

Pastor's Note

Hello

During some recent sermons in early December we spent a considerable amount of time looking at God's plan for humanity. During those sermons we consistently brushed up against many aspects of God's character. Can I share with you that the character of God is incredibly important to understand for three reasons? The first is this, if you really want to get more out of reading the Bible... If you want the scriptures to start making a lot more sense... If you want to begin to understand some of the deep and difficult passages of the bible... You need to understand the character of God. The bible is a circular instrument. It operates in a circular pattern that does two things. First, it reveals the Character of God and second the character of God allows us to understand the scriptures. The more we know about the character of God the clearer the scriptures become. Everything in the bible is filtered through the character of God. God and the Bible are intertwined;

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. By the way, the Word is also Jesus Christ. Look at

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word of God and the Holy Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all intertwined. If we want to understand them it is imperative that we know the character of God. The second reason that it is important to understand the character of God is this. God not only designed us with the capacity to be like Him, He wants us to be like Him. He designed us in His image to be like Him. The only way we're ever going to become more like God is to understand His character and try to take on those attributes in our own lives.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit is alive and working in each of us right now. In every circumstance big or small, He is moving us closer to the character of God through the renewing of our minds. The third reason that it is important to understand the character of God is this. To truly know and understand someone we must know their character. It is the same with God. When we understand God's character, life itself makes a lot more sense. When we understand our creator's character, the one who made us in His own image;

Genesis 1:27 says, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

We share a common image with our creator and when we understand what that image is supposed to look like, things that didn't make sense before become clearer. Our understanding of our overall purpose becomes apparent. We know who we are and why we're here.

Understanding the character of God helps us understand the bible, it helps us conform to the image we were created to become, and it helps us make sense out of life. It is through the understanding of the character of God that we find our true purpose.

I'm going to be spending the next six weeks looking at six character attributes of God. Are there only six? I couldn't tell you how many there are, but the best answer is probably more than six. There are probably aspects to God's character that I don't even have the capacity to

understand at this point in my existence. I have a hard enough time just trying to wrap my mind around some of the things that God does that I'm aware of. But

1 Corinthians 2:16 says this, For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

God has given us these things to understand and we truly understand them when we understand His character. God is Holy, He is just, He is merciful, He is graceful, He is kind, and He is love. God is Holy and His Holiness is pure light, there is no evil in Him. God's Holiness requires justice and He is just. God's justice is always merciful and He loves mercy. Because of God's great mercy He offers us the free gift of grace. God's mercy and grace flow from His loving-kindness because God is kind. And most importantly God's kindness flows out of His great love for us. These are the six characteristics of God we will be looking at and today we begin with Holiness.

I have touched on some of this material before but because of its foundational importance to our understanding of holiness you may hear some things reinforced today that I have mentioned previously. God Is Holy. This is what the scriptures say about God's holiness:

Exodus 15:11 "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?"

Isaiah 6:1-4 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Revelation 4:8-11 ...Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, "You are worthy, 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."

God is Holy. We talked in the past about how God has interacted with humans and how we have interpreted that interaction in the varying stages of our development. For example we talked about the significance of the second forbidden tree in understanding God's character in our removal from the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We ate the fruit and it became necessary for us to be removed from the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:21-23

And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden.

- 1) Stopped and made them some clothes
- 2) Could not allow evil to live forever.

Much is made of God's destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked God to spare the cities so as to not kill the good people with the bad. There is an account of this exchange in the 18th chapter of Genesis. I encourage you to read it sometime. If you are familiar with the story you know that Abraham went back and forth with God until he discovered there were no good people except Lot in the two cities. None. God allowed Lot to take his wife and daughters with him when the angels told them to "run for your lives and don't look back."

Genesis 19:22-26 Hurry; escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there. "Therefore the city was called Zoar. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Did you ever wonder why she became a pillar of salt? The natural human assumption is what you're thinking right now. She was told not to look, she looked, she got punished. I don't think that's what happened at all. When you understand the principle of holiness you can see this in a whole new light. She was told not to look for her own protection, she did not take the warning seriously, she turned and came into the presence of God's holiness and it destroyed her. There were no feelings involved. It just happened because that's what holiness does to evil. I imagine God was quite saddened by her choice.

As the Ark of the Covenant was being transported

2 Samuel 6:2-9 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. David was angry because the LORD had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah, to this day. David was afraid of the LORD that day.

David probably understood God better anyone else in his time and he was afraid. Uzzah was just trying to stop the Ark from falling. Did he really do anything wrong? That's what they thought. It's the natural human response. He must have done something to make God mad. Uzzah touched the ark and came into contact with holiness and it killed him. God wasn't mad at Uzzah. I imagine God was rather saddened by Uzzah's misfortune.

Understanding the character of God changes the way we understand his word. You will see in the coming weeks as we move deeper into understanding God's Character how the attributes of holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love are intertwined. You see they cannot contradict one another at any time. God cannot be loving and cruel or loving and vindictive. We interpret events in our terms and place our attributes on God's actions and until we understand the character of God in its combined entirety we will continue to misinterpret God's actions and God's reasons for doing the things He has done. Every account and action that is attributed to God must be filtered by the character of God if we want to have a prayer of understanding why God is doing whatever it is that He is doing.

Moses got close to God and no one could look at him. They couldn't look at Moses. Imagine trying to look at God. Jacob wrestled with God and was maimed for life. Saul saw God for a split second and was blinded. No evil can coexist in the presence of Holiness. Not even the good guys. Wow, this God guy is a pretty scary individual isn't he? They sure thought so in the Old Testament and God is still perceived in this manner by millions of people today because they do not understand holiness. Yes God is holy.

Revelation 4:8 "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

God is holy. Holiness can be tricky to wrap our minds around. But it is very important for us to understand it. Holiness is what makes heaven paradise. Most of you have seen a little thing called the periodic table of elements. Elements are the bed rock components of everything that exists in the physical realm. When we combine them together they make up everything in the created universe. H₂O - Mix two hydrogen atoms with one oxygen atom and you get? Yes! Water. The neat thing about elements is they have very specific properties that stay constant all the time, like their atomic weight, their atomic mass, and their electro negativity number.

Once we understand the properties of an element, that element is very predictable. We know with great confidence how it will react physically with other elements or how it will react physically to temperature changes and so on. Well how many of you know that if there were a periodic table for the spiritual realm, holiness would be one of the elements on it? Holiness has rock solid properties that do not change. Part of our purpose for being on planet earth is to practice trying to become holy. Jesus Christ is perfectly holy and as Christians one of our jobs is to become more like Christ; to become more holy.

One rock solid property of holiness is that in its pure form it obliterates evil. It's not that holiness has feelings about evil and decides to destroy it, it just happens. It's like when we freeze water; that water doesn't think about if it's going to freeze, "Hmm, Ok I think I'm gonna freeze now, I'm really going to freeze now." No. The temperature just changes and it becomes ice. Well this property of pure holiness creates quite a problem for humans who want to get into heaven. We live on a fallen world, which means that there is evil in this world and we are imperfect because we are affected by that evil. What happens to evil when it comes into the presence of pure holiness? The evil is obliterated. God is Holy. We have evil on us. If we come into direct contact with God we will be obliterated. God is not looking at us and saying, "You are evil and therefore I am going to destroy you." No God is saying, "Look out! I'm holy and you have evil on you, so don't look back. If you get to close, my holiness will kill you."

He doesn't want to destroy us. He loves us and He wants us to have a close personal relationship with Him. And His plan makes it possible for us to be in His presence without fear. But until we are participating in the plan we cannot come into direct contact with pure holiness without being obliterated. So in essence it's not just that God doesn't want evil in heaven, which of course He doesn't. And it's not just that heaven would no longer be paradise if God let evil in, which of course it wouldn't. But the reality is God is in heaven and He is pure and holy. Any evil that tries to get into heaven will automatically be destroyed because one of the properties of holiness states that whenever evil comes into the presence of pure holiness it is automatically obliterated.

It's like the empty room that has a closed door and no windows. The room is filled with darkness. If we turn on a light in the center of the ceiling the darkness is obliterated. It is completely gone from the room. God is Holy. God also loves justice, mercy, grace, kindness,

and is completely loving in nature. No single attribute can be placed on God in isolation. He is the sum of all of them and they are all true all of the time.

That is why He worked for thousands of years to develop our character and when we were ready, He came to the earth again in human form to establish a way for us to be in relationship together again; the solution to the holiness factor. We don't have to worry about getting burned, maimed, or blinded. God has bridged the gap through Jesus Christ. When we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, His blood sacrifice covers our mistakes and God sees us as holy. We become Holy in God's sight. We could never do it on our own, we don't deserve it, but God sends his Holy Spirit to live in us anyway and we begin a personal relationship with God. When we are in a personal relationship with God, we begin to change. You see we can't hang out with God and stay the same. When we hang out with God we begin to take on the character of God. We begin to become more holy, more fair, more empathetic, more forgiving, more kind, and more loving.

Blessings,

Scott

