

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

[These are lecture notes I used to teach on the Doctrine of God some 12 years ago in our church. I have not tried to rewrite them , therefore they are still in the notes format and not a formal article or essay. It is also easily apparent that they are not finished. I used several sources and at this time I cannot cite them all. I am by no means smart enough to think all this through without the writings of others. I do know that Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* played a major role in my thinking and at times I quoted him quite freely.]

I will begin our study of the doctrine of God by making the assumption that God is knowable and we can know God. I am making the assumption that our best source of knowledge is the Bible. The Bible is many things; it is a history, it is a book of wisdom, it is a book of short pithy sayings. But most of all, the Bible is a revelation of God to us. Because God is our subject, I prefer to begin with the doctrine of God with the assumption of the reliability of his revelation because God is first.

There are many ways to talk about God. There have been many schemes worked by different theologians to discuss the attributes of God. When we speak of attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God which constitute what he is. These are the very characteristics of his nature. Furthermore, attributes are qualities of the entire Godhead and should not be confused with *properties*, which are the distinctive characteristics of the various persons of the Trinity. Properties are functions, activities, and acts of the individual members of the Godhead.

There are many complicated ways to describe and study God's attributes and properties. Some of them are very rational and structured, some almost without structure. The outline that we will use will be as follows based on *Christian Theology*, Millard Erikson (Baker Book Company: 1987):

I. What is God Like

The Greatness of God

The Goodness of God

God's Nearness and Distance

God's Three-In-Oneness

II. What God Does

God's plan

God's Originating Work: Creation

God's Continuing Work: Providence

I. WHAT IS GOD LIKE

A. The Greatness Of God

1. God Is Spirit.

God is not composed of matter and does not possess a physical nature. For instance, John 4: 24, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." And see John 1: 18, I Tim: 17; 6: 15-16.

Consequence of God's spirituality:

- God is not limited by a physical body
- Not limited by time or space
- One can worship God anywhere--not contained in a location or building, see John 4: 21

2. God Is Personal

We may have a hard time defining what the word "personal" means, but we all know what we mean when we compare a person to say a rock. When we say that God is personal we mean the He relates to humans like other humans. God is not inanimate, he is not impersonal. There are those who teach that God is the Great Other or that God is "The Absolute, who is inaccessible to mankind.

There are religions who belief systems conceive of God as impersonal. In Hinduism, reality is *Brahma* which is the whole and the individual parts are called *Atman*. For them, ultimate reality is the impersonal God and man's highest order is to become one with the impersonal God which they call *Nirvana*, a state in which one ceases to strive, one becomes simply at rest. In Buddhism, the difference is one seeks to become one with the Great Reality and in the process ceases to exist all together.

But God has revealed through his word that he is and infinite-personal being. God's personality is revealed in scripture in several ways.

- God has a name, Exod 3: 14, I Am or I will Be, Yahweh. By this he demonstrates that he is not an abstract, unknowable being, or a nameless force. His name is not a mere description, but his name is used to address him.
- God's name is indicative of his nature. God is called by several names and the task of the names is to demonstrate his relationship with persons rather than with nature.

יהוה <i>Yahweh</i> – Lord God	Genesis 4: 3
אהיה <i>Ehyeh</i> – I Am	Exodus 3: 14
יהוה צבאות <i>Yahweh Sebaot</i> – Lord of Hosts	I Samuel 1: 3
אלהים <i>Elohim</i> – the Transcendent Being	Genesis 1: 1
אל עליון <i>El Elyon</i> – God Most High	Deuteronomy 32: 8
אל שדי <i>El Shaddai</i> – God Almighty	Genesis 17: 1
אדוני <i>Adonai</i> – Lord and Master	Genesis 15: 2
יהוה אדני <i>Adonai Yahweh</i> – Lord God	Isaiah 61: 1
אל עולם <i>El Olam</i> – God Everlasting	Genesis 21: 33
אל ראי <i>El Roi</i> – The God Who Sees	Genesis 16: 13
אלהים חיים <i>Elohim Chaym</i> – The Living God	Deuteronomy 5: 26
אל חי <i>El Chay</i> – The Living God	Joshua 3: 10
אל בית אל <i>El Bethel</i> – The God of The House of God	Genesis 31: 13
יהוה יראה <i>Yahweh Yireh</i> – The Lord will Provide	Genesis 22: 14
צור <i>Sur</i> – Rock	Deuteronomy 32: 4
קדוש <i>Qadosh</i> – The Holy One	Isaiah 57: 15
מלך <i>Melek</i> – King	Psalms 5: 2

- God's personal nature is further revealed in the activity that he engages. He knows and communes with man. In Genesis 3, the first interaction of God and man is that God walked in the garden with Adam in the cool of the day.
- We know that God is personal because God has revealed himself as one who knows, feels, wills, acts. In fact, God is the one who defines complete personhood. We are but a mere shadow by comparison.

Because God is personal, there are a number of implications. Because God is personal, our relationship to him has a dimension of warmth and understanding. God is not a machine who dispenses out aid in times of trouble. God is a knowing, loving, good father. He can be approached and spoken to and he in turn speaks to us. Further, our relationship to God is not a one way street. God is our object of respect and reverence. But God is also a living reciprocating

being. He is not merely one whom we hear, but one who we meet and know.

God is an end in himself, not a means to an end. He is of value to us for what he is himself, not merely for what he does. The first commandment in Exod 20: 2, is preceded by the words, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out to the land of Egypt." It is a mistake to read this and believe that the Israelites were to worship God simply because of what he had done, that out of gratitude they were to make him their God. Rather, what he had done was the proof of what he is: it is because of what he is that he is to be loved and served, not only supremely but exclusively. God as a person, He is to be loved for what he is, not for what he can do for us.

3. God Is Life

The most common way you will find the word "life" defined today is something like this: "an organismic state characterized by capacity for metabolism, growth, relationship to stimuli, and reproduction." But when we say God is alive we transcend a mere biological definition of life. In fact, God himself defines life. God is characterized by scripture as living, His covenant name reveals life, I Am Exod, 3: 14. Hebrews 11: says that anyone who "would draw near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Existence is considered a most basic aspect of God nature.

Not only does God have life, his life is different from all else. All living things derive its life from God, God does not derive his life from any external source. He is **eternal**, there has never been a time when he was not. Thus the scripture says In the beginning God...

God is also different from all other life in that his continued existence does not depend upon anything outside of himself. He does not need anything to support his life, he is independent of all need of external support.

God is sometimes described as self-caused. it is better to refer to God as the uncaused. To be God means to exist, it is his very nature. There is one sure thing, there is a God, he always has been and he always will be, he is "from everlasting to everlasting."

4. God is Infinite.

To say that God is infinite means not only that he is unlimited, but that he is unlimitable. This can be seen in several ways.

- In terms of space. This has been traditionally called **immensity** and **omnipresence**. God is not subject to the limitations of space. In fact, it is improper to think of God as

present in space at all. All finite objects have a location, they are one place and not in another. God is the one who brought time and space into being. He was before space. God cannot be localized in any one particular part. See Acts 17: 24-25

- Another aspect of God's infinity in terms of space is that there is no place where he cannot be found. This is the tension of **immanence** of God (he is everywhere) and the **transcendence** of God (he is nowhere). There is no place in creation where God does not have accessibility. see Ps. 139: 7-12. Yet God is above his creation or separate from it.
- God is also infinite in relationship to time. Time does not apply to him because God was before time. The question of how old is God is not appropriate. Infinity plus one is still infinity. God is the Alpha and the Omega Rev. 1: 8 also see Ps. 90: 1-2, Jude 25. God is timeless and he does not grow or develop. Yet this does not mean that he is not conscience of the succession of points of time. He knows what is occurring in Human experience. He acts in history. His acts are a logical order, yet in his willing, there is no temporal order. He has from all eternity determined what he is now doing.
- God is infinite in respect to knowledge. God is all knowing (**Omniscience**). God's understanding is immeasurable, Ps. 147: 5). Also God's wisdom is also infinite, see Romans 11: 33
- The infinite God is all powerful, he is **omnipotent**. God is able to do all things which are proper objects of his power. God identified himself as "I am God Almighty" Gen 17: 1. He caused Sarah to be with child. He judged the world and flooded it. He controls history by his providence. In the Old Testament, no king rose or fell without the action of God. God has the power to change the human heart.

God's power implies that his will is never frustrated and that he is always free. God acts always out of freedom. He acts as the scripture says at his "Good pleasure." However there are limits. He cannot arbitrarily do whatever we might conceive of. he cannot do the logically absurd or contradictory. He cannot make a square circle or triangles with four sides. He cannot act contrary to his nature. He cannot fail to do as he has promised.

5. God Is Constant.

The Bible often speaks of God as unchanging. Ps 102, Ps 33: 11. In Mal. 3: 6 we read, "I the Lord do not change."

- There is no quantitative change. God cannot increase or decrease in anything because he is perfection.
- There is no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification.
- God does not change his mind or his intent

What of passages where it says God has changed his mind or is said to repent over what he has done? These can be explained in several ways:

1. Some of them are anthropomorphisms. They are descriptions of God's actions in human terms
2. It might be a new stage in the working out of God's plan.
3. It is not so much a change in God as a change in man. Man changes his relationship to God by certain actions and God responds accordingly.

Finally, some see in God's unchangingness that he is **immutable**, that is God is unmovable emotionally. The biblical view is not that God is static, but is stable. He is active and dynamic but in a way that is consistent with his nature. In other words God is dependable.

B. THE GOODNESS OF GOD-MORAL QUALITIES

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the goodness of God we are talking about a set of attributes that are not necessarily connected to those we have already talked about. We talked about: God as Spirit, God as personal. God as life, God as infinite, God is constant. But none of these tells us about the moral qualities of God. God might be immoral or amoral. He might exercise his power and knowledge in a capricious or even in a crude fashion. But we have specific information about God. God has revealed to us that he is not only all powerful, all knowing, and all present, but he is also all moral and trustworthy and all loving. God has attributes of goodness as well as greatness. Of course we who are christians know something of God's goodness, we have all experienced it. But have we studied it, can we give a reasoned account of God's goodness to others? Of course a witness to what God has done for us is great and important and vital in witnessing to others, but we will, more often than we would like, run into those who do not love God and who do not believe that God is a loving and moral being. They will be confused by some of the experiences that they have. For instance, C. S. Lewis said that as a little boy, his mother became ill and was dying. He prayed that God might

heal her and yet she died. From that moment on, he said that he stopped believing in God, even as a small child. He thought that not healing his mother was a immoral act so, either God was immoral and not worthy of our worship or he was not able to heal here and still not worthy of our worship or there is no God. He was in his fifties before he became a follower of Christ.

We want to affirm here and now that God is good and moral. We want to study here in detail what we mean by God's goodness. It is multifaceted, it has it demanding side and it has it's compassionate side. There are parts of God's goodness that we will like and parts that we will live in horror of. The outline that we will use to discuss God's goodness is as follows:

- Moral Purity
- Holiness
- Righteousness
- Justice
- Integrity
- Genuineness
- Veracity
- Faithfulness
- Love
- Benevolence
- Grace
- Mercy
- Persistence
- God's Love and Justice—A Point of Tension?

1. Moral Purity

By moral purity we are referring to God's absolute freedom for anything wicked or evil. His moral purity includes the dimensions of 1. holiness, 2. righteousness, and 3. justice.

a. Holiness Lev. 11: 44-45, Isa 6, Mt. 5: 48, Lk. 5: 8

- There are two basic concepts of holiness. The first is God's **uniqueness**. God is totally separated from all of creation. This is affirmed in Ex. 15: 11. God is considered lofty and lifted up. To be called into his presence is a terrible experience. God is always separated from creation. He is not seen. I Isa. 6, smoke fills the temple and Isaiah does not see God face to face but only his presence. Yet he is terrified by the holy presence.

- The Hebrew word for holy is qadosh which means marked off or withdrawn from common, ordinary use. The verb means to cut off or to separate. When the other people referred to the holy they applied it to sticks and stones and trees and totems. But in Israel it was applied to God and only to those things which God claimed to be holy such holy ground or mountain or people. They became holy because they were associated with the thrice holy God and thus were themselves separated, set aside and withdrawn from ordinary use. These separate things were not for ordinary use. When Moses went to the holy mountain, only he could touch it. If any other Israelite touched the mountain, he would die.

The same was true later when the temple was built. The Holy of Holies was the symbolic place where God dwelt. It was symbolic because God cannot be contained in a building. It was here that God met Israel once a year to forgive their sins. The Holy of Holies was separated by a huge veil which is estimated to be about a foot thick. No one was allowed to enter there except the High Priest and only he once a year. He had to make preparations to enter the Holy of Holies. Proper reaction to God's holiness, his separateness is one of awe, reverence, and silence. "Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is he! Ps. 99: 3.

- The other aspect of God's holiness is his **absolute purity or goodness**. This means that he is untouched or unstained by the evil that is in the world. God does not participate in evil at all. (This is contrary to much of the eastern religion ying and yang--Buddhism, and to Hindu religion, both see God as the author of both good and evil and that good and evil are both part of God.) Note Habakkuk 1: 13, Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look upon wrong." James says that God cannot be tempted with evil.
- God's perfection is the standard for our Moral character and the motivation of religious practice. See Lev. 11: 44-45. For I am the Lord your God; Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves therefore, and be holy for I am holy.... God expects his people to be Holy and we shall see what that means. It means to live righteously and ethically. It means imitating God.
- Because of the holiness and flawlessness of God, a similar quality is expected of those objects or persons set apart unto him. Priests are to be without physical blemish. The same was true of sacrificial animals. Worshippers were not to bring blemished or defective animals, but rather, perfect ones without blemish, Lev. 1: 3, 10, 3: 1, 6, 4: 3.

- The holiness of God is stressed throughout the Bible. It is in both the OT and NT, but is predominant in the OT. WE need to take God's holiness seriously. We need to see that God is allergic to sin and evil and that to the extent we allow sin into our lives we are an offense to God. God is Holy and calls for us to be holy. When Isaiah entered the temple and was in the presence of the Holy God, he was paralyzed and was undone. He knew by the presence that holiness is a **terror** to the ordinary man. But when we approach God, we often times do so with an air of casualness that borders on heresy because we do not acknowledge the holiness of God. Yes God is our father, Yes God has saved us, but yes also, He is the holy God. Paul wrote of his holiness and Jesus spoke of his holiness. We also need to take seriously the idea that God's people is called to be a holy people. We need to take that so seriously that we spend time meditating on in so that we might come to understand what it means for us to be holy.

Isaiah 6: 1-6

"I SAW THE LORD"

As I mentioned before, the prophets were strange people. They were rugged individualists who were singled out by God for a painful task. He served as a prosecuting attorney of sorts, an appointed spokesman of the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth, to bring suit against those who have sinned against God.

The prophet was no earthly philosopher who wrote opinions for scholars to discuss, he was not a playwright who composed dramas for public entertainment. He was a messenger, a herald of a cosmic king.

The prophet's lives were ones of sorrow. They were killed for their unpopular work. They were appointed by God to such suffering. The prophet's curse was solitude and his home was often a cave. I have heard many preachers, most of them young, say that they were called as a prophet, modeled after the prophets of old. When they ask for such a life, they don't really know what they are asking.

The prophets were a varied people. Micah lived in a small town and ministered to the people of the villages and towns of Judah. He championed the causes of the people from these small places. Then there was Amos. Amos was a country boy who went to the city. He snorted every time he saw a palace. He rejected the way of the mighty who oppressed the weak and defenseless of society.

Hosea proclaimed the word of God from the background of a broken home. God somehow worked through Hosea's heartbreak to show the prophet and the nation, the love of God for a wayward and rebellious people.

Jeremiah showed a sensitive and compassionate spirit and often bizarre behavior. Ezekiel exhibited tendencies toward the dramatic. But, Isaiah was different. He grew up in the capital city

of Jerusalem. He came from the royal family and was probably wealthy. He counseled kings and lead Judah through times. Why would such a man choose to be a prophet? The answer is he did not.

What set a prophet apart from all others was his call. He call was not from men. he could not apply for the job, he had been selected, chosen directly and immediately by God. And the call was sovereign, it could not be refused.

It is from Isaiah's call that we can learn some significant things about the idea of holiness. Isaiah was called in the middle of a crisis. Uzziah, the king had died. Uzziah was a good king who had ruled long and well. The Bible tells us that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. But his reign ended sadly. His career was marred by the sin of pride. He tried to play God. He boldly entered the temple and arrogantly claimed for himself rights that only belong to the priests. When the priests tried to stop him, he became enraged. While screaming at them in fury, leprosy broke out on his forehead. The Bible says of him: "He lived in a separate house--being a leper...cut of from the house of the Lord" 2 Chron. 26: 21.

The king was dead. His otherwise remarkable reign ended in sorrow. Yet, he was the beloved king and except for this episode, he had led the people in the paths of God.

But when Isaiah entered the temple, perhaps with sadness in his heart for the deceased king and concern for what the future would hold-who would be the next king, He saw the real king, the Ultimate king, the one who sat on the throne of Judah forever. He saw the Lord.

Who did Isaiah see? The word Lord is not capitalized. This means that the word there is Adonai. This means the Sovereign One. The name of God is not called. The emphasis is not the covenant and personal name of God, Yahweh, it was upon the sovereignty of God, he was and is king. When Isaiah came to the temple there was a crisis of sovereignty in the land, but Isaiah was to learn that the crisis was not real, the king was still on his throne.

Isaiah saw God. But he did not see God's face. The scripture says that no man can see God and live. To see God was a very serious thing. Moses had been a man who asked to see God. Remember that Moses had been a witness to some astonishing miracles. He had heard the voice of God from the bush that would not burn up. He had seen the Great river Nile turn to blood. He had tasted the manna that fell from heaven. Moses was lead by the pillar of fire and the Cloud of smoke. He had watched as the soldiers of Pharaoh drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. Yet he wanted more. He wanted to see God. He craved that ultimate spiritual experience. He inquired of the Lord on the mountain, "Let me see your face. Show me your Glory." The request was denied. Read Exodus 33: 19-23

When God told Moses that he could see His back, the text literally reads, "hind quarters." God allowed moses to see his hind quarters, but never his face. When moses returned to the people, his face was shining. The people were terrified and they shrunk away from him in horror. Moses face was too dazzling for them to look upon. This terror was directed as the face of a man who had come so close to God that he reflected God's Glory. This was the reflection of the glory from the back of God, not the full brilliance of the Glory of His face. If the people were terrified by the fading, reflected glory of the backside of God, how could any one stand in gaze directly into His Holy face?

Many today might just write this off as the experience of superstitious and primitive people. But we must not. We must understand that this carries us close to the idea of the holiness of God. His holiness is frightful for sinful man. But the fact is, the final goal of every Christian is to be allowed to see what was denied to Moses, we want to see the face of God. For the ancient Hebrew, it was a hope and a prayer, "The lord bless you and keep: the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; The lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." But this hope is promised to those who are in Christ. "Now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. This is called by Theologians the Beatific Vision. We will see God as He is. We will not see a burning bush or a reflection, but face to face.

But for now, it is impossible. Jesus said blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. We aren't yet pure in heart. One day, we will be and we shall see God.

That is what Isaiah saw. He declared that He saw the Lord, the Sovereign One. As we further study and reflect and meditate on this passage, I hope we will learn something about the holiness of God. We will see its pain, its terrors and its hope. I hope after much reflection we will never again view the idea of holiness as unimportant.

Isaiah 6: 1-6

WOE IS ME, FOR I AM UNDONE

The last time that we looked at this passage, we noted that Holiness one of the main characteristics that describe God to us. We experience God first and foremost as the Holy. For Isaiah, the first indication of holiness is associated with the idea of God's Sovereignty. He is the one who is lofty, high and lifted up. His presence filled the temple and the temple shook in his presence. Isaiah saw this vision when there was a crisis of sovereignty in the land for the king had died. He was assured even though the sovereign earthly king had died, The Sovereign One, Adonai was still Lord.

The angels are not human creatures. We don't know much about them, there are brief mentions of them in the Bible. We know that they are special servants of God. They are holy, they are set apart for service to God.

Yet, their holiness is not the same as the holiness of God. Even they, who live in the physical presence of God, treat God with awesome respect. They had six wings. With one pair they covered their face. They shielded their eyes from the direct gaze on the face of God. Even they must not look directly on God.

The second pair of wings covered their feet. The covering of feet is reminiscent of Moses' experience at the burning bush. Moses removing his shoes symbolized his creatureliness, feet of clay

kin to the earth. The Seraphim are not of the earth, they are spirit beings. yet they are creaturely and they too must cover their feet in respect to God.

With the third pair of wings they flew and as they flew they cried out "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the earth is full of his glory." Note, they did not sing, they cried out. As far as we know, angels do not sing. We don't really comprehend the significance of the three Holy's. In English if we want to emphasize something in print, we might bold it, put it in Italics, underline and follow it with exclamation marks. But in Hebrew language, both spoken and written, the way to emphasize something important is to repeat it. Usually something was repeated twice. Jesus often said, amen, amen, it is true, it is true. But only on a few occasions does the Bible repeat sometime three times. The repetition of three time is to elevate the subject to the superlative degree, the highest degree. When the angels say Holy, Holy, Holy, we must give maximum attention to these words for they are of ultimate importance to us.

In the midst of all of this, the doorpost and thresholds were moved. This was no little feat. The Temple was a huge building and the doors were thick. The temple was over thirty feet high and the walls were at least a foot thick. it was awesome power that shook the temple. It was the presence of God that shook the temple.

But the temple was not the only thing that was shaking. Isaiah was trembling at the very presence of God. He cried out woe is me, for I am ruined. We are not too familiar with this word woe it is not a part of our today's vocabulary. But this was a pronouncement of doom. When a prophet pronounced an oracle, he would often tell the people good news by saying the word blessed. But if the news was bad, the woe would be used. It indicated doom and helplessness and judgement. In the Bible cities are doomed, nations are doomed, individuals are doomed, all are doomed by the use of the word woe. Jesus used the word in condemning the scribes and pharisees, Woe unto you.

When Isaiah saw God, he pronounced the judgment of God upon himself. he cried down the curse of God on himself. He called down upon himself the judgment of God, because he knew he was undone. He was judged by the very presence of God. There was something about being in the presence of God that frightened Isaiah; But also, being in the presence of God judged him. He was in the presence of the Holy.

My translation says I am ruined. The older translations use the word undone. Isaiah was disintegrating, he was coming apart at the seams. But if there was ever a man of integrity, it was Isaiah. But in a moment he was undone. "Then he caught one sudden glimpse of a Holy God. In that single moment all of his self-esteem was shattered. In a brief he was exposed, made naked beneath the gaze of the absolute standard of holiness. As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals, he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character. The instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed--morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone. He came apart. His sense of integrity." (Sproul, Holiness of God, p. 44)

Notice that he did not say that he had an unclean heart or unclean habits, but unclean lips. He recognized that the mouth expressed all that a man is and that even being among the best, Isaiah was still unclean. While still groveling on the floor, God sent one of the angels to take a coal from the

alter and to touch Isaiah's mouth so that he might be clean. His groveling was a form of repentance and the cleansing was painful, but Holiness is also expressed in grace, and God gracefully cleansed Isaiah.

I spent time going through this story about Isaiah, a story that I have preached on before. But the reason is this, I cannot define for you the word holiness. I can tell you that it means separate, to divide, to mark off, but what does that really communicate? That does not really tell us what Holiness is. But, by looking at this story of the life of Isaiah, we can catch a glimpse of holiness. In older cultures, holy signified an object of awe, whether in the sense of reverence or in aversion. R. Otto said that the experience of the Holy runs a wide range of feelings Otto, p. 12-13. Even with that, holiness is not something that is communicated by definitions alone. When we hear the story of Isaiah, we can relate to Isaiah by remembering the time we were convicted of our sins for instance, that moment when we felt totally unworthy and helpless. We were standing in the presence of the Holy God.

The Righteousness of God

One practical aspect of God's holiness is the righteousness of God. This is the second aspect of God's moral purity. We might view God's righteousness as the holiness of God applied to his relationships to other beings, particularly man. The attribute of righteousness reflects the personal character of God. Where the idea of Holiness tells us that God is not ordinary, that he is separated from the rest of the universe and that to face the holy God is an awesome terror, righteousness tells something personally about God's character.

First I want to make sort of a theological statement. Righteousness is not a standard that is outside of God. There are no moral absolutes, no laws, no concept of righteousness that are outside the nature of God. These concepts emanate from the character God. In other words, there is no law outside of God telling him how to behave. Rather, the idea of right is consistent with the nature of God. Or another way of putting that is that the nature of God defines righteousness.

Now you might ask why is this theo-babble important anyway, it makes since, so why bring that up? The reason is this, our society is constantly looking for a standard of right and wrong. Many people think that we humans just invented the idea of right and wrong. Some theorize that we humans made up the idea of morality and the idea of right and wrong so that society might run smoothly. So, each generation seeks to define it's standard of right and wrong. The humanist think that they have enough insight to develop a moral code. The politicians think they have that insight, so do the educators and news media, the intellectuals. But the fact is, we can only come to an understanding of right and wrong if we look to some moral absolute, only if we look to God. The whole idea of morality is a product of religious inquiry, not philosophy. Morality is both religious

and practical, not philosophical and abstract. What the Bible tells us about God's law, and consequently his righteousness, is that it is perfect and it is the rule for righteous living. Ps. 19: 7-12.

Practically, this means that, when we ignore God and his Law, we have no basis for morality that we might teach in our schools, or homes or in our common culture. This has had the effect that most people today want the right to determine what is right and wrong. We are told that we can't legislate morality. But that is exactly where we get into trouble when we decide that we make our own right and wrong. We live in a society where people literally do not know what right from wrong.

I am convinced and I hope all Christians are, that the absolute God has the absolute right to tell us his nature and expect us to live in accordance with his nature, particularly in light of the fact that we are made in his image. I believe that God's law has absolute rule over all mankind, but particularly over Christians, we need to not only know God's law, we are called to become conformed to that law.

The Law of God is a reflection of God nature and is consistent with his nature. A good example of this is the ten commandments, Exodus 20: 1-17. An examination of this text tells us a great deal about the righteousness of God. First, the Ten Commandments are prefaced by a reminder that this is the word of the sovereign God who led them out of captivity. This is not the words of Moses or of some king in the land. What we have is the word of God and is a reflection of his character. God is constant and reliable and if he discloses his character to us in his law, we can be sure that this is his character and it has demands on our lives.

The ten words can be outlined in three points;

I. Right relations with God, vv. 2-7

II. Right relation in the Worship of God, vv. 8-11

III. Right relationship with fellow man, vv. 12-17

The righteousness of God demands that man be in right relationship with God and to do so on God's terms. We are the creature, and we were created to acknowledge and worship and love God. No other creature can do that. No other creature has the capacity; intelligence, self awareness, relational. The God who created us calls upon us to relate to him and to acknowledge as creator. God himself made his glory the highest order, he himself functions by that and we humans are called upon to do the same. Thus we are to have no other gods. We are not to worship idols. This means that we are not to put anything before God. You work on Sunday, you maybe putting work before God. You miss church for so activity you may be putting that before God. You choose to live an ungodly life, you have put ungodliness before God. We can make anything a idol, family, job, friends, influence, etc. God's righteousness, to which we have been called to live by, calls us to worship and serve Him only. Further, we are not to take the name of the Lord in vain. To view that simply as cursing, is to miss the meaning of this command completely. We take the name of the Lord in vain when we claim to be a follower of Christ and then do not live by his word. We take

God's name in vain when we do something sinful and do so in the name of God we take his name in vain. For instance when we justify hatred by evoking the name of God we take God's name in vain. The fact is, the righteousness demands of us a right relationship with God and demands that that relationship be done in a certain way.

Secondly, God's righteousness demands that we honor him by keeping the Sabbath. Notice that keeping the Sabbath is a reflection of God's character.

God's righteousness demands that we stand in a proper relationship with our fellow man. Within the Godhead is the triune relationship of Father , Son, And Spirit. This is the model for our relationship to parents. It is not just for social convenience or for the protection of the elderly, but it is a reflection of the nature of God.

The same can be said of the commands, on murder, on adultery, on theft. These all reflect the righteousness. Man made in the image of God is worthy of not being murdered, not being cheated upon or stolen from. We can assume that these ten commandments I think reflect the way the three persons of the trinity interact with each other and they also reflect how God relates to mankind. When we go to God we can expect justice, a true witness from God in his court.

Finally, the sin of covetousness seems to be at the root of all of the commandments. You cannot break one of these without coveting something that is not yours.

Later Jesus summed up the righteous nature of God by reducing the Ten Commandments to two positive statements, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

After examining the holiness of God, how can we enter into a relationship with Him. I mean, he is the wholly other, he is awesome, in some sense a terror for man to go into his presence, he is overpowering and is separate from all other being, there is no one else like him. How does sinful man relate to a God like who is also totally righteous? The answer is that we relate to Him by his grace. He relates to us. He calls us to Himself and he cleanses those who accept Him by faith and he declares us to be righteous. We are commanded to be righteous, the only way we can truly be righteous is to submit ourselves to God and let him make us righteous.

2. Integrity

Genuine—God is always true.

Veracity—God always tell the truth.

Faithfulness—God always proves true. He is true to what he says and does as he says.

3. Love

As we turn to the that last point in the outline, we turn to the subject that we most know about and most want to experience. We want to talk about the love of God. In the Bible God is said to be Holy, Spirit, Light, a Consuming Fire, and Love. Of all of these, I think we prefer to think of God as love. We have a need to be loved and we hope that all love comes from God. We cannot comprehend God as the Infinite one. We cannot really comprehend God as the Holy one, even though we can understand the supra-rational aspects the holiness of God as the awesome Wholly Other. We suspect that we know what the spirit is, but we cannot begin to define it. The idea of God as a consuming fire is not even pleasant to think about. But, the idea of God as love is one of the most impressive thoughts that the Bible speaks to us because we are the recipients of it. It is the one aspect of God that we crave. I think that we also understand that the idea of God as Love is the root of all true love. One poet wrote, "Man cannot comprehend Infinity. Yet the crumb of our pity comes from the whole loaf of God's compassion. The milk of human kindness comes from the dairies of God's love."

The two words that we are most familiar with in the Bible for love are Chesed and Agape. There are other words but most of us are familiar with these words. They are used as that kindly disposition that God has toward man and his eternal giving or sharing of Himself with man. Chesed is often translated as mercy or loving kindness and Agape is defined as self giving, Godly love.

God in his very essence is described as love. The Apostle John said in I John 4: 8 that "God is Love." We can assume that Love is an eternal quality that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Perfect love is practiced perfectly within this triune relationship. We can assume from scripture that love is the nature of God and it is he who defines Love and not a popular idea of love that defines God. Every aspect of God is ruled by love, even his wrath.

We will look at love under four headings; benevolence, grace, mercy, persistence.

Benevolence

Benevolence is the basic dimension of God's love and by it we mean the concern of God for the welfare of those he loves. God seeks out our welfare and wants the best for each of us. The best known passage of scripture that illustrates this is John 3: 16. God's love for mankind, his concern for man's welfare, is that he sent his only begotten son to die for us. There is no greater expression of love for someone than to die for someone.

God's love for us is an unselfish interest in us for our own sake. It is a perfect description of Agape. God loves the unlovable, the worthless for the stand point of righteousness. But We are not worthless precisely because God loves us. This selflessness is seen in what he has done by giving his son, the second person of the trinity. God took the divine initiative in creating a salvation history from the beginning of creation that worked it way through Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, David and lead directly to Jesus and the cross.

Grace

The second aspect of the love of God is **grace**. Grace is defined as how God deals with us on the basis of our needs. God supplies us with undeserved favors. God gives to us generously and abundantly. The first thing that we think of is salvation. We are saved by grace Ephesians tells us. But We also know that God supplies with our other needs and even supplies us with the ability to take care of ourselves. If God gave us what we deserved, none would be saved, we would all stand condemned.

Mercy

The third aspect of love is mercy. Mercy means that God is tenderhearted and compassionate toward us. If Grace contemplates man as sinful, guilty and condemned, mercy sees him as miserable and needy. The psalmist said, "As a father pities his children, so the lord pities those who fear him", (Ps. 103: 13). The Bible shows God pitying his people, he hears their cries and delivers them from injustice, from suffering, from physical ailments. That is why we call upon God for healing. That is why we turn to God in our bereavement. That is why we turn to God when we feel lonely and insignificant. Where would we be without God's mercy?

Persistence

God's love is **persistent**. God is longsuffering in his dealing with us. This was particularly clear in God's dealing with Israel. God raised up a people and yet they constantly doubted him. Remember, he delivered them from Egypt yet they grumbled. They grumbled about the food and the water, and the conditions that they lived under. Yet, God continued to love them and to endure them.

God's persistence was not limited to Israel. Peter suggested that even the flood was delayed hoping man would repent. 2 Peter 3: 9 says that God does not wish "that any should perish, but that all reach repentance." God's persistence is his patient waiting on sinful man to repent and turn to him and it is also his patience that he displays toward us, his children, when more often than not we serve ourselves and not him.

Finally, God's love compels us to love in return. We are compelled to love God. How could we not love God. Equally, we are called to love our fellowman. We are to love our neighbor. We are to love fellow believers. We are to love our families. We are to love even our enemies.