

Sunday, March 13, 2022 | The Immutable Characteristics of God

Exodus 34:5-8 | "The Relational God"

Announcements:

- VBS Wednesdays July 20th-August 10th with a church-wide picnic on August 14.
 - Easter Sunday is April 17. There'll be two services, 9:30am and 11:00am. There will be no bible fellowship that morning.
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We kicked off a series called The Immutable Characteristics of God two weeks ago. This series is intended to give you a crash course into, exactly, God is. After all, it's pretty difficult to follow someone if you don't know who they are. And during the first week, we spoke about what it means when we say that God is immutable; he does not change. This characteristic is the nail upon which all the other attributes hang and, without its virtue, would render the rest of God's characteristics meaningless. Thus, **God's immutability means we have everlasting stability.**

In the second week, we spoke about God's "allness." There is no knowledge my God does not already know. There is no place where my God will not be found. And there is nothing my God cannot do. **God's "allness" —omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence—means that He is all we'll ever need.** The Lord ought to be the first one we turn to, not the last.

Last week tried to wrap our heads around the idea of God's timelessness. When we say that God is "eternal," we mean that he is without beginning or end. Time itself has no real meaning to him as it does to us because God existed before time was even a thing. He was before the "befores." And, likewise, he will exist after the end. Just as he begins beginnings, the Almighty ends endings. This is what we mean when we say we know who holds tomorrow. As vast as existence may seem, it is but a speck in the palm of our timeless God. Therefore, if time's days are numbered, so, too, are the days of our life numbered. **God's timelessness means we should not waste the time we have been given to us.**

Today we're going to talk about God's communicable attributes.

Definition of God's **communicable** attributes:

From a Latin term which means "to make common" from which we get our English word "communication." Thus, God's communicable attributes are ways in which he communicates in a language we can comprehend.

Knowledge, wisdom, goodness, love, wrath, grace, joy, anger, mercy, patience, faithfulness, holiness, sadness, righteousness, and so on are all examples of God's **communicable** attributes. Notice, however, that God's communicable attributes are distinguished from his non-communicable ones: i.e., immutability, omniscience, omnipresence, etc. When it comes to these aspects of God's nature, we have no mental framework to comprehend what they actually are. Can finite beings fully grasp what it means to be God, an infinite being? No. Creatures that exist within the confines of time and space cannot understand the Creator who stands outside time and space. Thus, with God's non-communicable attributes, we have no way to identify ourselves with God.

But our God is **relational** God. To say that he has communicable attributes is to say that God can, and does, **relate** to his creation in a way that we can understand. As creatures made in the image of God, we, more than any other created thing, can identify with God in a variety of different ways (cf. Gen. 1:26-28).

This is not to say that our feelings perfectly represent God's feelings. They used to. When Adam walked with God in the Garden of Eden, humanity was in perfect harmony with God not only spiritually but emotionally. But since we are marred by the Fall, our feelings, thoughts, and wills are twisted so that they've become disharmonious with God's feelings, thoughts, and will.

Nevertheless, God engages with us using a language we understand despite the Fall. Since our downfall, the Lord made the **common ground** so that mankind might **commune** with him once more. And while many followers of God understood that the Lord related to humanity, Moses was the first who had it spelled out for him.

READ: Exodus 34:5-8 (ESV)

⁵The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." ⁸And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

The Bible Project has a great video series that delves deeper into this passage, and I'd like to encourage you to watch it this week,¹ but, suffice to say, God wanted the children of Israel to relate to him when he used words such as “merciful,” “gracious,” “slow to anger,” “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” These are not terms like eternity or omnipotence but everyday words which the common man can understand.

For instance, when God said he was “merciful,” we know, intuitively, what that means. We understand that God is saying he will be compassionate with us in the same way a mother is moved with compassion for her child (cf. 2 Ki. 13:23). Or, when God says that he’s “gracious,” we’ve all experienced how it feels when we’re graciously given something that we do not deserve (cf. Jon. 4:2). Furthermore, when we hear God describe himself as being “slow to anger,” we hear the longsuffering bells of God’s patience ringing out; it is the song of one who is not governed by his temper but tolerance (cf. Pro. 16:32). And lastly, learning that a big part of God's self-described attributes is that he’s overflowing with not only “steadfast love” but also “faithfulness” resonates with anyone alive. Who among us has not felt the pangs of betrayal? Likewise, who among us has not known feelings of love and loyalty (cf. Gen. 39:21)?

Right after the children of Israel debased themselves with a golden calf, God wanted them to know that he was a relational God. He feels in much the same way that we feel. He was not like some disassociated deity who cares little for what goes on in the mortal world (cf. 1 Ki. 18:27, 36-40). He is immeasurably invested in his creation, and he is moved by what goes on (cf. Dan. 9:23).

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

God’s relational attributes give us the standards by which our own personalities are judged.

ILLUSTRATION: Play guitar out of tune and then tune it while reading the explanation below.

There are innumerable ways that we express ourselves. We listen as someone tells a joke, and we end up laughing. Or, if the joke doesn't land, we end up scowling. We might thoughtlessly make our way through rush hour traffic; or, considering the moron who’s just cut you off, your emotions might pull you out of your reverie and compel you to wish them a good evening using one of your upraised fingers. For those of us married, we might give our significant other a kiss because they've been charming. Or, if they've annoyed us, we may choose to shut down and refuse to engage. While there are endless ways to show others what we are feeling on the

¹ “The Character of God Series,” *The BibleProject*, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/category/character-of-god-series/>, [accessed, March 10, 2022].

inside, only the scriptures teach us how to control our emotions and how we ought to feel about a given situation.

READ: Ephesians 5:1 (ESV)

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

Paul is here writing to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a sprawling metropolis comprised of a complex network of outlying villages. Located on the coast of the Aegean Sea, the city was a cultural hub during Paul's day. And part of Ephesus' appeal came because one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis, was located there (cf. Ac. 19:29-40).

Obviously, given that Paul was a Jew who converted to Christianity, it comes as no surprise to us that he would tell the Ephesians to be "imitators" of God rather than "imitators" of Artemis. But, considering the cultural context, it is hard to not make the comparison. There were many things that one would have to do if a person wanted to emulate Artemis. For instance, while Artemis is commonly known as the Greek goddess of the hunt, she was also the heroine of chastity and fertility. Obviously, I don't need to explain how this sort of worship was immoral. But, suffice to say, followers of this idol would hunt women as easily as they chased an animal; as such, they were given free rein to feed their varying appetites however they wanted.

Contrary to how inductees into the Artemis cult would worship, Christians, Paul explains, were to be known as "imitators of God" specifically in the way they love:

READ: Ephesians 5:2 (ESV)

²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Nonbelievers, like those in Ephesus, thought of lust as love. Rather than give themselves over to their baser desires, they should've given themselves over to another: God. This would've been true love. But how is it that we even know the difference between lust and love? God's word. In fact, if any of God's communicable attributes could be said to be the most crucial to understanding God's personality, it would be love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13). Like every other emotion, the world has its own definition of love. But only the Scriptures teach us what it means to love.

READ: 1 John 4:7-12 (ESV)

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God

sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Love for God and one another is easy enough to understand, but God's idea of love is far more complex. God's love extends to the unlovable, and our love ought to as well.

READ: Matthew 5:43-48 (ESV)

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

God’s definition of love is far different than what we’re going to find in romance novels, sitcoms, and big blockbuster movies. And while they’re not always off the mark, Hollywood's idea of love is more often wrong than right. This is especially the case when they portray a couple who has a falling away. Inevitably, one of the characters will say something like, "I just don't love you anymore." The love that the Scriptures speak of is not temporary but eternal.

READ: Romans 8:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The sheer lunacy of the gospel is that God loves the unlovable. A love that doesn’t make sense is the kind of love that God loves us with. Paul put it best when he said in Rom. 5:8, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” As Mark Jones put it: “Every humiliation, trial, heartache, and suffering that our Savior experienced was God showing his love toward us.”² The marks of true love are on full display whenever we look at the cross. What a remarkable thing to find healing in another’s pain (cf. Isa. 53:5).

² Jones, Mark, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2017), p. 131.

So, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

God's relational—communicable—attributes give us the standards by which our own personalities are judged.

No other book addresses the sum total of human expression like the Bible. We only had time to speak about God's standard for love today. Still, the Scriptures talk in other places about knowledge, wisdom, goodness, wrath, grace, joy, anger, mercy, anxiety, patience, faithfulness, holiness, sadness, righteousness, and so on. The point is that while our feelings have validity, they are not the standard. Just because we feel that something is right doesn't mean that they're right. Only when we compare ourselves to the tuning fork of God's word will we know if our personalities are in harmony with God's relational attributes.

Video Description

The Immutable Characteristics of God | Week 4 | “The Relational God”

TEXT: Exodus 34:5-8

God’s **relational**—communicable—attributes give us the **standards** by which our own **personalities** are **judged**. No other book addresses the sum total of human expression like the Bible. Don't go to some romance novel, sitcom, or movie if you want to know what true love is. True love is in the Scriptures. Furthermore, God's word not only speaks about love, but it also talks about knowledge, wisdom, goodness, wrath, grace, joy, anger, mercy, anxiety, patience, faithfulness, holiness, sadness, righteousness, and so on. The point is that while our feelings have validity, they are not the standard. Just because we feel that something is right doesn't mean that they're right. Only when we compare ourselves to the tuning fork of God's word will we know if our personalities are in harmony with God's relational attributes.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: