

God's Communicable Attributes

Dear reader,

Last time we asked the question, "What is God like?" We saw that He is unique - unlike any other earthly or heavenly being; for He is Spirit, eternal, omnipresent, independent, sovereign, all-powerful, and unchanging. No human, no animal, no other creature, can claim to have these characteristics.

Today we explain more of God's perfections, to know God better and praise Him more perfectly.

First, God is holy. *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory,"* cried the angels in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:3). That God is holy means that He is free from all sin, and able to do only that which is good. It means also that He seeks His own glory above all, for He is the only Good One (Matthew 19:17). Jesus revealed God's holiness both by His death on the cross (making known God's holy hatred of sin), and in His own complete devotion to God. Think of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt"* (Matthew 27:39).

God is also just, or righteous. All that He does manifests His good and holy Being. Jesus Christ displayed this righteousness by obeying God's law. God's righteousness will be manifest in the day in which Jesus Christ returns to judge all men (Acts 17:31), and is manifest in hearing the prayers of those for whom Christ died: *"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (I John 2:1).

Thirdly, God is wise: *"the only wise God,"* (I Timothy 1:17). Being wise, God knows the best way to attain His goal, which goal is the glory of His name in the salvation of His church. Christ is the revelation of God's wisdom - so much so that the apostle Paul calls Him *"Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God"* (I Corinthians 1:24). The only way in which God could save His church was the way of payment for sin; Christ paid for our sins by His death on the cross. So Christ manifested God's wisdom.

God loves; in fact, *"God is love,"* (I John 4:8). God's love is His delight in Himself, and His desire that He be most blessed. That love also desires that we enjoy God's fellowship and blessing. This love of God is a sacrificial, giving love, as that well known text reminds us: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"* (John 3:16) - which verse really says more about the unlimited, sacrificial character of God's love, than it does about the objects of that love. As this verse also shows, Christ reveals God's love, for God sent Christ to die, in order that He might have fellowship with many!

In this connection let us not forget that God also hate. He hates not only sin, but people: *"thou hatest all workers of iniquity"* (Psalm 5:5). And He hated Esau, Malachi 1:3. Many people think of God's love and hatred as inconsistent. Rather, we ought to view His hatred of ungodly sinners as an expression of His love for Himself and His church. In love for Himself, His cause, and His covenant, God hates all those who oppose it.

God is gracious. To sinners, who do not deserve it, He shows favor, and bestows upon us His own beauty. His grace is manifest in saving us from sin, and bringing us to heaven, apart from our work or will. The basis of this grace of God to us is the complete death of Christ in our stead, paying for sin. God's grace to His people is unlimited. *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (I Peter 5:10).

His grace implies His mercy. His mercy is His tender compassion toward us, according to which He is affected by our misery, and delivers us from it. His mercy is abundant: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (I Peter 1:3). Again, Christ manifested this mercy, as His many instances of healing the sick demonstrate.

God is longsuffering: *"The Lord . . . is longsuffering to us-ward"* (II Peter 3:9). His longsufferingness is His patience. To His people He is patient in that He does not immediately deliver us from the troubles of sin and sickness, but lets us suffer awhile. We might wonder why He does not deliver us quickly; the reason is that He uses suffering to prepare us for heaven. Also He manifests a forbearing patience to the wicked, not destroying them as quickly as He could, in order the better to accomplish His good purpose.

We said that we should know these perfections of God, in order to praise Him for them. But for at least two more reasons, we should know them.

First, the Christian believer must know them, because he experiences them. God shows us His love, grace, mercy, and longsufferingness; He uses His wisdom, holiness, and righteousness for our good. In other words, all these attributes of God have saving benefits for us.

Second, God's children, knowing what God is like, must strive to be like Him. We cannot do this, of ourselves; but He gives us the power to do it in Christ. We must manifest to others the grace, love, mercy, and patience that God shows us; must live a holy life, in all wisdom, to God's glory. This Jesus means, when He tells us: *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). Let us, to the praise of the glory of this great God!

Pastor Douglas Kuiper

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Exodus 34:5-8

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

John 17:3

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which

we call God; and that he is eternal , incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

Belgic Confession, Art. 1 (The Belgic Confession, written in the 1500s, is a confession to which all Reformed believers subscribe).