Basic Christian Theology

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The study notes from previous sessions are available at fbcdandridge.org/wednesday-bible-study

Theology: The Doctrine of God (2)

3. The Communicable Attributes of God

    a. **Holiness**: God's holiness refers to his total separation from all that has been created, which results in absolute purity and goodness, totally unstained by fallen creation. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "marked off," "set apart," or "withdrawn from common, ordinary use." Some have described God's holiness as his "otherness." Holiness doesn't only mean moral otherness, but physical and practical otherness. As John Fienberg's book title states, there is "No One Like Him." Theologian A.H. Strong believed that God's holiness is his single most important attribute. Otherwise, God would also suffer the effects of the fall and would be marred by sin, weakness, inability, and other limitations—removing his deity.

        - **Exodus 15:11** – "*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*"

        - **Habakkuk 1:13** – "*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.*"

        - **James 1:13** – "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*"

        - **Trinity**: God has revealed his holiness through each person of the Trinity—"*Holy Father*" (John 17:11); Jesus is called "*the Holy One of God*" (Mark 1:24); and the Holy Spirit is referred to as "*the Spirit of holiness*" (Romans 1:4).

        - **Institutions**: God has revealed his holiness through different institutions such as the tabernacle/temple, sacrificial system, the calling of Israel, and the person and work of Jesus.

        Believers: God's holiness is communicated to believers when they become regenerate followers of Christ. God separates believers from the dominating powers of sin and death. Therefore, Scripture refers to believers as "saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2; Gk. "hagioi"). However, holiness is more than a status, it's also a lifestyle. God commands, "*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and by holy, for I am holy*" (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

b. Truthfulness: The truthfulness of God is displayed in his nature, speech, and character.

- Nature: God is the true and living God, unlike pagan gods, or gods that have been created by humans. Jesus said, "*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (John 17:3).

- Speech: God is true in his speech. Everything that God declares and reveals is always true. He always makes true judgments and decisions. Titus writes, "*In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began*" (1:2).

- Character: God is true in character, meaning that he is always faithful and always keeps his promises. Paul writes, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Believers: The truthfulness of God is communicated to believers in that we can be people of truth in word and deed. Therefore, believers should always seek the truth and report the truth, never misleading people, lying, or perpetuating what is false (e.g., gossip, rumors, etc.).

- Proverbs 12:22 – "*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.*"

- Ephesians 4:25 – "*Therefore, having put away falsehoods, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.*"

c. Righteousness/Justice: The righteousness of God means that God continually acts in accordance with what is right, which is set by his holy and perfect standards. God always conducts himself in conformity with what he expects from others. This attribute is often connected with God's "justice." Moses writes, "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deut. 32:4). In addition, He also rewards obedience to his truth and punishes disobedience, bringing justice to those who are sinful and corrupt, without partiality.

- Romans 2:6 – "*He will render to each one according to his works.*"

- Revelation 16:5–6 – "*And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!*"

Believers: The righteousness/justice of God is communicated to believers through our capacity and responsibility to live righteous and just lives. We should seek to make right decisions, show no partiality, treat everyone fairly, live with integrity, help those who are

suffering, protect those who are weak, oppose those who are unjust and corrupt, and support those who punish evil.

- Psalm 106:3 – "*Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*"

d. Mercy and Grace: God's mercy and grace are connected in the sense that they reflect God's love toward sinners in various ways.

- Mercy is God not giving sinners what they deserve. Even though we are guilty of sin and deserving of judgment, pain, weakness, and loss, God diverts these outcomes because of his mercy. Titus writes, "*He saved us…according to his own mercy*" (3:5).

- Grace is God giving sinners what they do not deserve. Even though we are guilty of sin and deserving of judgment, God graciously decides to give us good things to accomplish his will. Such gracious gifts includes salvation, spiritual growth, favor, Scripture, the church, gifts and skills, opportunities to serve, protection from evil, family and friends, health and financial blessings, etc. Paul testified, "*But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Believers: God has given believers the capacity and obligation to extend grace and mercy toward others.

- Matthew 5:7 – "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*"

- Luke 10:36-37 – "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise.*"

e. Wisdom: God's wisdom means that he always chooses the best goals and the best means for accomplishing those goals. In other words, when God makes decisions, they are always the best decisions, bringing about the best results for God's purposes. Therefore, God is perfect wise in all his actions and decisions. In addition, his wisdom is available for believers who seek it.

- Job 12:13 – "*With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.*"

- Romans 11:33 – "*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*"

- James 1:5 – "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*"

Believers: God's wisdom is communicated to believers in that we are able to think and live wisely. God has blessed believers with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the counsel of Scripture, and the help of the local church. These resources and others enable believers to make wise choices that bless others and glorify God.

f. Love: God's love is much more than an emotion. According to Wayne Grudem, "God's love means that God eternally gives himself to others." Therefore, love is the giving of oneself for the benefit of others (i.e., "*agape*"). God's love was displayed in eternity past through the loving relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's love extended to his creation, particularly believers. It could be argued that God's love is the foundation for most of the other communicable attributes.

- 1 John 4:8 – "*God is love.*" (self-giving)

- 1 John 4:10 – "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"

Believers: God's love is communicated to believers in that we are enabled to love God and others. We love God through our worship, obedience, and affections. We love others through our kindness, sacrifice, forgiveness, and helpfulness.

- Matthew 22:37-39 – "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

- 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 – "*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*"