

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

GOD IS OUR POWERFUL, Genesis 1:1-3 & 27, Colossians 1:16, I Chronicles 29:11-13,

MAJESTIC, SOVEREIGN CREATOR I Timothy 6:15-16, Isaiah 40:12-26, & Psalm 115:3.

GOD IS LOVING, I John 4:8, Psalm 36:5-7, Lamentations 3:21-23,

COMPASSIONATE & PATIENT Deuteronomy 7:9-10, II Peter 3:9, & Genesis 6:3.

GOD IS PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS & JUST Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 45:6-7, Exodus 34:7, & Psalm 7:9-11.

ABOVE ALL ELSE GOD IS HOLY & PURE, Isaiah 6:1-3, Psalm 99:5, Habakkuk 1:13a, Psalm 5:5-6, Luke 5:4-9, & Isaiah 57:15.

BECAUSE HE IS HOLY, GOD IS A GOD OF GREAT WRATH Romans 1:18-20, Nahum 1:2-7, II Thessalonians 1:6-9, Hebrews 10:26-31, Isaiah 55:8-9, & Matthew 10:28.

INTRODUCTION: "The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped...Something more than a theoretical knowledge of God is needed by us. God is only known in the soul as we yield ourselves to Him, submit to His authority, and regulate all the details of our lives by His holy precepts and commandments."¹ The vast majority of people in the world today are virtually ignorant as to what the God of the Bible is like. They have heard of God, but much of what they have heard is distorted, one-sided, or altogether inaccurate. Most today have created a "god" to their own liking who exists only in their own imaginations. Men and women spend thousands of hours studying for college degrees so as to equip themselves for the world that exists around us. It seems very strange that so few will take time to try to know God better to prepare themselves for the world to come. It is hazardous not to spend some time examining the God who is revealed to us in the Bible, for the Bible tells us that He is the judge of all the earth and has ultimate power over every man's eternal destiny.

The God of the Bible claims to be the one and only true God. He is revealed to us as being Creator of all that is, powerful, majestic, sovereign over all creation, loving, compassionate, patient, perfectly righteous, just, holy, and a God who is full of wrath or anger against all unrighteousness. These are only a few of the characteristics of the God of the Bible. We will examine each of the above characteristics of God in more detail in an effort to get to know Him better.

1. God is our powerful, majestic, sovereign creator: We shall begin at the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis. Turn to Genesis 1:1-3 & 27. Who does verse 1 say created the world? How did God create light (vs. 3)? Who created man according to verse 27?

Colossians 1:16 gives us a view of the power and majesty of God in creation. What does it say God created? Was anything created that God did not create?

I Chronicles 29:11-13 lists some of the qualities or characteristics of God. List four words used in verse 11 to describe God. What does it say that God is ruler or head over (vs. 11)? What does verse 12 tell us about God? What does the knowledge of these things cause the writer to do in verse 13?

Paul, the writer of many books of the New Testament, describes God in I Timothy 6:15-16. God is called by three separate and distinct titles by Paul in verse 15. What are these titles? What does it mean to be Lord of lords? How does Paul describe God in verse 16? Why do you think God lives in unapproachable light? What does this tell us about God and about ourselves?

Isaiah gives us a lengthy description of the greatness and majesty of God in Isaiah 40:12-26. What does verse 12 picture God as doing? What impression do you get of God from this verse? What are the answers to the questions asked about God in verses 13-14? How does the greatness of the nations of the earth compare to the greatness of God (vs. 15)? What does verse 23 say God does to the power of the rulers of the countries of the earth? What are the rulers of the earth compared to (vs. 24)? What is the answer to the question asked in verse 25?

Psalms 115:3 speaks of the sovereignty of God. What does this verse tell us about God? The sovereignty of God means that His will is supreme. He is the Creator of all and all creatures are accountable to Him. He is a law unto Himself, so that whatever He does is right. Psalm 135:5-6 says, "For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.

Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." Since God made us, we are accountable to Him and responsible to obey His will and submit to His authority. God desires that we lovingly choose to submit to Him; however, most men and women despise and hate the idea of the sovereignty of God. Men will allow God to do most anything except be on His throne. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "When God ascends His throne, His creatures gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love." How does the knowledge of God's sovereignty cause you to respond to Him--favorably or unfavorably?

2. God is love: is a characteristic of God that most people are familiar with. But many today who talk about the love of God do not know the God who in His very essence, is love. A. W. Pink has said, "Divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good natured indulgence." God's love as viewed by modern man allows man to do anything he pleases with no consequences. This is not what the Bible teaches or portrays about God and His love for men. Let's examine some verses which tell us about God's love, compassion, and patience.

We will begin with I John 4:8. What does this verse tell us about God? Does the verse imply that God only "has" love or more than that? Notice that before John tells us about God being love, John mentions the fact that God is light in I John 1:5. What do you think of when you hear the word "light"? Light often implies holiness, purity, and righteous.

Turn to Psalm 36:5-7. What qualities or characteristics of God are mentioned in verses 5 & 6? How great is God's love or loving-kindness (vs. 5)? Because God's loving-kindness is so great, what does the Psalmist say this allows men to do (vs. 7)?

Lamentations 3:21-23 tells us more about God. What qualities does Jeremiah mention that God has in verses 22-23?

The mistake that most people make in evaluating or attempting to understand God's love relates to how God responds to and deals with sin or unrighteousness in man. Deuteronomy 7:9-10 helps strike a proper balance between God's love and holiness. What does verse 9 say about God? What does verse 10 say about those who do not love God? How have those in verse 9 demonstrated that they love God?

Some people doubt that God would ever judge the earth because they see no evidence of judgment in the lives of the wicked today. This leads to the misconception that God is indulgent of sin or like an old man up in heaven, who is so full of love that He winks at or overlooks all sin. At least two fundamental errors have been made by such people: 1) They do not understand or realize that judgment follows death. Therefore, since they do not see evidence of divine judgment, they presume it does not exist and 2) They mistake the marvelous patience of God toward those in the world for indulgence. Peter talks about God's patience in II Peter 3:9. Why is God so patient with those in the world according to what Peter says in this verse?

Genesis 6:3 reveals to us another side of God's patience. It says, "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man forever.' " What do we learn about God's patience from this verse?

3. Not only is God a loving, compassionate, and patient God, He is also perfectly righteous and just. Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us more about God's character and what He is like. What does this verse tell us about God? Psalm 45:6-7 tells us about God's righteousness. What does verse 6 say is the scepter (a staff borne by a king as an emblem of authority) of God's kingdom? Since God is declared to be righteous, what is His attitude said to be toward evil (vs. 7)? God hates all

sin and His righteous character demands that He punish sin. Not just a few sins, but all sin. Proverbs 15:26 says, "Evil plans are an abomination to the Lord."

This balance between God's love and justice is seen clearly again in the same verse in Exodus 34:7. What does the first half of this verse tell us about God? What does the last half of this verse tell us God will do to the guilty (those who break any of His laws)?

Again, we see this balance in Psalm 7:9-11. What does the writer of verse 9 ask God to do to the evil and the righteous? Since God is righteous, what does this cause Him to do (vs. 9)? What is God's attitude said to be toward evil (vs. 11)?

4. Above all else, God is a holy God. What does this mean? Holiness is a quality that is totally unfamiliar to most modern men. Webster's Dictionary defines holy as "sacred, of unimpaired innocence or proved virtue, godly, worthy of adoration". Holiness implies purity, moral perfection, and absolute uprightness. In Isaiah 6:1-3 God's holiness is declared. What does Isaiah see in verse 1? Seraphim, created beings similar to angels, surround the throne of God. What do the seraphim call out to each other (vs. 3)? Why do you think the word "holy" is repeated three times? It is interesting to note that no other quality of God is ever repeated three times like this in all the rest of the Bible. God is never said to be "Love, love, love" or "Mighty, mighty, mighty". Holiness then, must be the supreme character trait of God. Above all else and any other quality, God is holy!

In Psalm 99:5 God is declared to be holy. What are we told to do because God is holy?

In the first half of Habakkuk 1:13 we learn more of God's holiness. What does it say about God's eyes and sin? How does God respond to wickedness?

Turn to Psalm 5:5-6. How does God feel toward those who sin and do what is wrong (vs. 5)? What does verse 6 say about God's attitude toward the deceitful person?

Because God is holy, He hates all sin. God loves everything which is in conformity or agreement with His laws, and hates everything which goes against or is contrary to His laws. God hates sin with an absolute hatred, therefore He must punish all sin. Even those things which men consider to be "little sins" are hated and despised by God. Every sin constitutes open rebellion against God's authority and therefore is an abomination to Him.

Let's look at the response one man made when he became aware to some extent of the holiness of God. Turn to Luke 5:4-9. What instructions does Jesus give to Simon (also called Peter) in verse 4? How does Simon Peter answer Jesus (vs. 5)? What happens (vs. 6)? What response does this cause in Simon Peter (vs. 8)? Why do you think Simon Peter responded in this way?

Finally, we will look at Isaiah 57:15. How is God described in the first part of this verse? What description is given of the person God is pleased to live with? Does this describe you?

5. The wrath of God is one characteristic of God which many people prefer to ignore or try to explain away. In actuality, there are more references in the Bible to God's anger, fury, and wrath than to His love and tenderness. We have seen in the last section that because God is holy, He hates all sin. A. W. Pink has written, "Indifference to sin is a moral blemish... How could He (God), who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loathe and hate that which is impure and vile?...The wrath of God is...the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin...God is angry at 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 God is the Lord."³

Turn to Romans 1:18-20. What are the reasons listed in verse 18 that the wrath of God comes upon men? What can any man learn about God by observing God's creation around him (vs. 20)? Does any man have any excuse after observing nature to deny that God is real (vs. 20)?

The Old Testament book of the prophet Nahum begins by describing God. Read Nahum 1:2-7. What characteristics of God are mentioned in verse 2? What does Nahum say that God will do to His enemies (vs. 2)? What will God do to the guilty (vs. 3)? How is God's wrath described (vs. 6)? Still, Nahum reminds his hearers of God's goodness in verse 7. To whom will God be a refuge or stronghold (vs. 7)?

II Thessalonians 1:6-9 speaks more about the wrath of God. How will the Lord Jesus be revealed from heaven (vs. 7)? Who are the objects of God's wrath (vs. 8)? What will their punishment be (vs. 9)? What character trait of God is spoken of in verse 6 to describe God's response in repaying evil men with trouble or affliction?

The passage in Hebrews 10:26-31 is addressed to people who have heard the truth about God, refused to believe it, and continued on in their selfish lifestyles. They are described in verse 26 as those "who go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth." What does the writer say in verse 29 about the person who knowingly rejects Jesus Christ? What warnings are given to the one who has rejected Jesus in verses 30-31?

Isaiah 55:8-9 will help us to understand God better. In these verses God is speaking. What are we like in comparison to God (vs. 8-9)? God views sin and righteousness very differently than we do. For one sin God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden. For one sin God cursed the descendants of Ham. For one sin Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. For one sin Lot's wife became a pillar of salt, Gehazi was turned into a leper, and Ananias and Shappira were stricken with death.⁴

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus gives us counsel and a warning. Whom does Jesus tell us not to fear? Whom does Jesus tell us to fear? Why?

In examining the character of God we have seen that God is much different than we are. We have seen that God is our Creator, therefore, we are accountable to Him and responsible to obey Him. We have seen that God is both a loving and compassionate God, but that His love must be balanced with His absolutely holy character. Holiness is a quality that is difficult for us to understand, because we are not holy. Because God is holy, He hates all sin and must punish it. Since God hates sin so much, it is very important that we understand what sin is. Please continue on to the next study entitled "The Nature of Sin".

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- 1 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 8.
- 2 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 77.
- 3 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 83.
- 4 Ibid, pp. 43-44. (Summary)

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