

## “WHAT IS GOD REALLY LIKE, II?”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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**Sermon Texts: Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 5:1**

### **Introduction.**

In our attempt to describe the various aspects of God's character categories have been developed and one of the most common ways of classifying God's attributes is the one we find in the Belgic Confession.

Two weeks ago I explained how Article One divides the attributes of God between the incommunicable attributes of God and the communicable attributes of God.

In simplest terms a communicable disease is a disease that can be passed on, it's catchable like the flu. And there are diseases that can't be passed on, like Parkinson's or Multiple Sclerosis.

We have already considered the Incommunicable attributes of God that He does not share with others, like being spiritual, invisible, eternal, infinite, all powerful, incomprehensible. This evening we come to the Communicable attributes of God, attributes God shares with others.

Solomon was wise, wiser than anyone living.

Mary's husband Joseph was called just.

Joseph of Arimathea was called a good man.

When Moses asked God to reveal to him God's glory, God reveal His communicable attributes.

**Exodus 34:6-7** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

While we call these attributes shared we readily acknowledge that even these attributes are not shared with us perfectly or completely. There's no attribute of God that we have in any complete or whole way as it's found in God. We can have love and be loving and share love but not in any way that comes close to the ways God is love and loving.

### ***Completely (perfectly) wise***

God is perfectly and completely all wise, or omniscient. This attribute encompasses knowledge, understanding, intelligence, truth and wisdom.

Yes, we have knowledge and wisdom but there is a vast qualitative difference. He has all knowledge, all intelligence, He knows all things. He cannot get smarter or wiser.

I tried to wrap my head around how smart God is. **First**, I searched how much our human brains can hold.

“The human brain contains about 50 billion to 200 billion neurons (nobody knows how many for sure), each of which interfaces with 1,000 to 100,000 other neurons through 100 trillion (10<sup>14</sup>) to 10 quadrillion (10<sup>16</sup>) synaptic junctions. Each synapse possesses a variable firing threshold which is reduced as the neuron is repeatedly activated. If we assume that the firing threshold at each synapse can assume 256 distinguishable levels, and if we suppose that there are 20,000 shared synapses per neuron (10,000 per neuron), then the total information storage capacity of the synapses in the cortex would be of the order of 500 to 1,000 terabytes. (Of course, if the brain’s storage of information takes place at a molecular level, then I would be afraid to hazard a guess regarding how many bytes can be stored in the brain. One estimate has placed it at about 3.6 X 10<sup>19</sup> bytes.) (<http://rnseitz.org/>).

Another source estimates the brain’s memory storage capacity closer to around 2.5 petabytes (or a million gigabytes).

**Second**, I tried to figure out the amount of information on the Internet which has passed 5 million terabytes (byte, kilo, mega, giga, tera).

Every minute of every day over 2 billion Internet users add over 500 new websites, 48 hours of video to YouTube, almost a million pieces of content to Facebook, 30,000 new pictures to Tumblr and Flickr, over 100,000 Tweets are sent, over 200 million e-mails are sent and over 2 million searches are made on Google. Every minute, 1440 minutes a day.

Comparing all the information in the Library of Congress or all the information on the Internet or even all the information in all the world is not even a close second to what God knows. All the information on the Internet would fit on God’s fingernail; no it would fit in just one of God’s brain cells, and even that is an anthropomorphic exaggeration.

**Psalm 147:4-5** He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.  
5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

God’s wisdom is an infinite wisdom, an incomprehensible wisdom, an eternal wisdom.

In the Bible *wisdom* is different from knowledge and intelligence. We all know people who are really smart but not very wise.

Wisdom is a moral quality, it’s taking knowledge and intelligence and applying and using them in very good ways, in ways that are best and right. Wisdom is the skillful application of knowledge.

God takes all He knows, which is everything, and makes decisions and plans that will perfectly glorify Him and bring Him the greatest glory. His ability and intelligence and knowledge are perfectly and wisely used to the highest and best ends. He foresees and comprehends all facts, all actions, all contingences.

Because God is above time and outside of time and because all time is now or present to Him He knows everything about everything all the time.

In his classic little book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes, “Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow” (p. 148).

It's important we believe this today because there are college professors and authors of books and pastors of churches today who don't believe this. They call themselves "***Open Theists.***" They believe that God knows everything that can be known, but that God doesn't know what doesn't exist, that is the future. It's unknowable because it doesn't yet exist.

Open Theism says that God is not absolutely omniscient and all-knowing of all future events. They say that God is uncertain about the future and that He is continually learning about it. To them divine foreknowledge is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get.

Pastor and professor Gregory Boyd pastors a mega-church in the Minneapolis area and teaches at Bethel College, a Baptist college in Minneapolis.

*Christianity Today* favorably reviewed Open Theism and said it's a viable option for Christians. Intervarsity Press publishes their books.

A few years ago there were a couple of very popular books at the Christian book store, *Wild at Heart* and *Sacred Romance*, which promoted open theism ideas.

John Eldredge talks about God taking risks. But in order to take a risk you have to not know the outcome, that's what makes it a risk. Open Theists say God takes risks. No! That's impossible for God. He knows every outcome, every contingency, every possibility and eventuality. God knows the beginning from the end and the end from the beginning.

The open God is a long way from the God of Ephesians 1 who does all things by the counsel of His own eternal and wise will. Open Theism dishonors God and diminishes His glory. But I am too gracious, it's a modern heresy in the church in America.

Wrong thinking leads to wrong acting. Bad theology leads to bad living. Eternal things are at stake, including our trust and faith in God.

We see God's perfect wisdom everywhere, in creation, in our own human bodies, and especially in His perfect plan for our redemption. The cross is foolishness to the Greeks and weakness to the Jews but perfect wisdom to all who believe.

**Romans 11:33-34** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

**Psalm 104:24** O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all;

In response to this attribute we trust God's perfect wisdom in all the details of our lives, good things and bad things. Trusting in God's absolute wisdom and power helps us deal with the painful and upsetting events of life. We can trust His counsel.

In God's wisdom He has not promised to make our lives trouble-free and happy. He has never promised to make life easy or better or more comfortable or more pleasant. God is not about our happiness but about our holiness and about preparing us for and making us fit for an eternity of

happiness and joy and glorious bliss in His perfect presence. That is the good toward which all things must and will work.

### *Just*

God is just, true, pure, holy, and righteous. Justice and righteousness are almost synonymous. He judges everything with equity (absolute fairness and impartiality). When God judges evil men or rewards righteous men He does so with absolute justice and fairness and equity.

When God judges it's completely consistent with His justice and what they deserve.  
When God spares someone it's completely consistent with His goodness and mercy.

God is just in His being and in all His works. He maintains what is right and true and good and righteous.

When we say that God is just and righteous we are also saying that He has authority to judge. All through the Bible we see God acting as a just judge.

Adam and Eve expelled from the garden.  
The wickedness of humanity judged in the flood.  
Sodom and Gomorrah judged by fire and brimstone.  
The Egyptians judged through ten plagues.  
God's people judged for worshipping a golden calf.  
God's judgment announced through countless prophets for idolatry, apostasy and unfaithfulness.  
Ananias and Sapphira judged for lying.  
Herod judged for his pride.  
Christians in Corinth eating and drinking judgment on themselves at the Lord's Supper.

The vague hope that God will be too kind or nice to punish the ungodly is a deadly lie from hell. It keeps people from fearing God and repenting to God.

**Exodus 34:7** keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Our sense of justice and of good and evil and right and wrong have its source in God. This is part of our image of God.

His justice is manifested in giving to mankind a conscience and in giving us righteous laws, and most clearly in the suffering of Christ for the sins of His people.

The cross is the place where we see this attribute most prominently displayed. Sin and evil require the punishment and judgment of a just and righteous God. He can't turn a blind eye or just wink at it. So God fulfills His righteous requirement by being both just and the justifier.

**Romans 3:21-26** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by

faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God is just and He is a justifier. The just penalty for sin had to be paid in full before God could justify sinners.

To acknowledge God as just and true is to stand against the idols of our post-modern world. It is to stand against relativism, compromise and the denials to truth and truth claims.

To acknowledge God as a God of justice is to stand against all those who say there will not be a final day of reckoning, a day of judgment. It's to stand against those who say there is no hell, no punishment, no justice, no setting accounts right.

In response to this attribute we praise God that He has set everything right in Christ and that His just judgment was poured out on Christ and not on us who deserved it. In response to this we humble ourselves and worship Him for all He did on the cross. We worship Christ for His perfect obedience to the Law on our behalf.

### ***Good***

God is good and God is good all the time. He is the fountain of all good. And not just the fountain of good but the overflowing, abundant fountain of all good.

The goodness of God in this context in the Belgic Confession is probably a comprehensive attribute that encompasses many attributes. Under the goodness of God is His lovingkindness, grace, mercy, tenderhearted benevolence.

God's love is God's goodness show to all and especially to His own in His Son.  
God's grace is God's goodness to those who don't deserve His goodness and love.  
God's mercy is God's goodness in restraining His wrath which we do deserve.  
God's patience (long-suffering) is God's goodness in postponing punishment.

By His nature, God is good. For God to be other than good is a contradiction.  
God has always been the same degree of good. Never can He be more kind or less kind.

How good is God? Consider all the sins ever committed against a good and holy God. And His goodness and grace and mercy and forgiveness are greater still.

Consider His ways toward the Prodigal. If we come to Him as the Prodigal came, He will come to us as the Prodigal's father came.

The truly repentant will always find God full of goodness and lovingkindness.

**Psalm 145:9** The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Remember one interesting thing about this last attribute being included in this list. This list was written by a man living in the midst of terrible persecution and suffering who himself had been forced to flee for his life on several occasions and eventually die a martyr's death.

What faith. What grace to live by faith and not by sight. What insight into the real character and nature of God to know that all His ways and purposes are good and not to be measured by momentary suffering and temporary temporal trials.

**II Corinthians 4:16-18** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

If the report comes back negative, God is good. If the report comes back positive, God is good. If we are successful God is good, if we fail God is good. If we have a long and healthy life God is good, if we have a short and difficult life God is good. If our children live long and prosper God is good, if our children don't God is good. In sickness and health, in richer and poorer, in good times and bad, God is always good.

In response to the goodness of God we can have a true and stable and eternal perspective, we can have God's perspective on all things.

### **Application and conclusion.**

**Ephesians 5:1** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

In response to God's communicable attributes we are to be like Him. God created us to be imitators of Him, to reflect His character and nature.

God created us for His glory, to reflect His glory, and to glorify Him. The only true way God can be glorified is by us reflecting Him back to Him.

A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. 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*** (A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 7).

All of God's attributes are cause for worship.