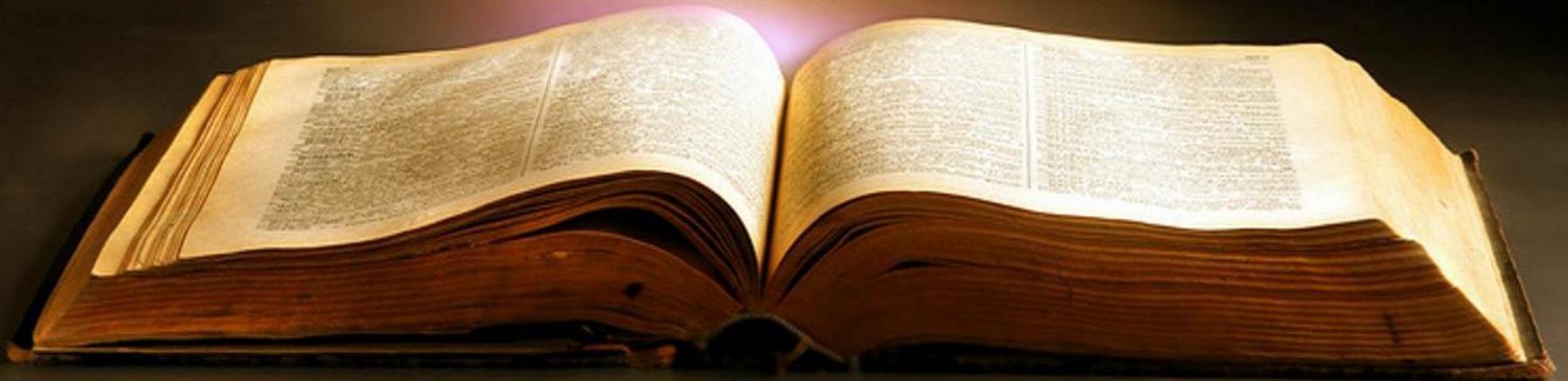


Stow Park Bible Fellowship

# Bible Doctrines

Based on the teachings of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

## 5. The Moral Attributes of God



# The Moral Attributes of God

- Let me remind you we are dealing with the attributes of God. We have considered those which belong to His personality and we come now to consider the moral attributes of God or the *communicable* attributes of God.
- Those that we have previously dealt with belong only to God and are incommunicable. But the next ones we must consider are communicable and something like them is to be found in men and women.
- So what are these? Well, first we must place the *holiness* of God.
- What is holiness? It has a negative meaning in that God is entirely separate and apart from sin – separation from evil.
- But also it has a positive meaning – God is essentially absolutely pure
- Here are some examples of the Bible's teaching on this. God has revealed His holiness by granting visions of Himself to certain people.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- There is the great case of Moses, in Exodus 34 and in other places, where God appeared, as it were, to Moses who was overwhelmed by the sense of His holiness.
- The Bible teaches this in certain terms that it uses – it refers to God as ‘the Holy One’ (Isa. 40:25) and we have God’s injunction: ‘Be holy because I am holy’ (1 Peter 1:16).
- The great business of the Old Testament is to reveal the holiness of God. It is not as some people suggest these days that Old Testament history is just the history of man’s search for God. No!
- It is primarily a revelation of God’s holiness and of what God has done as a result of that, and therefore, you find this teaching everywhere.
- What was the purpose of the giving of the law if not to reveal and to teach the children of Israel about the holiness of God. There He separated a people to Himself, and He wanted them to know what sort of people they were.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- Then take all the instructions about making the Tabernacle – the division of the outer and the inner court and the holy place and the holiest of all where only the high priest could go alone once a year, and then not without blood.
- The Tabernacle was simply designed to show this great teaching of the holiness of God.
- As was all the teaching about the ceremonial law about the clean and unclean animals. Why all this?
- Well the reason given was that ‘you are a holy people and I am a holy God; you are not to eat what everyone else eats. There was to be a division and a separation between clean and unclean and all that long list of rules and regulations is also a part of the teaching of the holiness of God.
- And again you get the same emphasis in the New Testament. Jesus, Himself, addressed God as ‘Holy Father’ (John 17:11)
- Surely that is the supreme teaching about the holiness of God?

# The Moral Attributes of God

- I suppose if you were to be asked to say where the Bible teaches the holiness of God most powerfully of all you have to go to Calvary.
- God is so utterly holy, that nothing but that awful death could make it possible for Him to forgive us. The cross is the supreme and the sublimest declaration and revelation of the holiness of God.
- Now all this teaching is not mere theoretical knowledge that we are asked to try and understand. Its purpose is very practical. In the words of the author of Hebrews 12:28 we are to 'approach God with reverence and fear'.
- He is always to be approached like that – when you are alone, when you are meeting for worship or prayer with others. God is always God and He is always to be approached with reverence. No such expression as 'Dear God', for example, is to be found in the Scriptures.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- You will never have a knowledge of sin unless you have a true conception of the holiness of God.
- Finally, God's holiness shows us the absolute necessity of the atonement. Yes, the cross shows us the manifestation of the holiness of God but it also shows us that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, that God's holiness insists upon it, demands an atonement for sin. That is the only way that we can be treated as being holy.
- The next moral attribute of God that is God's and is communicable to us is the *righteousness* or the *justice* of God, which follows naturally from the holiness of God.
- So what is righteousness?
- Well it is the holiness manifested in God's dealings with us – that's as good a definition that Dr. Lloyd-Jones could give.
- Righteousness and justice are the carrying out of God's holiness and the expression of it in the government of the world.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- This conception can be analysed in a number of ways and here is a good one. Righteousness is the demonstration of God's *legislative holiness*. God gives His laws in order to impose upon us His righteous demands. He legislates for us. Justice on the other hand, is God's *judicial holiness*, by which He exacts penalties from those who have been guilty of breaking His law, those who have been guilty of sin.
- Now the righteousness and the justice of God are revealed almost everywhere in the Scriptures. The wrath of God is taught in both the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus Himself taught it. One of the cardinal doctrines of the whole Bible is that God has a hatred of sin which He expresses in His wrath. 'Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.' (John 3:36)
- 'We are all by nature', says Paul, the children of wrath'. (Eph 2:3)

# The Moral Attributes of God

- But God's righteousness and justice are not only shown in His wrath. He reveals these same qualities, thank God, in forgiving us our sins: 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will purify us from all unrighteousness'. (1 John 1:9)
- Having prepared the way of forgiveness, if we conform to it, the justice of God comes in and by His justice God forgives us.
- It was God's justice, coupled with His love, His mercy and His compassion, that provided His Son, Jesus, as the offering and the sacrifice – the propitiation – that was necessary.
- So we come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> great moral attribution of God that is communicable to us. His *goodness* or the *love* of God.
- Notice the order we are taking them; **holiness, righteousness and justice, goodness and love**. "It is a dangerous and a terrible thing not to put these attributes in the right order. People's faith has been shipwrecked by not doing so." Writes the Doctor.
- These two words, goodness and love, are really interchangeable.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- Yet there is a kind of distinction between them and I suggest it is something like this: the **goodness of God is that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bounteously and in a kindly way with all His creatures.** ‘The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works’ (Psalm 145:9)
- **God’s love is that attribute in God by which He is eternally moved to communicate Himself to others.** God is eternal and God’s love is eternal. We shall discuss this more when we come to the Trinity. For now we are trying to define the difference between goodness and love.
- For convenience, they are grouped under certain headings.
- First, God makes known His goodness and His love towards His creatures in general: ‘God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous’ (Mat5:45). In Mat.6:26 we read that God feeds the birds in the air. Acts 14:17 tells us God has shown kindness by giving you rain and crops in their season.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- These are examples of God's indiscriminate goodness.
- The second way God's goodness and love manifest themselves is by means of what the Bible calls the *grace* of God.
- Grace, this great word that we find so constantly in the Scriptures, is the goodness or the love of God towards those who do not in any way deserve it.
- It is the unmerited goodness or love of God towards those who have forfeited every claim upon Him and His love, and who deserve judgment and condemnation.
- The Bible teaches that the grace of God is the source of every blessing that is ever bestowed on us.
- 'The grace of God', says Paul to Titus, 'that brings salvation has appeared to all men'. (Titus 2:11).
- The next thing that tells of the Goodness and love of God is the *mercy* of God – His loving-kindness and tender compassion of God.

# The Moral Attributes of God

- What then is mercy? It can be defined as the goodness or the love of God towards those who are in misery or distress as the result of their sin, and irrespective of what they deserve.
- Psalm 103 is well worth reading, so let's do that now.
- Then Luke 1: 77 is very clear, 'Jesus was sent to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, *because of the tender mercy of our God*'.
- Another subdivision is the patience and longsuffering of God. Not one of us here this morning would be here were it not for this.
- Paul puts it like this in Rom.2:4 – 'Or do you show contempt for the richness of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance.
- And also in Rom. 9:22: 'What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.'

# The Moral Attributes of God

- Then there is the famous statement in 2 Peter 3:15: ‘Bear in mind that our Lord’s longsuffering (patience) means salvation!’
- So we come to the last moral attribute of God – His *faithfulness*.
- Throughout the Scriptures God’s faithfulness is very apparent on which we can absolutely rely: ‘God is faithful and just to forgive our sins’ (1 Jn 1:9).
- We have rather hurriedly dealt with the moral attributes of God but I trust these discussions have been helpful and we must remember at all times that the whole of God is in every attribute, and that God is all these things at the same time. His love is a holy love.
- The tragedy of forgetting that, and of pitting His love against His justice, for example, is wrong. Everything in God is loving. Everything in God is just and righteous, altogether, and always. There is no division. He is all these things at all times.