Systematic Theology Lesson 14

GOD’S COMMUNICABLE PERFECTIONS (GOD’S GOODNESS)

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

– EXODUS 34:5-7

The attributes or perfections of God that we will consider in this lesson are called communicable because they describe qualities of God that may also be bestowed upon and shared with us; although in a finite and imperfect way as compared to the Lord. Also, we should remember that the dividing of God’s attributes into categories is merely for the sake of our systematic study. As we established before, God is simple, meaning that God is not a complex composition of parts, nor is He the sum of all of His attributes. All of these attributes are simply aspects of God, and they are all interrelated and connected one with another in the pure being of God. But most of these attributes that we will consider in this lesson have to do with His moral character, whereas the incommunicable ones we considered before were more related to His essential nature. As the incommunicable attributes described God’s greatness, the following attributes mostly describe His goodness.

I. THE VITALITY OF GOD

But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king: At his wrath the earth shall tremble, And the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. – JEREMIAH 10:10

While this is not necessarily a moral attribute, and while it’s very similar to God’s aseity (self-existence), the vitality of God is a communicable attribute because it is one that He has shared with us. God’s vitality simply describes His liveliness. As Jeremiah described Him, the LORD is the living God. God is alive and He’s the source of all living things. Our own vitality is a gift bestowed upon us by the living God, who graciously bestowed the status of being alive to His creatures. The vitality of God is often expressed in contrast to graven images which are inanimate objects, as well as those who serve idols:

(Psalms 115:1-8) Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

(1 Samuel 17:26) And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

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Vitality is such an essential attribute of God's nature, that God sometimes describes Himself as "Life," as well as "our life":

(John 14:6) Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

(Colossians 3:4) When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Because God lives, we live:

(John 14:19) Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

God's vitality is such a certainty, that it was often appealed to whenever God Himself, or someone else swore an oath!

(Numbers 14:21) But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

(1 Kings 1:29-30) And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day.

Because He is "the living One," death and the grave could not hold Jesus:

(Acts 2:23-24) Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

(Revelation 1:18) I am he that liveth (Literally, "the living one"), and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

II. THE VERACITY AND FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; – Titus 1:2

Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

– Deuteronomy 7:9

God's veracity describes His absolute truthfulness. As Paul said to Titus, God cannot lie. God's veracity is so absolute, that Jesus called Himself "the truth" (John 14:6). This means that He is the one true God, and that all of his knowledge and words are utterly and completely true, and are the ultimate standard of truth by which all things must be measured:

(Deuteronomy 32:4) He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

(Psalm 19:9) The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

(Psalm 119:160) Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

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If people are seeking other sources and standards of truth besides God, then it is because they are in spiritual darkness:

(Isaiah 8:19–20) And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

God’s veracity is also very closely related to, and truly indistinguishable from His faithfulness or trustworthiness. This means that God will always do what He has said and fulfill what He has promised:

(Romans 3:3–4) For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

(Numbers 23:19) God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Because He is “a God of truth and without iniquity” (Deuteronomy 32:4), He hates lying and will not tolerate falsehood from His people:

(Proverbs 12:22) Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

(Exodus 23:1) Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

(Ephesians 4:25) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

III. THE WISDOM OF GOD

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. – JUDE 25

The wisdom of God is more of a mental attribute than a moral attribute, but again this is one that He is more than willing to share with us—although, we will never attain to God’s infinite wisdom, which is why He is called, in more than one place, “the only wise God” (see also Romans 16:27 and 1 Timothy 1:17). A good definition of God’s wisdom is that God always chooses the best outcomes and the best means to those outcomes; and thus his actions will always bring about the best results through the best possible means. This is closely related to God’s omniscience and His sovereignty as well. Because He knows all things actual and potential, and knows every outcome, He is able to chose the best outcome; and by His sovereignty and omnipotence, He is able to execute that wise outcome without fail. Numerous Scriptures express the depths of God’s wisdom. We can see that God possesses all wisdom:

(Romans 11:33–36) O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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**Proverbs 8:22-23** The LORD possessed me \(\text{[wisdom]}\) in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

**Job 12:13** With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding.

We see also that God created all things by His wisdom:

**Psalm 104:24** O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

**Proverbs 3:19** The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

God’s infinite wisdom is displayed in His plan of redemption:

**1 Corinthians 1:21-25** For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

**Ephesians 3:8-12** Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

And the good news is that God is eager and willing to share His wisdom with us for our good:

**Proverbs 2:6-7** For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

**Daniel 2:20-22** Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

**James 1:5** If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

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**IV. THE GOODNESS OF GOD**

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. – Psalms 34:8

While we may include many of these attributes under the category of the goodness of God, as they are expressions of His goodness; the attribute of goodness itself refers to God’s benevolence towards His creation, that He is the ultimate standard of what is good, and that all that He does is good. As He said to Moses, He is “abundant in goodness” (Exodus 34:6).

God Himself is good in His essential Character:

(Psalm 34:8) O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

(Psalm 100:5) For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

(Psalm 106:1) Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

All of God’s works are good, both in His act of creation and His acts of providence:

(Genesis 1:31) And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

(Psalms 33:5) He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

(Psalm 107:8) Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

All that God gives to mankind is good:

(Psalm 145:9) The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

(Acts 14:17) Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

(James 1:17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

God is particularly good to His children:

(Romans 8:32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

(Romans 8:28) And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

As God is good, He commands and expects His children to reflect His goodness to one another:

(Galatians 6:10) As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

V. THE LOVE OF GOD

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein 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 4:7–10

God is love. This means that love is a fundamental attribute of God, and that all true love is of God. But love that is not expressed in any way is not true love. Therefore God manifested His love towards us in

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that He sent His only begotten Son to save us. And God’s love that compelled Him to do this was unconditional. We didn’t love God, He loved us.

(1 John 4:19) We love him, because he first loved us.

Most people have a warped understanding of love, because they do not know the Lord. Love, as it truly is, is seen in God, and experienced from God. So when we speak of God’s love, we are defining what love is altogether. Therefore, based on the definition that John gives us, love is God’s disposition to give of Himself unconditionally, for the eternal benefit of others, seeking the highest good for the objects of His love, without needing anything in return. This love is expressed most clearly in salvation:

(John 3:16-17) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

(Romans 5:6-8) For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(Revelation 1:5-6) And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Not only is God’s love unconditional, unmerited, and self-sacrificial; but it is also everlasting:

(Jeremiah 31:3) The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

God’s love has always been eternally active, being given and received within the Holy Trinity in the realm of eternity, and even exhibited towards us before the foundation of the world!

(John 17:24) Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

(Ephesians 1:3-6) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

The love of God is the definition of what love is. Anything less than the love of God is not love. And God commands us to love Him with all of our being, and to love one another as He has loved us.

(Deuteronomy 6:5) And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

(John 13:34-35) A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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