



“Getting to Know God”

Section 2: What Can We Know About What God Is Like?

Unit 2.4: A Portrait of Perfect Unity



I) Divine without Division

- So far in this section, we have considered what God is like through divine attributes that are exclusive to Him as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We have affirmed from Holy Scripture that God is uniquely independent as the self-giving, self-sufficient, and self-sustaining source of eternal life in and of Himself. We have also stated that God is infinite, limitless, and unchanging in all of those exclusive attributes that reveal His perfect character. Today, in our final unit focusing on the exclusive attributes of God, we consider the *unity* of God’s character. This idea of God’s unity means that He is not divided into parts like human beings, but every attribute is absolute and unified without any segment or division. In theological studies, this concept is also known as the *simplicity* of God, because God is not composed of a complexity of parts but instead is one simple whole. However, because the term *simple* can be easily misunderstood as “easy to understand,” it is more helpful to focus on the term *united* to consider how every aspect of God’s character works together in perfect harmony as one entire unit. This is why Moses proclaims in **Deuteronomy 6:4**, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

II) Sin Causes Separation

- The reason God’s unified character is so distinctive is because it stands in stark contrast to human beings made in His image. We are far more complex and segmented than God for several reasons. First, we are composed of body and spirit, and that alone makes us more complex than our Father who is spirit alone. However, the greatest factor that contributes to the segmentation of our character is *sin*. Sin separates us into many distinct parts, and we are therefore disunified creatures. Some of our qualities reflect a genuine character of godliness, while others have been tainted by our sin and reflect our fallen nature. While a person may be a diligent worker like the Lord, they may also be impatient and uncaring. Others may also be loving and kind like Christ, but they struggle with dishonesty. No human is immune to this state of disunity because, as **Romans 3:23** states, “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In simple terms, it will always be our sin that causes separation between the many complex and often contradicting attributes that make up our character.

III) The Anatomy of an Absolute Being

- Another way to understand and appreciate the unity of God is to consider that He is an *absolute* being. This means that all His attributes are supreme, unrestricted, and therefore inseparable, with each aspect of His character working together in perfect harmony. As AW Tozer states in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “**The harmony of His being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but the absence of parts**” p. 15. Another way of looking at this concept of absolute harmony is that God’s divine attributes are not merely a symphony of instruments that make many sounds together as one song, but instead His attributes all make one perfect sound simultaneously in a way that cannot be separated.

IV) In Harmony with Who He Is

- The primary reason God’s attributes are all in perfect harmony is because they are not a reflection of *what* He does, as much as *who* He is. The Bible makes clear and definitive statements that God’s very identity is rooted in each of these qualities. **1 John 1:5** states, “God is light” and **1 John 4:8** reveals, “God is love.” In both statements, love and light don’t just represent certain actions that God occasionally does, but they define who God is. God is love. God is light. In both of these attributes, God is the infinite source of love and light, and these attributes will never increase or diminish but will remain in complete unity as God’s being for all of eternity.

V) Singular Fruit of a Spirit-Filled Life

- An ideal biblical example of how the segmented attributes of fallen human character stands in contrast to the unified attributes of God's divine character is found in **Galatians 5:19-23**. In this passage, Paul identifies several "works of the flesh" as separate examples of the dark reality of human nature, and then He uncovers the "fruit of the Spirit" as one demonstration of the perfect unity of godliness. First, Paul proclaims in verses 19-21, "*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" Then, in verses 22-23 Paul continues, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*" It is important to note that the works are *plural* and *separated*, but the fruit is *singular* and *united*. In other words, it is not possible to have one fruit while missing others. A perfect example of this is in **1 Corinthians 13:4**, when Paul reveals, "*Love is patient and kind.*" These three aspects of love, patience, and kindness are all listed in Galatians 5:22, but they each are used interchangeably to define each other because the fruit is singular and unified as one demonstration of God's spiritual character.

VI) The Same God Throughout the Scriptures

- The unity of God is something we can easily forget when reading the Scriptures. This is because in each individual moment we typically only see one aspect of God's nature being emphasized. People therefore distinguish the God of the Old Testament (a God of holiness, justice, wrath, and pending judgment) from the God of the New Testament (a God of love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace). However, these attributes of God's character are not only unified, they also cannot be fully understood without each other. So, if we step back to see the big picture of the biblical story below, we will notice from these examples that together both testaments form a singular portrait of our great God:
 - a) **Creation:** God created everything good and established a kingdom. This reveals the *goodness* and *authority* of God.
 - b) **Fall:** Mankind sinned against God, the kingdom was fractured, and Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. This reveals the *holiness* of God.
 - c) **Promise:** God punished humanity but promised to redeem them in **Genesis 3:15**, and then covered their shame with animal skins in **Genesis 3:21**. This reveals the *sovereignty* and *mercy* of God.
 - d) **Redemption:** God's plan of redemption is fulfilled in Jesus, who comes as a suffering servant to earn righteousness, atone for sins, and offer eternal life. This reveals the *love* and *grace* of God.
 - e) **Restoration:** God promises Christ will return to earth for final judgement and restoration. This reveals the *justice* of God.

VII) Connecting Everything at the Cross

- Refining our focus from the entire biblical storyline to the very moment of Christ's crucifixion, the following attributes are examples of how God's unified character is most glorified on Calvary's cross:
 - a) **God's sovereignty and wisdom:** These attributes lead to God's eternal plan of salvation.
 - b) **God's justice and holiness:** These attributes require Christ's blood for the forgiveness of our sins.
 - c) **God's righteousness and love:** These attributes prove why Christ is our worthy and willing sacrifice.
 - d) **God's grace and patience:** These attributes explain why God has provided a substitutionary atonement for our sins, offered salvation by grace through faith, and delayed final judgment.

VIII) Exalting all His Attributes Equally

- The reason why we tend to separate the attributes of God is because we allow life experiences to shift our focus too heavily on one aspect of God's character. For some, we only see God as a *loving* Father, while others can only picture Him as a *holy* Creator. However, the truth is that He is both simultaneously without any separation or contradiction. Therefore, we need to remember in every life experience that "*...for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*" (**Romans 8:28**). Our experiences may often be contradicting, but God's character never will.