

Essentials of Christianity (pt 10)
4/24/2010

Introduction _____

Today will be yet another day of learning about the essentials of Christianity. We began this study a number of weeks ago, as it had been every much on my heart for some time to take us through these essentials.

I do want to mention that it is my intention to continue through our study of Luke's gospel when we have completed this current series.

From time to time it can be necessary to address particular subjects like we're doing now; but at Calvary Chapel, we believe that the most effective way of feeding the flock on a consistent basis is to work through the Bible: book by book; chapter by chapter; verse by verse.

No, I have not forgotten about the book of Luke. But this is the necessary direction for our flock right now.

On to today's study.

Theology: The Attributes of God

God is Love

This morning we will begin by finishing up the subject that we only scratched the surface of last week. In our coverage of the attributes of God: we are now looking at the attributes of **God's love**.

God is Love: the Bible teaches that **God is love**. Last week we were able to do a brief introduction on this attribute. We talked about the love that existed between the members of the Godhead. As I said last week,

The self giving that characterizes the Trinity finds clear expression in God's relationship to mankind, and especially to sinful men.¹

In our coverage of this attribute of God, we will also include the attributes of **Grace and Mercy**. God is gracious and merciful-- two attributes that are definitely intertwined with the Love of God.

To begin, let's turn to a few passages that exhibit **God as love**, as well as His attributes of **grace and mercy**.

Turn to Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 1 John 4:7-11; Ephesians 2:1-9: read.

^{NAU} Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

⁷ "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

⁸ *but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

^{NAU} *1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

⁸ *The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

⁹ *By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

^{NAU} *Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

² *in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.*

³ *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*

⁵ *even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

⁶ *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

⁷ *so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*

⁹ *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

In view of all these passages let's look at some definitions and explanations for the love, grace and mercy of God.

God's love may be defined as "that perfection of the divine nature by which God is eternally moved to communicate himself. It is not a mere emotional impulse, but a rational and voluntary affection, having its ground in truth and holiness and its exercise in free choice." The Greek term agape, translated "love," is frequently used to denote God and His response to humanity. Agape denotes a reasoned-out love, rather than an emotionally-based love (but not devoid of emotion)—one that loves the object irrespective of the worth of the object and even though the love may not be reciprocated.

God's Mercy: a general definition of God's mercy is: "the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of how desolate they are." It is God's response to the pitiful human condition, the effect of humanity's own rebellion from God, with a desire to help and give comfort.

His mercy is free of obligation and given according to His sovereign choice (Rom. 9:15-16, 18).

God's Grace: God's unmerited love for fallen humanity is the expression of his grace. The basis of his grace is, and always has been, the work of Christ in bearing the punishment for our sin. There is nothing humanity can do to earn God's love and goodness. Jesus paid it all.^{23 4}

A great summary of these attributes is clearly seen in Psalm 103-- **turn to Psalm 103:1-17: read.**

² Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

³ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines Of The Bible* (Moody Press Chicago).

⁴ Christian Theology By John H. Sailhamer

^{NAU} Psalm 103:1 A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;

³ Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases;

⁴ Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;

⁵ Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

⁶ The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed.

⁷ He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

⁹ He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.

¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

¹⁴ For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

¹⁶ When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.

¹⁷ But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,

^{NAU} Psalm 103:18 To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.

Here are some more amazing details about these attributes.

God loves the world of sinners and ungodly men. John 3:16—“For God so loved the world” was a startling truth to Nicodemus in his narrow exclusivism. God loved not the Jew only, but also the Gentile; not a part of the world of men, but every man in it, irrespective of his moral character. For “God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). This is wonderful when we begin to realize what a world in sin is. The love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind. God desires the salvation of men.

^{NAU} 1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Love is more than compassion; it hides not itself as compassion may do, but displays itself actively in behalf of its object. The Cross of Calvary is the highest expression of the love of God for sinful man. He gave not only a Son, but His only Son, His well-beloved.

Back in Ephesians 2-- verses 1-3 show the human race rushing headlong to inevitable ruin.

Vs 4--“But” reverses the picture; when all help for man fails, then God steps in, and by His mercy, which springs from “His great love,” redeems fallen man, and gives him not only pardon, but a position in His heavenly kingdom by the side of Jesus Christ.

All this was “for,” or, perhaps better, “in order to satisfy His great love.” Love led Him to do it.⁵

The great mercy of God.

Mercy is usually exercised in connection with guilt; it is that attribute of God which leads Him to seek the welfare, both temporal and spiritual, of sinners, even though at the cost of great sacrifice on His part. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.... God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Eph 2:4; Rom 5:8.)

^{NAU} Nehemiah 9:31 "Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and compassionate God.

Here is mercy manifested in forbearance with sinners. If God should have dealt with them in justice they would have been cut off long before. Think of the evil, the impurity, the sin that God must see. How it must disgust Him. Then remember that He could crush it all in a moment. Yet He does not. He pleads; He sacrifices to show His love for sinners. Surely it is because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, and because His compassions fail not. The mercy of God is here shown in His loving forbearance with sinners.

^{NAU} Psalm 32:10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.

The very act of trust on the part of the believer moves the heart of God to protect him just as in the case of a parent and his child. The moment I throw myself on God I am enveloped in His mercy—mercy is my environment, like a fiery wall it surrounds me, without a break through which an evil can creep in. Resistance surrounds us with “sorrow”; but trust surrounds us with “mercy.” In the center of that circle of mercy sits and rests the trusting soul.⁶

⁵ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines Of The Bible* (Moody Press Chicago).

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Nevertheless there are some extreme cautions that must be considered when applying these three attributes.

The love of God is widely accepted, but sometimes wrongly understood. Many people believe in a “God of love,” who operates according to *their* definition of love. Those people will be shocked to find themselves spending eternity in hell if they believe “a loving God would not condemn anyone to hell.”

But the error is not just among unbelievers, for many Christians also have a very distorted concept of God’s love.

Why are so many eager to embrace this attribute, unlike many other of God’s attributes?

One writer explains:

There are many who talk about the love of God, who are total strangers to the God of love. The divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. The truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is apparent not only from the ignorance which so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality which is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians.

How little real love there is for God. One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with His wondrous love for His people. The better we are acquainted with His love—its character, fullness, blessedness—the more our hearts will be drawn out in love to Him.

^{NAU} Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

God's mercy is a holy mercy; it will by no means protect sin, but anxiously awaits to pardon it. God's mercy is a city of refuge for the penitent, but by no means a sanctuary for the presumptuous. God's mercy is here seen in pardoning the sin of those who do truly repent. We speak about "trusting in the mercy of the Lord." Let us forsake sin and then trust in the mercy of the Lord and we shall find pardon.⁷

In conclusion:

In our witness to a sinful, lost, and dying world, we dare not distort the love of God. God is the One who defines love, not men. We must accept God's love as God has defined and expressed it. We dare not rely on God conforming to the distorted perceptions of love to which fallen men ignorantly cling. We must be careful not to compartmentalize God's love and separate it from His other attributes, or try to evangelize men by appealing only to the love of God. Our Lord did not indicate that we should depend upon the "attraction" of His love, as much as He has indicated that lost men should be compelled by a sense of His righteousness, our sin, and the judgment which awaits sinners (John 16:7-11). The sinner ought not to be comforted by assurances of the love of God (apart from Christ), but should be reminded that God hates sin.⁸

God of Wrath

This leads us to the next attribute. God is also a **God of Wrath**.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Romans 1:18; John 3:36: read

⁷ Robert Deffinbaugh, "Let Me See Thy Glory: A Study of the Attributes of God" (1997), Biblical Studies Press www.bible.org.

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NAU Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

NAU John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

It may surprise us to find how frequently the Bible talks about the wrath of God. Yet if God loves all that is right and good, and all that conforms to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character.

God's wrath directed against sin is therefore closely related to God's holiness and justice.⁹

God's wrath may be defined in this way:

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.¹⁰

To conclude:

⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

¹⁰ Robert Deffinbaugh, "Let Me See Thy Glory: A Study of the Attributes of God" (1997), Biblical Studies Press www.bible.org.

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with esteem; they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the Divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.

Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the Divine character, or some blot upon the Divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. He is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong unto Him.

I've done a teaching on the topic of hell (in the foyer). We'll discuss the nature damnation when we get to eschatalogy.

God is Jealous

Lastly for today. **God is Jealous** I won't spend a lot of time on this, because we touched on it already; and the point can be made very quickly without tons of commentary. **Turn to Exodus 34: 14-16: read.**

^{NAU} Exodus 34:14 -- for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God--

¹⁵ otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice,

¹⁶ *and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.*

God's jealousy means that God continually seeks to protect his own honor. Scripture represents God as being jealous in this way. He commands his people not to bow down to idols or serve them.

He desires that worship be given to himself and not to false gods. Therefore, he commands the people of Israel to tear down the altars of pagan gods in the land of Canaan.

People sometimes have trouble thinking that jealousy is a desirable attribute in God. This is because jealousy for our own honor as human beings is almost always wrong. We are not to be proud, but humble. Yet we must realize that the reason pride is wrong is a theological reason: it is that we do not deserve the honor that belongs to God alone.

It is not wrong for God to seek his own honor, however, for he deserves it fully. God freely admits that his actions in creation and redemption are done for his own honor. Speaking of his decision to withhold judgment from his people, God says, "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it...My glory I will not give to another" (Isa 48:11).

It is healthy for us spiritually when we settle in our hearts the fact that God deserves all honor and glory from his creation, and that it is right for him to seek this honor. He alone is infinitely worthy of being praised. To realize this fact and to delight in it is to find the secret of true worship.¹¹

Paul said in 1Corinthians 10:20-22.

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 10:20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

¹¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

²¹ *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.*

²² *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?*

Explain and close.

