



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.1 – The Doctrine of God

The Attributes of God: Loving, Unchanging, Eternal, Perfect

The main attribute of God that He wants to convey to us through His Word is His love for the human race: **“God is love”** (1 John 4:16). The knowledge of God that we receive through nature and conscience is only a faint glimpse of that love. In fact, many things in nature may convey to us God’s anger at sin, rather than His love for sinners (floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, volcanoes, accidents, wars, sickness, etc.). But God’s Word from Genesis to Revelation presents God to us as a loving God.

Consider these words from 1 John: **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world”** (1 John 4:9-10, 14).

Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus: **“For God so (in this way) loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

In His love for the world, God sent His Son to save the world through His life and death. But God did even more. After Jesus rose from the dead, God sent His Holy Spirit into the world with the good news of what Christ had done, so that through the Gospel people might be brought to believe in Jesus and thus be given eternal life. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-6). God uses all of His attributes out of love to save the world. God proclaimed His name to Moses in these words: **“The LORD. The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty”** (Exodus 34:6-7).

God is unchangeable. Psalm 102 says: **“They (the heavens and the earth) will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same”** (Psalm 102:26-27). James, the brother of our Lord, writes: **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”** (James 1:17).

Because God is unchangeable, we can always trust what He says. **“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”** (2 Timothy 2:13). **“The counsel of the LORD stands forever”** (Psalm 33:11). The prophet Samuel told King Saul: **“The Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent”** (1 Samuel 15:29).

When Bible occasionally speaks of God’s changing His mind or repenting, it means that God changes His conduct toward us from our point of view. For example, after allowing the human race to grow and prosper for many years in spite of widespread wickedness, God apparently changed course and said: **“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them”** (Genesis 6:7). Nevertheless, His desire to save mankind from eternal death never changed, and He did give them many years to repent.

Sometimes God threatens to do something and yet does not do it. His threats are intended to bring about repentance, and when the people repent, He does not carry out His threats. God sent the prophet Jonah to the city of Nineveh to proclaim this threat: **“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”** (Jonah 3:4). But when the city of Nineveh repented, we read that **“God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it”** (Jonah 3:10). This was God’s very purpose in issuing the threat. God certainly knew in advance what would happen when Jonah proclaimed God’s Word.

God is eternal. Moses declared: **“Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”** (Psalm 90:2). In a sense, time is meaningless for God. **“A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night”** (Psalm 90:4). The prophet Isaiah said that God “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15). To God, the past, present, and future are all present. God the Father spoke of eternity when He said to His Son: **“Today I have begotten You”** (Psalm 2:7). Time can be represented by a straight line from one place to another. Eternity is a circle that encloses the line from beginning to end.

There is love between and among the three Persons of the Triune God. On the evening before His death, the Son of God, Jesus, spoke of the love of His Father. In His prayer to His Father He said: **“You have loved Me”** (John 17:23). **“You loved Me before the foundation of the world”** (John 17:24). On that same evening Jesus said: **“I love the Father”** (John 14:31). Twice before the Father said to the Son: **“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”** (Luke 3:22; 9:35). Since **“the fruit of the Spirit is love”** (Galatians 5:22), we can be sure the Holy Spirit also shares in this love.

God is perfect in every way. Jesus told a ruler among the Jews: **“No one is good but One, that is, God”** (Luke 18:19). In His sermon on the mount Jesus said: **“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48). **“Good and upright is the LORD”** (Psalm 25:8).

Because of His perfection, there is a majesty and glory and awesomeness in God that strikes fear in the hearts of sinners. Moses assured the Israelites that they should not be afraid of their enemies: **“You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you”** (Deuteronomy 7:21). King David praised God in these words: **“Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as Head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all”** (1 Chronicles 29:10-12).

Questions

1. What is the main attribute of God that is revealed to us in His Word?
2. In what two main ways did God reveal His love for mankind?
3. What does it mean that God is unchangeable?
4. Why is God’s immutability important for us?
5. Why did God not carry out His threat against the city of Nineveh?
6. What is the difference between time and eternity?
7. What is the relationship between the three Persons of God?
8. Why is it true that God is the only One who is good?