

WHO IS GOD?

If God exists, then what do you think he is like? What is the first characteristic that enters your mind? Why do you think that attribute came to your mind first?

Of all of God's attributes, which one do you think is the most significant in that it will influence all the others?

Many people will often refer to God's **love** as being the most significant. It is almost as though God is a big Grandpa in the sky who just warmly loves everyone. However, the Bible also refers to God's **wrath**. Take the story of Noah for instance. Civilization became so wicked and violent that eventually all righteousness would have been abandoned and life on earth become very short-lived (see Genesis 6). In order to save civilization God had to choose a wrathful response, judge evil and start over with Noah. He was the one man who had faith in God and desired to live righteously.

How can wrath and love work together?

They must be determined by some other overriding factor.

Isaiah 6:1-5 (NKJV)

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"

4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

What characteristic does the seraphim see as being all significant?

Answer: God's holiness

Holiness is the one attribute of God that influences all his other attributes.

In the English language if we want to emphasize something we often use the word “really”, as in, “It was really big”. We might even go so far as to say, “It was “really, really, big”.

Likewise, in the Hebrew language if you want to **emphasize** something, you simply repeat the adjective. Here, the seraphim are not simply saying, “God is holy”. They are not even saying, “God is holy, holy”. They are saying, “God is holy, holy, holy”. Do you get the sense they’re trying to stress a point?

What does the word “holy” mean?

Holiness consists of two concepts:

1) Separate

God, by his nature, is separate from anything created and from anything that is less than perfect. The opposite of that which is holy is that which is “common” or “earthly”.

In the Old Testament, objects dedicated to him were also considered to be “holy” as they were made distinct from everything else and set apart for God, i.e. the priesthood – those members alone could enter the Holy Place of the tabernacle because they were declared holy by God and set apart from the others for his service. (Also: Ark of the Covenant, the temple utensils, etc.).

2) Moral Purity

To say God is holy means that he is completely righteous. There is no hint of sin or evil associated with him. Because he is holy, he can in no way embrace what is evil or sinful.

Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Why do you think Isaiah responds the way he does in verse 5?

When a person encounters the true holiness of God, he becomes distinctly aware of his own sinfulness. It induces an overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, and judgment. Our natural response is to want to retreat away from it – like bugs under a rock suddenly being exposed to the light.

Isaiah's response was to say he was "undone" or ruined by that experience. In what way was he ruined?

Isaiah felt naked and exposed, as he stood before his holy God. He felt there was no possible way he, a sinner, could possibly survive such an encounter. We can never completely understand the full extent of our sinfulness, at least until we see the nature of true holiness.

Isaiah became painfully aware of his own sinfulness as he stood before the Holy God. How would you define sin?

Sin is anything that **does not reflect the holiness of God.**

The actual Greek word has reference to the realm of **archery** when the arrow misses the target. Sin is compared to missing the target of God's glory and holiness. Anything that falls short of hitting the target of holiness is sin. We might think sins have varying degrees of severity, but from God's perspective, all sin is a moral rejection of him.

Where do you think these insights leave us with regard to our relationship with God?

Is it possible for God to accept and embrace us if we have sin in our lives?

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV)

*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness,
without which no one will see the Lord.*

QUICK SUMMARY:

What are the positive aspects of God's holiness?

God is good.

God can never be evil or do evil to you.

God can be trusted to do what is morally right in every situation.

You can trust God.

What is the negative side of God's holiness with regard to us?

God cannot be united with evil. If we have any sin in our lives we cannot be in a relationship with God or dwell with him through eternity.

Don't worry. Over the next few weeks we will resolve the tension and reveal God's solution to the problem of our sin.

What are some examples of times we tend to question the goodness or holiness of God?

Is there any concept from this study that might affect your perspective about God or self?

There are also a few other characteristics that we want to look at in order to help us better understand our relationship with him.

Characteristics of God

1) God is Just

Psalms 9:8 (NKJV)

He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

What does it mean to say God is just?

God will always give the appropriate (correct) response in every situation and will judge according to his holy standard. God can never turn a blind eye to evil and ultimately, will only allow righteousness to prevail.

Imagine a judge who is presiding over a case that proves a man maliciously raped and murdered a young girl.

How do you want that judge to react to such a crime?

How would you feel if the judge simply put the man on probation?

We want a judge who: hates injustice, gets angry with wrong doing and who will ultimately deal with evil in such a way that it is removed from our presence, so it will not harm us again.

If God is just, then what are the implications with regard to our sin?

God needs to declare us guilty and give a proper reaction to our sin.

Job 10:14 (NKJV)

If I sin, then You mark me, and will not acquit me of my iniquity.

What is a proper response to sin from God's perspective?

Isaiah 59:2 (NKJV)

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Genesis 2:16-17 (NKJV)

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

For the wages of sin is death,

God is HOLY

Good News:

God is morally pure and can do no evil.

Bad News:

If we have sin in our lives we are eternally separated from God.

God is JUST

Good News:

God will always judge rightly and respond appropriately to evil.

Bad News:

If we have sin in our lives, the appropriate penalty God must deal out is death.

How do you respond to these truths?

Fortunately there are other characteristics of God that come into play that bring us hope. God is not simply HOLY and JUST, he is also LOVE.

2) God is Love

How is God's love different from our love?

Our love is almost always "conditional".

I love you because of how you treat me or because of how you make me feel. Perhaps the closest we might get to God's kind of love would be the love of a parent with their brand new baby – but even then we discover that love is very conditional. I love my child – not yours. The parental love for the child is "conditional", based on the fact that it is "my" child. If I had unconditional love for a baby, I would have to have that same love for every baby – and not just babies – but everyone. Otherwise the condition I have set is that it must be a baby and it must be mine.

What is God's love based on if it is not based on our performance?

1 John 4:10 (NRSV)

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:8 (NIV)

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is love. He doesn't simply act lovingly...he is love. Any love we experience originated in, and flowed from, his character. It is rooted in who he is.

Therefore, when God loves us, it has nothing to do with us, but everything to do with him. His love for us, therefore, is not based on our performance, but in his character.

God's love is not an emotional reaction to us, but is in fact, a choice - he chooses to love us – we call that grace. We receive love from God even when it is not deserved or earned.

What sort of things might I do that would cause God to love me less?

Nothing!

What can I do to ensure God will continue to love me, or to love me more?

Nothing!

How do you feel about the fact that you can't increase or diminish God's love for you?

There is one more characteristic of God we want to quickly touch on.

3) God is Sovereign

Nebuchadnezzar was a very effective and powerful ruler over the Babylonian Empire (605 - 562 BC). It was he who conquered Israel and led many of the Israelites from captivity back to Babylon. Because of his tremendous military and political success, Nebuchadnezzar grew extremely proud and considered himself accountable to no one. Despite warnings from God through the Prophet Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar continued to revel in self-glory.

Daniel 4:29-33 (NKJV)

29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.

30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you!

32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

After 7 Years Nebuchadnezzar repents and acknowledges the sovereignty of God.

Daniel 4:34-35 (NKJV)

34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.

35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

What do we mean when we say God is sovereign?

Even though He doesn't control our decisions, He is in ultimate control over the affairs of heaven and earth. Nothing happens without his permission or outside his ultimate purposes.

In what ways might it bother us to confess that "God is sovereign"?

It is easy to look at the world and question whether or not God is in control. It makes one wonder why God would allow all the evil that happens?

One of the great challenges to belief in God is the question, "If God exists, why does he not do something about all the evil in the world?"

This perspective raises a tension between his character and what appears to be:

God's inability to do something about the evil	His sovereignty
God's acceptance of evil	His holiness
God's unwillingness to stop or judge evil	His justice
God's indifference to people's suffering	His love

Which of these attributes of God do you find you struggle with the most?

Which of these attributes do you find the most reassuring?

The goal of this series is to show you that God does have a plan, he is working it out, and that you are a part of it. God is approaching things the way he does because he is holy, just, loving, and sovereign.

In what ways, as a Christian, is it comforting to know God is in control of your life?

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

He is holy and can only do what is absolutely right

He is just and will judge evil in his perfect timing

He is love (his followers only experience things which he allows, so they will be more like him). Nothing can catch God by surprise; nothing can stop his purposes from being carried out.

If God is truly sovereign and in control, how might that affect how you approach this next week?

Free from stress or anxiety

Prayerfully dependent on him to provide everything I need for life

Confident

Obedient

Humble

Etc.