

The Character of God

Introduction

God is a person (He has intellect, emotions, and a will). As such, God makes choices. Because of the choices God has made, He has a particular kind of character. We call this character His “moral attributes” or His “moral characteristics”—those characteristics that He has *because of the choices He makes*.

Just as we addressed in our discussion of God’s *Natural* Attributes, that some natural attributes are mistaken for moral attributes, so you should note that some of God’s *moral* attributes we are going to discuss have been mistaken to be *natural* attributes.

In considering examples of God’s character, we may look at both the Father and the Son, since it is written

- Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)
 - He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)
 - No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18)
- I. God is love.
God fulfills all of His moral obligation. God is loving or God is benevolent.
- Definition of love: to will the highest good of God and the universe, in its relative order
 - Any other moral attribute is an attribute of love.
 - The origins of the moral law—its grounds and conditions.
- II. God is holy.
- Holiness is not a natural attribute.
 - Throughout the Bible we are enjoined to praise God for His holiness.
 - We shouldn’t get excited about natural attributes.
 - Holiness is to always live up to one’s moral obligation, to always love, or to never sin.
It is to live up to all of the knowledge we have of right and wrong, always choosing to do right.
 - We are commanded to be holy, just as God is holy.
 - not to the extent, but in the manner
 - We must live up to our knowledge of right and wrong, and always choose right.
- III. God is righteous or God is just.
- In respect to every moral being, He constantly and consistently treats them fairly in accordance to the law.
 - There is no partiality with God.
 - God is never arbitrary (“arbitrary” means “not based on law”).

- God's justice is an important issue to the world. We hear it expressed in other terms, such as
 - "Why do the innocent suffer?"
 - "Is God's judgement fair?"
 - Can a lifetime of sin be disregarded simply by believing in Jesus?
 - Has God chosen some to be saved and others to be damned? (Unconditional Election)
 - If we are born with "original sin" is it fair for God to send us to hell for it?
- "The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD." (Proverbs 19:3)
- "Wicked men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all things." (Proverbs 28:5)
- If sinners can find a problem with God's justice they have an excuse to not serve Him.
- The righteous would be justified in not serving God if He was unjust.
- "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." (Psalms 97:2)
- "God is just in all His ways and kind in all His deeds." (Psalms 145:17)

IV. God is merciful.

- Mercy is the choice God makes to try to restore a relationship with us after we have broken it; or
- Mercy is the disposition to pardon crime. Love seeks the good even of those who are evil, when this can be wisely done. Mercy will seek to pardon or to procure a pardon unless the attributes of wisdom and justice prevent it.
- "As wisdom and justice are also attributes of benevolence, mercy can never manifest itself by efforts to secure its end, except in a manner and upon conditions that do not set aside justice and wisdom." (*Finney's Systematic Theology*, p. 93)
- Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you for the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. (Isaiah 30:18)
- If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

V. God is wise.

- Wisdom is a *moral* attribute. Knowledge is one of His *natural* attributes.
- Wisdom is the loving application of knowledge.
- "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (I Corinthians 8:1, NIV)
- God always uses His knowledge for the highest well-being of others.

- We can use our knowledge as a weapon to hurt others.

VI. God is truthful.

- If we ask Him a question, He will tell us the truth.
- He has created the universe in such a way that it communicates truly to us.
- He has created us in such a way that we will perceive truth.
- He communicates to us in the scriptures truthfully, even at His own expense.
 - “And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any." (Matthew 22:16)
 - “...an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth...” (Romans 2:20)
 - “that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17)

VII. God is faithful.

- Faithfulness is a moral attribute, not a natural attribute.
- God is completely consistent in His moral choices.
- “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:5-7)
- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)
- If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
- He is faithful to forgive us, faithful to keep His promises to us, faithful to discipline us...”

References
(New American Standard Bible)

Holy

I John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Exodus 22:31

"You shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat any flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs."

Leviticus 11:45

"For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

Matthew 5:48

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

I Peter 1:15–16

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Holy—Jesus

John 8:29

"And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

1 Peter 2:21-23

²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Righteous or Just

Psalm 97:2

Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Proverbs 28:5

Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.

Proverbs 19:3

The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD.

A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD. (NIV)

One's own folly leads to ruin, yet the heart rages against the Lord. (NRSV)

Faithful

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Merciful

Hebrews 4:15–16

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Isaiah 30:18

Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you for the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him.

Wise

I Corinthians

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (NIV)

Truthful

Matthew 22:16

And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.

Romans 2:20

an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth

Faithful

Malachi 3:5-7

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?'"

I John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.