

Essentials of Christianity (pt 9)
4/17/2010

Introduction _____

The essentials of Christianity. Core beliefs of Christianity that separates Christianity from all other religions; distinctions that help us to discern between truth and error.

By growing in our understanding of these things, it will benefit us in many ways: one of which is to help us fulfill the mandate that we talked about when we began this study.

NAU Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Today, I hope we can become more equipped and knowledgeable about God.

We're going to continue studying the **attributes of God**. Today we will look at another aspect of God's attributes: the **communicable attributes of God**.

God's Communicable Attributes- those qualities of God for which at least a counterpart can be found in humans; those He can share with us. (e.g. love).

Attributes that He imparts to His own, by His Spirit, to enable us to live holy lives.

But we're not focusing on these attributes as they apply to us, but how they are attributed to our God.

I suppose one of the most logical attributes to begin with is the attribute of God's holiness.

God is Holy

Let's begin by **turning in our Bibles to Revelation 4:8**. This is one of many majestic glimpses into heaven.

^{NAU} Revelation 4:8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

This is a pattern we see throughout scripture; the three-fold designation of God as being "Holy"... Holy, holy, holy.

What do we mean when we say God is holy? What does "holy" mean? The word **holy** literally means *to be set apart, dedicated*.

When we're speaking about God, we're speaking about a quality of holiness that is an expression of *the divine in contrast with the human. Holy in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human.*¹

¹ Johannes P Louw and Eugene A Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988).

Though He calls us to be holy, His holiness is infinitely beyond any holiness that we will ever experience. The nature of God's holiness is that He is uniquely holy with no rivals or competition.²

This distinction of God's holiness is expressed in two ways:

1. when the Bible calls God holy it means primarily that God is transcendentally separate. He is so far above and beyond us that He seems almost totally foreign to us. To be holy is to be 'other,' to be different in a special way. The same basic meaning is used when the word holy is applied to earthly things.

The Scriptures put it this way:

"Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11). "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2).

There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Thine. All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; And they shall glorify Thy name. For Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds; Thou alone art God (Psalms 86:8-10).

2. This separateness of God has a moral or ethical quality as well. The foundation of this emphasis is Leviticus 11:44, 45, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

Because God is morally pure, He cannot condone evil or have any relationship to it (Ps. 11:4-6). In His holiness God is the moral and ethical standard; He is the law. He sets the standard.³

² Robert Deffinbaugh, "Let Me See Thy Glory: A Study of the Attributes of God" (1997), Biblical Studies Press www.bible.org.

³ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

NAU 1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

For God to be holy is for Him to be holy in relation to every aspect of His nature and character.

When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, his justice is holy justice, his mercy is holy mercy, his knowledge is holy knowledge, his spirit is Holy Spirit.⁴

How important is God's holiness? .

Turn to Hebrews 12:28-29: read

NAU Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

The holiness of God is not merely a theological subject fit for scholars with the interest and stamina to pursue it. Indeed, the holiness of God is a matter of great importance to every living soul. The Christian should be especially concerned with the holiness of God. Several incidents in the Old and New Testaments underscore the importance of

⁴ Robert Deffinbaugh, "Let Me See Thy Glory: A Study of the Attributes of God" (1997), Biblical Studies Press www.bible.org.

holiness to the believer. These examples are but a few of the accounts in Scripture dealing with God's holiness and its impact on saints.

Moses and the Holiness of God: Water from the rock (Number 20:1-13)

NAU Numbers 20:12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

13 Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them.

Uzzah and the Holiness of God: (2 Samuel 6:1-11)

NAU 2 Samuel 6:7 And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.

God struck him dead because of his irreverence. Even when our motives are sincere and we are actively involved in the worship of God, we must constantly be mindful of the holiness of God and maintain a reverence for Him manifested by our obedience to His instructions and commands.

The Holiness of God and the NT Church (Acts 5:1-16)

NAU Acts 5:4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

Unbelievers were prompted by their fear to keep their distance from the church, and the saints were motivated to keep their distance from the world (as far as its sins are concerned). Fear is the response of men to the holiness of God. Thus, the sin of Ananias and his wife was a sin

of irreverence, a sin against God's holiness. But the outbreak of divine holiness which brought about the death of this couple also brought fear on those who heard of this incident.⁵

In conclusion:

The holiness of God is not simply a doctrine to which we give assent. Rather, the doctrine of the holiness of God should guide and govern our lives.

The holiness of God is the message of the entire Old Testament. To the prophets God was the absolutely Holy One; the One with eyes too pure to behold evil; the One swift to punish iniquity. In taking a photograph, the part of the body which we desire most to see is not the hands or feet, but the face. So is it with our vision of God. He desires us to see not His hand and finger, denoting His power and skill, nor even His throne as indicating His majesty. It is His holiness by which He desires to be remembered as that is the attribute which most glorifies Him.

Let us bear this fact in mind as we study this attribute of the divine nature. It is just this vision of God that we need today when the tendency to deny the reality or the awfulness of sin is so prevalent. Our view of the necessity of the atonement will depend very largely upon our view of the holiness of God. Light views of God and His holiness will produce light views of sin and the atonement.⁶

God is Holy. I suppose the next logical attribute to look at in view of God's holiness is, the God of truth.

⁵ Robert Deffinbaugh, "Let Me See Thy Glory: A Study of the Attributes of God" (1997), Biblical Studies Press www.bible.org.

⁶ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines Of The Bible* (Moody Press Chicago).

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

God is Truth

Let's turn to where Pastor Mark taught from last Wed--
Psalm 31:5.

*^{NAU} Psalm 31:5 Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me,
O LORD, God of truth.*

Pontius Pilate, looking right at Jesus asked Him, “what is truth?” That’s a weighted question, and somewhat profound, considering that the embodiment of truth was standing right in front of Him.

That kind of question also smacks of the type of questioning we see many in our society asking today. **Please turn to Jeremiah 10:6-11.**

Satan, the father of lies, has always tried to blind people from seeing the “truth.” A popular antithesis to truth seeking today is relativism.

Relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are equally valid, and that all truth is relative to the individual. This means that all moral positions, all religious systems, all art forms, all political movements, etc., are truths that are relative to the individual.

Relativism seems to defy the very nature of truth; namely, that truth is not self-contradictory.

This is what philosophy does sometimes as it seeks to examine truth. It sometimes clouds issues so much, that nothing can be known for sure (in their minds).

Here is what we need to know:

^{NAU} Jeremiah 10:6 There is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and great is Your name in might.

*⁷ Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Your due!
For among all the wise men of the nations And in all their kingdoms, There
is none like You.*

*⁸ But they are altogether stupid and foolish In their discipline of delusion--
their idol is wood!*

*⁹ Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work
of a craftsman and of the hands of a goldsmith; Violet and purple are their
clothing; They are all the work of skilled men.*

*¹⁰ But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting
King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His
indignation.*

*¹¹ Thus you shall say to them, "The gods that did not make the heavens
and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens."*

God's truthfulness means that he is the true God, and that all his knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth. The first part of this definition indicates that the God revealed in Scripture is the true or real God and that all other so-called gods are idols. Jesus says to his Father, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Job tells us that God is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16). To say that God knows all things and that his knowledge is perfect is to say that he is never mistaken in his perception or understanding of the world: all that he knows and thinks is true and is a correct understanding of the nature of reality. In fact, since God knows all things infinitely well, we can say that the standard of true knowledge is conformity to God's knowledge. If we think the same thing God thinks about anything in the universe, we are thinking truthfully about it.

In addition, we must also affirm that all of God's words about himself and about his creation completely correspond to reality. That is, God always speaks truth when he speaks. He is the God for whom it is impossible to lie (Heb 6:18), the God whose every word is perfectly "pure" (Ps 12:6), the one of whom it can be said, "Every word of God

proves true" (Prov 30:5). God's words are not simply true in the sense that they conform to some standard of truthfulness outside of God. Rather, they are truth itself; they are the final standard and definition of truth. So Jesus can say to the Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). What was said about the truthfulness of God's knowledge can also be said about God's words, for they are based on his perfect knowledge and accurately reflect that perfect knowledge: God's words are "truth" in the sense that they are the final standard by which truthfulness is to be judged: whatever conforms to God's own words is also true, and what fails to conform to his words is not true.

The truthfulness of God is also communicable in that we can in part imitate it by striving to have true knowledge about God and about his world. In fact, as we begin to think true thoughts about God and creation, thoughts that we learn from Scripture and from allowing Scripture to guide us in our observation and interpretation of the natural world, we begin to think God's own thoughts after him!

This realization should encourage us in the pursuit of knowledge in all areas of the natural and social sciences and the humanities. Whatever the area of our investigation, when we discover more truth about the nature of reality, we discover more of the truth that God already knows. Growth in knowledge is part of the process of becoming more like God or becoming creatures who are more fully in God's image. Paul tells us that we have put on the "new nature," which, he says, "is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col 3:10).⁸

^{NAU} John 8:31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

God is Just and Righteous

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

The scriptures also teach us that God is also **Just and Righteous**. We're going to cover these together because we find these two coupled together frequently in the scriptures as designations of God's character.

Let's **turn to** some passages, beginning with **Deu 32:4; Psa 97:1-2; 89:14; Rev 16:5**.

^{NAU} Deuteronomy 32:4 "The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.

^{NAU} Psalm 97:1 The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad.

² Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

^{NAU} Psalm 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You.

^{NAU} Revelation 16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;

Justice is sometimes taken together with the righteousness of God. The justice of God means that God is entirely correct and just in all His dealings with humanity; moreover, this justice acts in accordance with His law.

Throughout my years as a Christian, on more than one occasion I've had people speak critically of the principle in **(Exo 21:24-25)**

^{NAU} Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Many believe this demonstrates an exacting harshness in God's character. What they don't realize is that this principle is actually a protection against the imbalance of human judgment.

The Bible says the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. The "eye for an eye" principle actually provides a safeguard against people's tendency to punish the guilty party beyond what they deserve, rather than in accordance with the crime committed. It was the perfect way to administer fair punishment.

Here are some additional comments on God's justice and righteousness.

In a certain sense these attributes are but the manifestation of God's holiness. It is holiness as manifested in dealing with the sons of men. Holiness has to do more particularly with the character of God in itself, while in righteousness and justice that character is expressed in the dealings of God with men. Three things may be said in the consideration of the righteousness and justice of God: first, there is the imposing of righteousness, laws and demands, which may be called legislative holiness, and may be known as the righteousness of God; second, there is the executing of the penalties attached to those laws, which may be called judicial holiness; third, there is the sense in which the attributes of the righteousness and justice of God may be regarded as the actual carrying out of the holy nature of God in the government of the world. So that in the righteousness of God we have His love of holiness, and in the justice of God, His hatred of sin.⁹

God's justice cannot be argued against. Who dare argue with God and demand a reason for His action? Has He not equity, as well as authority on His side? He has not need to give an account of His actions. Man's reason may clash with God's justice, but the plumb line

⁹ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines Of The Bible* (Moody Press Chicago).

of our reason is too short to fathom the depth of divine justice. Divine justice must be adored even when we cannot see a reason for it. In this we rest that God knows what is right, and that because of His justice, sin which He hates, must be punished sometime, somewhere; and that all life's suffering and seeming inequalities will be rightly adjusted.¹⁰

God is Love

The next attribute we'll be looking at is not one we'll be able to cover this week, but in light of taking communion, I'll at least mention it, and briefly discuss it.

God is Love

As the band comes up and the ushers pass out communion, let us consider the following.

God's love means that God eternally gives of himself to others.

This definition understands love as self-giving for the benefit of others. This attribute of God shows that it is part of his nature to give of himself in order to bring about blessing or good for others.

John tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). We see evidence that this attribute of God was active even before creation among the members of the Trinity. Jesus speaks to his Father of "my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24), thus indicating that there was love and a giving of honor from the Father to the Son from all eternity. It continues at the present time, for we read, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand" (John 3:35).

¹⁰ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible: A Study and Analysis of Major Bible Doctrines* (Zondervan Publishing Company, 1966).

This love is also reciprocal, for Jesus says, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31). The love between the Father and the Son also presumably characterizes their relationship with the Holy Spirit, even though it is not explicitly mentioned. This eternal love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, and of both for the Holy Spirit makes heaven a world of love and joy because each person of the Trinity seeks to bring joy and happiness to the other two.

The self-giving that characterizes the Trinity finds clear expression in God's relationship to mankind, and especially to sinful men. "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" (1 John 4:10). Paul writes, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). John also writes, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Paul also speaks of "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20), thus showing an awareness of the directly personal application of Christ's love to individual sinners.¹¹

Communion

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

