

It would be one thing for God to love those who loved Him. However, He loved those who were undeserving of any love from Him.

*God's love is **unending**.*

"I have loved you with an everlasting love." - Jeremiah 31:3

Because God is eternal (He has no beginning or end), all of His attributes are eternal. His love knows no end. He will always love us, no matter what.



There is nothing you can do to cause God to stop loving you.

God's love is unusual.

God's love is unlike human love in every respect. Human love is usually conditional; divine love is always unconditional. Human love is usually given only to those who are considered deserving of such; divine love is given to those who are totally undeserving. Human love is usually temporary; divine love is unending. God's love is indeed unusual. "The New Testament writers had to introduce what was virtually a new Greek word, *agape*, to express the love of God as they knew it" (Packer, p. 112).

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! - 1 John 3:1

Note: The word translated "great" in the above verse is the Greek word *potapos*, which can also be translated "unusual" (cf. Mark 4:41).

The demonstration of God's love

God demonstrates His love for His creation in a variety of ways. The supreme expression of His love, however, was the sending of His Son to die for the sins of mankind.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. - John 3:16

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. - 1 John 3:16

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. - 1 John 4:9-10



A definition of God's love

God's love may be defined as that in God which moves Him to do what is best for His creatures. Because God is love, He does what is best for us.

Implications of Divine Love

What practical impact should God's love have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is love, we should glorify Him.

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
- Psalm 63:3

Because God is love, He disciplines us.

"The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." - Hebrews 12:6

Contrary to current thinking, love is not permissive; rather, it is protective. A permissive parent (one who tends to avoid disciplining his child for sinful behavior) does not truly love his child (in the biblical sense of the word). A parent who truly loves his child will discipline him for sinful behavior in order to prevent that child from persisting in such behavior and suffering the consequences that go along with it. Likewise, God disciplines us in order to protect us from sin and its consequences. Though painful, divine discipline is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:10–11).

Because God is love, we ought to love as well.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. - 1 John 4:11

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

Because they are the only ones who truly understand what love is, Christians ought to be the most loving people on the face of the earth. Our lives must be characterized by love—doing what is best for others.



Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is love, that is, He does what is best for us. God's love is unconditional, undeserved, and unending. In a word, it is unusual. The supreme demonstration of God's love was the death of His Son for mankind's sin. Because God is love, we ought to glorify Him. Furthermore, because God is love, He disciplines us. Finally, because God is love, we ought to love as well.

For Further Discussion

1. What's wrong with the common, worldly definition of love? What if God loved us that way?
2. If God didn't discipline us when we sin, what would that say about His love for us?
3. Read 1 John 3:14. What is true of those who love fellow believers? What is true of those who don't?



God is Merciful

He Doesn't Always Give Us What We Deserve

LAST TIME, we learned that God is love—He does what is best for us. There are many ways whereby God expresses His love for mankind. One such expression of His love is His grace, which we will study next week. This week, we will study the expression of His love known as His mercy.

The Meaning of Mercy

In Luke 18, Jesus taught a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector. In the parable, the Pharisee proudly boasted about his “righteousness,” while the tax collector humbly confessed his sinfulness. The tax collector’s plea was: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). This man understood that because of his sin, he deserved nothing but God’s displeasure. However, he also understood that God is merciful, that is, ***He doesn’t always give us what we deserve.*** Therefore, the tax collector appealed to God’s mercy, begging God not to give him what he deserved. As a result, God mercifully withheld His judgment and graciously granted the tax collector eternal life (Luke 18:14). Rather than condemnation, the tax collector experienced justification.

Like the tax collector, we deserve nothing but God’s judgment for our sin. Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death.” Because we are sinners, we deserve death, both physically and spiritually. Do you realize that every breath you take is a testament



to God's mercy? Because of our sin, we don't deserve to live another day. Yet, God in His mercy doesn't give us that which we deserve. He graciously grants us the gift of physical life (see Nehemiah 9:31). Even more amazing is God's mercy in salvation. No one deserves eternal life. All of us deserve to spend eternity in hell because of our sin. Yet, God mercifully grants eternal life to undeserving sinners (see Ephesians 2:4 and 1 Peter 1:3).

Related Concepts

Grace

Closely associated with God's mercy is His grace. Whereas mercy may be defined as not getting what one deserves, grace may be defined as getting what one does not deserve. In other words, mercy is the withholding of deserved cursing, while grace is the bestowing of undeserved blessing. We will examine God's grace more closely next time.

Pity and compassion

Some other concepts which are related to mercy are pity and compassion. Pity may be understood as the emotional facet of mercy, while compassion may be viewed as its volitional facet. Because God is merciful, He "feels sorry" for us due to our miserable condition. His compassion is that which causes Him to do something about it. In His mercy, He relieves the misery caused by our sin.

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. - James 5:11

Long-suffering

Yet another concept closely associated with mercy is long-suffering. To be long-suffering is to be patient. Because God is merciful, He patiently "puts up with" our sinfulness. It is God's long-suffering which prevents Him from immediately unleashing His justice on sinners.



He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. - 2 Peter 3:9

Forgiveness

A final concept related to mercy is forgiveness. God in His mercy forgives or pardons those who have offended His holiness by their sin.

Implications of Divine Mercy

What practical impact should God's mercy have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is merciful, we should be merciful.

Believers are to make every effort to reflect God's attributes of goodness. Thus, we should be merciful because God is merciful. Jesus emphasized this very point in a parable He taught in Matthew 18:23–35. Though shown great mercy by his master, the wicked servant showed no mercy to a fellow servant. In like manner, we have been shown great mercy by our Master. May we respond by freely showing mercy to others.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. - Colossians 3:13

Because God is merciful, we should be grateful.

God in His mercy withholds the judgment which we so greatly deserve. If this fact does not produce in us an attitude of gratitude, nothing will. "We should be amazed that we suffer so little for the consequences of our sin" (DeHaan, p. 56).

Because God is merciful, we should be humble.

Like the tax collector in the parable referred to earlier, we should be humbled by the thought of God's mercy. The more we fully understand what mercy is all about, the more humbled we should be that God has chosen to shed it upon us so abundantly.



Thomas Hooker, one of the Puritans, was told by his friends while on his deathbed: “Brother Hooker, you are going to receive your reward shortly.” Hooker responded: “No, no, I go to receive mercy” (DeHaan, p. 58).

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is merciful, that is, He doesn't always give us what we deserve. Other concepts which are related to mercy include grace, pity, compassion, long-suffering, and forgiveness. Because God is merciful, we should be merciful, grateful, and humble.

For Further Discussion

Why can God mercifully forgive our sin?



God is Gracious

He Sometimes Gives Us What We Don't Deserve

IN LESSON NINE, we studied the attribute of God's goodness known as mercy. Because God is merciful, He does not always give us what we deserve. The flip side of mercy is grace. In this tenth lesson in this series on God's attributes, we will learn what God's grace is and what practical impact it should have upon our lives.

The Meaning of Grace

The Greek word translated "grace" in the New Testament is *charis*, which means "to stoop or bend down." To be gracious means to stoop or bend down to help someone in need. God in His grace stoops or bends down to help us in our hour of need.

The Grace of God

Characteristics of God's grace

*God's grace is **unearned**.*

God's grace is a gift. There is nothing that one can do to earn it. God freely sheds His grace upon those whom He chooses. If one could earn grace, it would cease to be grace.

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. - Romans 11:6



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. - Ephesians 2:8–9

God's grace is undeserved.

It would be one thing if God shed His grace upon those who were somehow deserving of such. However, the fact of the matter is that God is gracious to those who are totally undeserving of His grace—sinners!

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. - Romans 3:23-24

A definition of God's grace

Having identified a few of the key characteristics of God's grace, we can now define it more clearly. God's grace may be defined as His unearned and undeserved favor shown toward sinners. Because God is gracious, He sometimes gives us what we do not deserve.

Manifestations of God's grace

God's grace is manifested in salvation.

Because of sin, there is no one who earns or deserves God's favor. God, however, mercifully spares certain individuals from the consequences of their sin and graciously gives them eternal life.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. - Ephesians 2:6–7 (see also Ephesians 1:7 and Titus 3:7)

God's grace is manifested in sanctification.

Not only is salvation all of grace, but so is sanctification. The ability to do right after one is saved is a gracious gift from God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of



them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. - 1 Corinthians 15:10

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. - Titus 2:11–12

Note: Sadly, there are some who believe that God’s grace excuses the believer from the responsibility to lead a righteous life. Grace, however, does not give one a license to sin (see Romans 6:1–2). Rather, as Titus 2:11–12 indicates, grace and godly living go hand-in-hand. Thus, the claim by some that God’s grace eliminates the responsibility of believers to develop and abide by personal standards of conduct does not hold any water.

God’s grace is manifested in service.

The Apostle Paul understood that it was only by God’s grace that he was able to experience the privilege of being in the ministry. Such should be our attitude when it comes to serving the Lord through our local church.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. - Ephesians 3:7–8

God’s grace is manifested in suffering.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” - 2 Corinthians 12:7–9

Like Paul, we must understand that God uses suffering as a means of displaying His grace.

Aspects of God’s grace

There are two aspects of God’s grace commonly identified by theologians: **common** grace and **special** grace.



Common grace

Common grace is common because it is shown toward all men. Common grace is displayed in God's provisions for mankind (Matthew 5:45, Acts 17:25), the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:6–7), and the ability of man to do cultural or civic good (Luke 6:33).

Special grace

Special grace is special because it is shown only toward believers. Special grace is displayed in salvation and all the benefits which accompany salvation.

Implications of God's Grace

What practical impact should God's grace have upon our lives? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is gracious, we should be gracious.

As believers, we are expected to reflect the attributes of God's goodness in our lives. Thus, because God is gracious, we should be too. Our lives should be characterized by doing good to others even though they do not deserve it.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." - Matthew 5:43–44

Because God is gracious, we should be humble.

As mentioned above, God's grace is unearned. It is a gift. This fact should always humble us. There is nothing that we have done, are doing, or ever will do which obligates God to favor us. We deserve no credit for our salvation or sanctification.

Because God is gracious, we should be grateful.

As also mentioned above, God's grace is undeserved. No one deserves the least of God's favor. This fact should cause us to always have an attitude of gratitude.



Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is gracious, that is, He sometimes gives us what we do not deserve. God's grace is both unearned and undeserved. It is manifested in salvation, sanctification, service, and suffering. The two aspects of God's grace are His common grace and special grace. Because God is gracious, we should be gracious, humble, and grateful.

For Further Discussion

1. What are those who try to earn or merit salvation's saying about God's grace?
2. What is the difference between common and special grace?



God is Just

He is a Righteous Judge

IN THIS ELEVENTH and final lesson in this series on the attributes of God, we will study one more of God's attributes of goodness, His justice.

The Meaning of Just

What exactly do we mean when we say that God is just? There are basically two aspects to justice: its essence and its expression. The *essence* of justice involves a sense of fairness or rightness. When we say that justice has been served, we mean that a fair or right penalty has been given for a crime committed. The *expression* of justice involves the actual executing of the penalty. Thus, when we say that God is just, we mean that He is a righteous judge. He deals fairly or rightly with men, punishing or rewarding them in accordance with what they deserve (unless He decides to act in mercy by not giving them what they deserve or in grace by giving them what they don't deserve), and He executes or carries out the deserved punishment or reward.

I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. - Deuteronomy 32:3-4



The Essence of God's Justice

As mentioned above, the essence of justice involves a sense of fairness or rightness. In order to decide whether or not something is fair or right, however, one must have a standard by which to determine fairness or rightness. When it comes to God's justice, the standard is **God Himself**. There is no standard of fairness or rightness external to God to which He must conform. He is the standard. Thus, everything God does is fair and right. God is never unfair in His dealings with us, though it may sometimes seem like it from our perspective. However, our perspective is limited.

Asaph realized this truth in the seventy-third Psalm. From Asaph's limited perspective, it seemed like God was being unjust in allowing the wicked to prosper (verses 3–12) and the righteous to suffer (verses 13–14). However, once he understood God's unlimited perspective, his doubts about God's justice were dispelled (verses 16–28).

The Expression of God's Justice

The means

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil . . . but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good. - Romans 2:9–10

There are basically two ways whereby God expresses His justice:

God expresses His justice by **punishing disobedience**.

The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him. - Daniel 9:14

Since God Himself is perfect, He demands that we be perfect (Matthew 5:48). However, we are very much imperfect. As a result, we deserve to be punished for our disobedience, as were the Jews in Daniel's day. The form such punishment takes may vary.



The fact remains, however, that God is perfectly just in punishing us for our sin.

God expresses His justice by rewarding obedience.

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. - Hebrews 6:10

When we think of God's justice, we usually think of it only in negative terms, i.e., God punishing disobedience. However, His justice also has a positive side. Because God is just, He rewards obedience. Again, the form such reward takes may vary. The fact remains, however, that God is perfectly just in rewarding us for our righteous deeds.

The time

When does God punish disobedience and reward obedience? There are two times when He does so:

God punishes disobedience and rewards obedience in this life.

Sometimes, God chooses to execute His justice upon men during their earthly lifetimes. This was especially true with the Jews during the theocracy. In the theocracy, there was an immediate cause-and-effect relationship between actions and their consequences. The effects of our actions, however, are often far removed from their causes. Nevertheless, the consequences usually come sometime during our earthly existence.

God punishes disobedience and rewards obedience in the hereafter.

We often make the mistake of assuming that God is obligated to execute His justice upon an individual while that individual is still alive on this earth. However, God has all of eternity to execute His justice. This means that even though all wrongs may not be righted in this life, they will be eventually. God's justice demands an eventual reconciliation between men's actions and their consequences. As Erickson states: "The justice of God must not be evaluated on



a short-term basis. Within this life it will often be incomplete or imperfect. Earthly life is not all there is, however. There is a life beyond, and in the scope of all eternity, God's justice will be complete" (Erickson, p. 289).

God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. - Ecclesiastes 12:14

The eventual reconciliation between man's actions and their consequences will take place at two different end-time events:

At the Judgment Seat of Christ

Shortly after the Rapture, all church-age believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive punishment or reward for every action performed after salvation (1 Corinthians 3:10–15, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

At the Great White Throne Judgment

Shortly after the Millennium, all unbelievers of all ages will appear before the Great White Throne Judgment to receive the just punishment for their unbelief—eternal death in hell (Revelation 20:11–15).

Implications of Divine Justice

What practical impact should God's justice have upon you and me? Here are a few suggestions:

Because God is just, we should do right.

From a negative standpoint, God's justice should motivate us to forsake sin, as we realize that God will punish every act of disobedience. From a positive standpoint, God's justice should motivate us to pursue righteousness, as we realize that God will also reward every act of obedience.



Because God is just, we should not take justice into our own hands.

Because God is just, He will eventually right all wrongs. This is His responsibility, not ours. Thus, no matter how tempted to do so, we should never try to take justice into our own hands. God will take care of it.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.- Romans 12:19

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that God is just, that is, He is a righteous judge. The essence of God's justice involves His fair or right response to conformity or lack of conformity to His perfect standard. God expresses His justice by punishing disobedience and rewarding obedience, both in this life and in the hereafter. Because God is just, we should do right and not take justice into our own hands.

For Further Discussion

1. Does it seem fair that the wicked often prosper while the righteous suffer? What did you learn in this lesson that helps explain or understand this better?
2. If God is just, why doesn't He kill every person who sins?
3. Does anyone ever really get away with a crime? Why not?



Review Quiz

True/False

- True** 1. God is what His attributes are.
- False** 2. God's supreme attribute is His love.
- False** 3. Because God is omnipotent, He can do anything.
- True** 4. God does not learn.
- True** 5. Though God is omnipresent, the manifestations of His presence vary from place to place.
- True** 6. Love is primarily a choice, not a feeling; an act of the will, not an emotion.
- True** 7. There is nothing you can do to cause God to stop loving you.
- True** 8. The only thing we deserve from God is hell.
- False** 9. Because God is gracious, we have the freedom to live as we please.
- False** 10. Because God is just, all wrongs will be righted in this life.

Fill in the Blank

- 1. The fact that God is present within His creation is known as **immanence**, while the fact that He is also present above, beyond, and apart from the same is known as **transcendence**.



2. God's holiness is the theological basis behind the doctrine of separation.
3. The writers of the New Testament had to create a new word to describe God's love. That word was agape.

Short Answer

1. Define "attribute."

a word that describes what someone or something is like; a character quality

2. Give a brief definition of all ten attributes we have studied in this series.

God is sovereign—He rules over all

God is omnipotent—He is all-powerful

God is omniscient—He is all-knowing

God is omnipresent—He is all-present or everywhere

God is all-wise—He makes no mistakes

God is holy—He is perfectly pure (and separate from His creation)

God is love—He does what is best for us

God is merciful—He does not always give us what we deserve

God is gracious—He sometimes gives us what we don't deserve

God is just—He is a righteous judge

3. List the two categories into which God's attributes can be classified and explain the difference between the two.

1) Attributes of greatness—exclusively characteristic of God; cannot be shared with mankind

2) Attributes of goodness—can be shared with mankind, though to a very limited degree



4. Distinguish between knowledge and wisdom.

Knowledge is the possession of facts, while wisdom is the proper use of knowledge

5. List the two aspects of God's grace.

1) Common grace

2) Special grace



Resources

Bisagno, John. *God Is*. USA: Victor, 1983.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993.

DeHaan, Dan. *The God You Can Know*. Chicago: Moody, 1982.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985.

MacArthur, John. *The Love of God*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996.

McCune, Rolland. "Systematic Theology I." Class Notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 1995.

Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973.

Pink, Arthur W. *The Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975.

Ryrie, Charles. *Basic Theology*. USA: Victor, 1986.

Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.

NOTE: As a supplement to this series, we recommend R. C. Sproul's six-part video series on the holiness of God.

