

Chapter 12: The Character of God: "Communicable" Attributes (Part 1)  
How is God like us in his being, and in mental and moral attributes?

A) Attributes Describing God's Being (186-190)

1) Spirituality

- a) God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence. (John 4:24: "God is spirit....")  
-- not limited to any spatial location  
-- does not have size or physical dimensions (remember omnipresence)  
God forbids us to portray or think of his very being as similar to anything in the physical creation (Ex. 20:4-6)

So God does not have a physical body

(though Christ took on a human nature, and still lives in heaven as the God-man)

-- to have a physical nature would deny many of God's attributes (independence, omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, unchangeableness)

God is not made of energy or thought or anything else in creation: God is spirit

Do you think this is an inferior kind of existence? less real? less desirable?

God's being as spirit is so powerful that he created the universe out of nothing:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

(-- out of nothing!)

The sun = size of 1,000,000 earths

Interior: 29,000,000 degrees (F)

All the energy produced on earth in history  
= energy produced by sun in 1 sec.

The sun is 1 star.

Our Milky Way Galaxy:

= 400,000,000,000 stars

How many galaxies?

The sun is 1 star.

Our Milky Way Galaxy:

400,000,000,000 + stars

How many galaxies?

current estimate

→ 125,000,000,000 galaxies!

Psa. 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made...by the breath of his mouth all their host ...

Do you think that God's being as spirit is a less real or less desirable kind of existence?

→ Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

"God is spirit" indicates that his being is the most excellent kind of existence!

Then what does it mean to say that God is spirit? What is "spirit"?

Mostly, we can say what it is not:

God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence.

-- Are you glad that God is spirit?

How then should we think of God when we pray?

How then should we think of God when we pray?

Not as having any human form, or any other material form.

Just as being present.

And very, very powerful.

And all-knowing. And wise. And loving. And just. And eternal.

God has given us a spiritual nature that is something like his own nature. (John 4:24, Rom. 8:16)

2) Invisibility

- a) God's invisibility means that God's total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by us, yet God still shows himself to us through visible, created things. (John 1:18, 6:46; 1Tim. 1:17, 6:16)
- b) Then what about these verses? (Exo. 33:11, 33:20-23)

- God shows us something of himself (or some representation of himself) through visible, created things. (Gen. 32:28-30; Exo. 13:21-22; John 14:9; Col. 1:15).
- c) We look forward to the "beatific vision" (Latin *beatus*, "blessed" + *facere* "to make") (Rev. 22:3-4; 1 John 3:2; Matt. Psalms. 16:11)

Questions:

1. Do you like it that God is invisible? Do you think this is a good thing?  
(note that all visible things are finite)
2. What do you think it will be like to see God face to face? How will he look at you?

## B) Mental Attributes (190-197)

### 1) Knowledge (Omniscience)

a) God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act. (Job 37:16; 1 Jo. 3:20; 1 Cor. 2:10-11)

i) God knows all actual things (things that have happened or will happen) (Heb. 4:13; Matt. 6:8, 10:30; Psalms. 139:1-2, Isa. 46:9)

To know every detail of every single thing in the whole universe at the present time is something beyond our comprehension.

To know it all for every single moment of past history is millions of times greater.

To know it all for every single moment of the future, with a future that will never end, is billions upon billions of times greater than that.

God knows all of this in one "simple and eternal act"

"simple" = not divided into parts

→ Therefore God doesn't have to ponder carefully before he knows something, or reason to conclusions, or count things quickly.

He always knows all things – all things are always present in his consciousness.

"eternal": He has always known all these things.

Psalms 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

ii) God knows all possible things (things that might have happened but did not happen) (1 Sam. 23:11-13, Matt. 11:21)

Since God knows himself fully, he also knows everything he is able to do.

→ Therefore he fully knows every other possible creation he could have made (but didn't), and every other possible creature he could have created, and every other possible thing that could have happened in each of those creations.

Definition: God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act. (= God's omniscience) (Rom. 11:33)

Questions:

1. How do you feel about God's knowledge?
2. What is the spiritual benefit to our lives from thinking about God's knowledge?

### 2) Wisdom

a) Definition: God's wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals. (Rom. 16:27, Job 12:13)

In creation: Psalms 104:24: O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

→ look for evidences of God's wisdom in creation (this has led to many scientific discoveries)

In the church: Ephesians 3:10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

→ look for evidence of God's wisdom in the church

In our individual lives: Rom. 8:28: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

→ as you look back over months or years, do you see God's wisdom at work in your life?

→ God's wisdom is a great comfort to us in difficult times.

b) Application: We can have some wisdom (in imitation of God's wisdom),

- and we can ask God for more wisdom. (Jas. 1:5; Pro. 9:10)  
 → God wants us to act wisely, and this honors him (it shows forth his character)

Any human activity that requires skill and planning is a form of manifesting God's wisdom

- sports
- music, art
- construction, any of the trades
- culinary skills
- scientific inventions
- managing people, parenting, helping

### 3) Truthfulness (and Faithfulness)

- a) Definition: 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.
- i) He is the true God. (Jer. 10:10-11; John 17:3)
- ii) God's knowledge and words are true and are the final standard of truth. (Job 37:16); Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Pro. 30:5)
- iii) God's knowledge and words are true and are the final standard of truth. (John 17:17)  
 (not just, "Your word is true" (adjective) but "your word is truth" (noun)  
 → This means that we should test all other claims to truth by the standard of God's Word.
- iv) We can imitate God's truthfulness by striving to have true knowledge about God and about his world, and by being truthful in our speech. (Col. 3:10)  
 → this is why we enjoy learning new things: we are thinking more of the same thoughts as God (and thus reflecting more of his character) (Pro. 18:15; Exo. 20:16; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9)  
 → this is why we should never lie (say X is true when X is false): we should imitate God who never lies. He is the God of truth. (2Cor. 4:2)  
 → Do you imitate God's truthfulness in whatever you say? Are your words always trustworthy? (In our truthful speech, Christians should be far different from the general culture today.)
- v) God's faithfulness means that God will always do what he has said and fulfill what he has promised. (Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:4)  
 → To imitate God's faithfulness, we should always do what we say and fulfill what we have promised!  
 → Are you faithful to your commitments? Do you keep your promises?  
 → God's faithfulness is also one of the attributes behind his command (Exo. 20:14)  
 God is faithful to his covenant promises, and he is a faithful "husband" to his people, so he expects us to imitate his faithfulness in being faithful to our covenant commitment of marriage.

### C) Moral Attributes (197-207)

- 1) The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval. (Ps. 100:5; Ps. 106:1; Ps. 34:8; Ps. 119:68; Rom. 12:2; Jas. 1:17)  
 Review of def: The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.  
 → what if God were not good?  
 → how should we respond to God's goodness (how do we respond?) (Ps. 34:8; Psa. 118:1)
- a) We should be careful never to think that something that God does in the Bible or in our lives is wrong, or bad, or evil (Job 1:21; Rom. 8:28)
- b) God's goodness calls forth worship and joy from our hearts  
 → God's goodness is thus the solid foundation for all real joy in the universe
- c) We should ourselves do good and thereby imitate the goodness of our heavenly Father. (Gal. 6:10)  
 This is completely different from worldly "moralism":  
 "Do good to others because it's the best thing to do"  
 "Do good to others because what goes around comes around" [but what if it doesn't?]  
 "Do good to others because it makes you feel better" [what if it doesn't?]  
 → not anchored in God, therefore weak reasons

### 2) Love

- a) God's love means that God eternally gives of himself to others. (1Jo. 4:8; John 17:24; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 2:20)  
 → This is somewhat different from God's goodness, but they are related.

God's love has to do with his giving to others, going out of himself to do good for others. (And his love is certainly something good!)

i) But how can we love God?

Certainly by giving him praise and approval in our hearts. (This is giving of ourselves to him)  
Also by obeying him (1Jo. 5:3)

ii) We imitate God's love first by loving God in return, and second by loving others in imitation of the way God loves them. (Matt. 22:37-39; 1Jo. 4:11)

### 3) Mercy, Grace, Patience

a) God's mercy, patience, and grace may be seen as specific aspects of God's goodness. They are often mentioned together. (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8)

i) God's mercy means God's goodness toward those in misery and distress. (2Sam. 24:14; Matt. 9:27)

→ What is your instinctive attitude toward those in distress, in need?

ii) God's grace means God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment. (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 11:6)

→ Grace is entirely God's choice to give; we have no right to demand it from him. (Ex. 33:19)

→ There is only one human attitude appropriate as an instrument for receiving unmerited grace: faith is the opposite of depending on myself (Rom. 4:16)

→ Isn't our whole life a life of grace? (1Cor. 4:7, 15:10)

iii) God's patience means God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time, and his delight at seeing his plans for history unfold gradually over time. (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Rom. 2:4-5)

→ Do not let God's patience make you think you will ever "get away with it" when you sin!

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. (Col. 3:23-25)

→ though our sins are legally forgiven as Christians, there are still consequences in this life for sin (sooner or later)

God's patience means God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time, and his delight at seeing his plans for history unfold gradually over time. (Exo. 20:11; Gal. 4:4; 2Pe. 3:4)

→ God is not "behind schedule" in preparing for Christ's return

→ Be patient when God works gradually in your life. (and in the lives of others)

→ But I don't think patience means you should enjoy being lazy, or unproductive, or bored.

Being patient does mean trusting God to work over time, at the right time, in the right way.

-- not pushing to make something happen when God is not in it yet

-- waiting on God's timing, praying and being sensitive to God's timing

God's goodness means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.

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

God's mercy means God's goodness toward those in misery and distress

God's grace means God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.

God's patience means God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time, and his delight at seeing his plans for history unfold gradually over time.

### 4) Holiness

Definition: God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.

Q: What does the word "holy" mean in the Bible? (Lev. 10:10)

→ something holy is "set apart" from common use, and is clean, pure (Ex. 26:33)

→ the Most Holy place was the place most "set apart" for God, devoted to his presence (Exo. 20:11)

→ this was a day "set apart" from ordinary use and devoted to honoring God (Exo. 29:44)

→ all these things were "set apart" from ordinary tasks and from impurity, and were dedicated to serving God, honoring him

Holiness includes both:

-a relational quality (set apart from ordinary activities and devoted to God)

-and a moral quality (set apart from sin and impurity, devoted to purity and to seeking God's honor)

God himself is holy (Isa. 6:3)

→ what do you do in God's presence? (Psa. 99:9, 78:40-41)

Application:

1. → We should always feel deep reverence and awe when talking about God, thinking about God, praying to him. He is holy! (remember Isa 6:3)

→ this is so rare today

2. → God commands us to be holy, for he is holy! (Lev. 19:2; 1Pe. 1:15; Heb. 12:14; Heb. 12:10)
3. → We should be holy not just as individuals but also as a people:  
The OT example: Exodus 19:5 "...You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.  
The NT fulfillment: a holy church (1Pe. 2:9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...."; Eph. 5:26-27)  
 → Are churches today growing in holiness as a people?  
 Is our church doing this?  
 Our class?
4. → Growing in holiness involves removing from our lives things that "defile" us – that make us impure before God (2Cor. 7:1)  
 → What are some things that are keeping you from holiness of life?
5. Zechariah prophesies a time when everything on earth will be "holy to the Lord" (Zech. 14:9)

## 5) Peace (or Order)

Definition: God's peace means that in God's being and in his actions he is separate from all confusion and disorder, yet he is continually active in innumerable well-ordered, fully controlled, simultaneous actions. (1Cor. 14:33; Rom. 15:33; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:16)

Application:

1. We should praise God for his peace and be thankful that he is this way!
2. He wants us to imitate his peace (Gal. 5:23; Rom. 14:17)

This "peace" of God is not just absence of conflict, but retains the OT idea of *shālôm*, "peace," in which "all is well" and there is completeness, security, and wholeness -- because all of life is lived in the presence of God and all of one's relationships and activities have his direction and favor on them.

→ "Peace" in this sense it does involve an absence of frantic striving, worry, anxiety, fear, panic, confusion. (God has none of these qualities!)

But a caution:

God's peace does not imply inactivity, but peaceful, well-ordered activity! (Heb. 1:3; John 5:17; Psalm 121:4)

3. By contrast, unbelievers do not know God's peace: (Isa. 48:22, 57:20)

Examples: constant conflict among nations and ethnic groups around the world, or among school children in our schools

Other examples: some modern art, music, dance

Also: some suburban families' patterns of life?

Q: Are there areas of your life where you would like God to give you more peace? (or where you should establish more peace?) (2 Thess. 3:16; Gal. 5:23; Pro, 3:17)

## 6) Righteousness, Justice

### a. Two different words in English

(1) righteousness

(2) justice

But they translate the same word in Hebrew and also translate the same word in Greek

Hebrew: (often) *tsedek* and related words

Greek: (often) *dikaio*s and related words

→ Therefore I will treat them as almost synonyms.

However: in English:

"Righteousness" is used more to emphasize internal character

"Justice" is used more to speak of fairness in one's dealing with others

Definition: God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right. (Deut. 32:4; Gen. 18:25)

God's speaks and commands what is right (Psa. 19:8, Isa. 45:19)

→ we should never think that something God commands is wrong, or something he does is unjust or unfair  
Because God is righteous, it is necessary for him to treat people as they deserve.

→ Therefore it is necessary that God punish sin, for sin deserves punishment, not reward. (Rom. 3:25)

In the events of the world, how can we know what ought to happen?

How can we know what is right?

→ Whatever conforms to God's moral character is right.

His character is the standard of what it means to be righteous, just.

Sometimes the Bible stops trying to explain to our satisfaction how God can be just and just tells us that he is the Creator, and he is just, and we are the creatures. (Rom. 9:19; Job 40:2; Job 40:8-9; Job 38:12, 19, 34; Job 39:26; Job 40:3)

Application of God's righteousness:

1. We should be thankful that God is always, everywhere, righteous and just and fair (another reason to praise him).

→ This gives us peace when thinking about the future and final judgment (it will be fair). (Gen.18:25, Rev. 16:5-7)

2. Someday a just God will rightly, fairly settle all accounts (Col. 3:22-25, Col. 4:1)

3. God's justice is the invisible cause behind many events in this world where "what goes around comes around" and we eventually see people receive "what they deserve" in a surprising turn of events (1Pe. 1:17)

4. God has set up civil government to administer his justice in some events in this life, without waiting for providential intervention or final judgment (Rom. 12:19, 13:4)

-This is a solemn responsibility for governments, and they have great power. Therefore it is important for civil governments to act justly and to enforce justice, and when they don't, there is great evil and suffering (Psa. 82:2-4; Amos 5:7, 12, 15, 21)

5. The assurance of God's justice enables us to forgive others freely, knowing that God will make everything fair and right in the end (1 Pet. 2:20-23)

6. Imitation of God's righteousness: we should be just and fair in our dealings with others.

- business transactions: sometimes something is "legal" but it is not right

- lawsuits, courts: our goal should be that decisions are right and fair and just, not merely for our side to "win"

- (also in sports events)

- also in our dealings with our children, or students, or employees

→ God's righteousness / justice is a wonderful attribute!

## 7) Jealousy

a) God's jealousy means that God continually seeks to protect his own honor (Exo. 20:5, 34:14; Isa. 48:11)

But is jealousy a *good* attribute to have?

In some senses "jealousy" is bad:

-Feeling resentful that somebody has something we don't have, and wanting to take it away from the other person.

→ this is failing to love our neighbor, want the best for him

But there is another kind of "jealousy" that is good: being deeply committed to seeking the honor or welfare of someone who deserves honor

One parallel to God's jealousy:

being jealous to protect the honor and faithfulness of our marriage

Another:

wanting people to speak truthfully about you (this is good – this is not a "selfish" attitude but is a God-given instinct to imitate his jealousy to protect rightful honor in the universe)

God wants people to think rightly about him, and to give him the worship that he deserves. (He is not robbing honor from anybody else who deserves it more!)

→ It is right for God to desire our praise and to seek to protect his honor.

→ He alone is infinitely worthy of praise.

Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

When we realize this it will deepen our joy in worship: Worship of God is what ought to happen!

This is deeply, profoundly right!

→ What if God did not allow us to worship him?

Application:

1. Do we like the fact that God is jealous for his own honor?
2. Do you reflect God's jealousy for his own honor instinctively when you hear him dishonored in conversation or on TV?
3. Imitation: Have you done enough to correct any untruthful things said about you? (Jesus and Paul always immediately corrected lies said about them – except at Jesus' trial, an unusual situation.)

## 8) Wrath

a) God's wrath means that he intensely hates all sin (Ex. 32:9-10, Deut. 9:7-8)

If God *loves* all that is right and good, it should not be surprising that he would *hate* everything opposed to his moral character.

→ There would be something very wrong with a God who did not hate all evil and sin, who just said, "Oh, that's fine" to every horrible, evil deed.

→ And what would heaven be like if God did not punish and exclude sin?

Therefore the wrath of God is a good and necessary attribute. It is the other side of his love for the excellence of his character.

God's wrath therefore must be directed against all sinful human beings, and it is only removed from us by Christ bearing God's wrath in our place (John 3:36, Rom. 1:18)

People who have believed in Christ have no need to fear coming under God's wrath (Eph. 2:3, 1 Thess. 1:10)

In this age we should also be thankful for God's patience, which means that his wrath does not come on the world at once (but it will come!). (Ps. 103:8-9, 2 Peter 3:9-10)

Application of God's wrath:

1. We should thank and praise God also for his just wrath against sin. (yet also for his mercy and patience in this age)
2. Though we should never fear God's wrath (to do us harm, to punish us), still we should fear displeasing God and coming under his fatherly discipline (for our good). (Eph. 4:30, Psa. 111:10)
3. Imitation: There is a righteous anger against sin and evil that is appropriate to us as human beings and that is not inconsistent with love for our neighbor (Eph. 4:26, Mark 3:1-5)