



“Getting to Know God”

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

Unit 2.5: Our Loving & Holy Lord



I) Pursuing God’s Moral Perfections

- After spending the first four units of this section discussing the attributes of God that are exclusive to Him, we now begin a four-week journey discovering the attributes that He has graciously shared with us. If the first four units focused on the exclusive natural characteristics that we refer to as the *greatness* of God, our focus now turns to shared moral characteristics that we categorize as the *goodness* of God. These moral perfections of God will not only help us to better appreciate and worship His unblemished character, they will also help us understand the type of character we too are called to pursue as redeemed believers being recreated in His image. As Christ Himself commands us in **Matthew 5:48**, “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” This command is not a call to *perfection* but to *completeness*. When we finally begin to understand the perfections of God’s character, only then can we truly realize how far we fall short of that character and how desperately we need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to begin our process of change.

II) Staying Balanced Between the Bookends

- As we begin examining these moral attributes, we must step back and see two areas that serve as bookends to give us perspective on all the others. Although God’s character is unified and these bookend characteristics are not segmented in His own character, they are keystone attributes that are discernable in human beings because they affect every other area of our spiritual lives. These bookend attributes are **love** and **holiness**. And as we seek to define these attributes later in this unit, we can celebrate that love and holiness are connected to every other exclusive attribute of God we have already discussed in this section. As A.W. Tozer reminds us in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “*From God’s other known attributes we may learn much about His love. We can know, for instance, that because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity; because He is immense, His love is an incomprehensively vast, bottomless, shoreless sea before which we kneel in joyful silence*” (p. 98).

III) God’s Love: Much More than a Feeling

- So, let us first consider the *love* of God. As J.I. Packer states in *Knowing God*, “*To know the love of God is heaven on earth*” (p. 117). Love is the most frequently used and abused attribute of God in Christianity today because we mistakenly want to bring God down to our level instead of allowing Him to raise us up towards His. The Bible has much to say about love, and it stands out in stark contrast to how we define love in either the secular world or even the church. Here is a biblical portrait of love:
 - The Source of Love: 1 John 4:8** – “*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*”
 - The Definition of Love: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8** – “*4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends.*”
 - The Demonstration of Love: John 15:3** – “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*”
- Therefore, taking a closer look at a truer and deeper version of love from these passages above, here is a more biblically faithful way to define this attribute: **Love is a self-sacrificial commitment to unconditionally pursue someone’s greatest good for God’s greatest glory.**

IV) God's Holiness: Simply Set Apart

- The second bookend to consider in this unit is God's *holiness*. Here is a biblical snapshot of the holiness of God:
 - a) **Holiness is God's Name:** Luke 1:49 – "... for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."
 - b) **Holiness is God's Attitude:** Habakkuk 1:13 – "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong"
 - c) **Holiness is God's Nature:** Exodus 15:11 – "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
 - d) **Holiness is God's Glory:** Isaiah 6:3 – "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
- Looking at these verses and others, we can define the holiness of God in two different dimensions as (1) God's set-apartness from all of creation, and (2) God's unblemished moral purity.

V) Dealing with Our Distorted Views of Love

- Since we typically see love as a *feeling* and not an *unconditional commitment*, we have several distorted views of love that have invaded the church. Here are just three of those distorted views:
 - a) **Valentine's Day Love:** This view of love emphasizes warm, gushy, sentimental *feelings* instead of and is void of an *unconditional commitment*.
 - b) **Woodstock Love:** This view of love promotes unquestionable *acceptance* of what everyone believes and does and is void of *truth*.
 - c) **Magic Genie Love:** This view of love is fixated on all the *desires* of the heart being met and is void of *reality*, which has taught all parents that true love does not grant every wish or rescue from every pain.

VI) Examining Our Empty Views of Holiness

- Those who see God as holy but not loving have also developed one of these three empty view of holiness that do not accurately represent the God of the Bible:
 - a) **Slave driver Holiness:** This view of holiness portrays God as an oppressive *taskmaster* who relentlessly attacks us with every mistake we make and it is void of God's *grace*.
 - b) **Finance Professor Holiness:** This view of holiness presents God as a *cold* and *mechanical* creator who has no emotions and it is void of God's *affections*.
 - c) **Landlord Holiness:** This view of holiness presents God as a *distant* landlord who stays away until it is time to collect the rent and it is void of God's *intimate, relational presence*.

VII) Seeking Our Good for His Glory

- So, our distorted and empty views of God's love and holiness teach us that these bookends need to be kept together for us to have a faithful understanding of each one. But, you may ask, if God's love is dependent on God's holiness, and it is all tied together by God's glory, does that mean that God's love is really about Him or is it about us? The answer it is about God's image in us. According to Millard Erickson in *Christian Theology*, "**God loves us on the basis of that likeness of himself that he has placed with us in creating us (Gen 1:27). He therefore in effect loves himself in us**" (p. 264). Due to his unselfish nature He gave us His image, and His love is seeking to preserve that image for His glory and our good. He therefore gives Himself to us in salvation because of His love, and He sets us apart in sanctification because of His holiness. Then then draws us closer to Him to enjoy Him and be with Him in His love, and His abiding presence transforms us to be like Him and bear fruit in His holiness.

VIII) Learning How to Live in Holy Love

- Finally, in an effort to be keep the bookends of God's love and holiness firmly in place, we need to search the entire Bible to receive and respond to the complete picture of God's holy love. Therefore, according to God's Word, we must pursue holiness (1 Peter 1:16), love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), love others (Galatians 5:14), meditate on God's love (Ephesians 3:14-21), remain in God's love through holiness (John 15:9-10), and remember the danger of holiness without love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).