

God's Communicable Attributes

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 May 2023

Preacher: Tyler Neighbors

[0 : 00] So, I don't know how many of you wake up in the morning and are just so excited to learn about systematic theology.

! It's all about having a proper knowledge of God, knowing Him properly. Everyone's a theologian on some level. They all have some understanding of God, regardless if it's a correct understanding or not.

And systematic theology is just having a biblical understanding of who God is, how we relate to Him, and what God's Word says about God. So, the more we know God, the better we can serve Him, and the more properly that we can love Him.

So, one of the fun things about being a parent is watching your kids grow up, and as they begin to take on more of your traits, your mannerisms.

If they're your kids biologically, they begin to look more like you. We've adopted two of our kids, and even though they're not biologically related to us, they are taking on more of my traits, more of Nicole's traits.

[1 : 23] And unfortunately, the ones that seem to get highlighted the most are the faults that you present. And unfortunately, those faults come out in places like Sunday school, and you hear from their Sunday school teacher, where did they learn something like this?

And we just say, well, they were at Nana's all week. But that's where Titus is right now. He is at Nana's house, and he is getting spoiled rotten for the next two days.

So, you should add us to the prayer list, because we have to do like this de-doctrination time with Titus after he gets back from Nana's for three days. But anyway, my mom always tells me that when she is watching Titus, it is like watching me grow up all over again, because Titus looks like me, he acts like me, he has my mannerisms, he loves dinosaurs, he loves chocolate milk and fart jokes.

He is my son through and through. Everything about him just screams me. Well, God has made mankind in a very similar fashion. From the beginning, it's really no mystery that God made mankind special.

First off, as you read through the creation account, it always amazes me every time I read it to hear how God created things just by speaking it.

[2 : 42] He was in need of nothing. There was no previous matter that he was like, yeah, I'll take some of this and this. He just spoke it into existence. His word has that kind of authority to be able to do that.

But with mankind, when you read the account of how he made Adam, he formed him out of the dust. And whenever he decided to bring Adam to life, he didn't just snap his fingers or command it. He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. And then perhaps the most amazing thing about Adam, about mankind, is that God created us in his image.

He created us in his image. Now, we're not created to be God. We are created to be like God in the way that he has created us. Becoming God, that's what got Satan in trouble in the first place when he was cast out of heaven.

That's what got Adam and Eve in trouble, got them cast out of the garden. But we were created to be like God. And we share some of his attributes. And that's what we're going to be talking about today.

[3 : 46] A couple of weeks ago, Nick talked about the incommunicable attributes of God. Attributes that stand alone as God's only. Today, we're going to talk about his communicable attributes.

The ways that we are like God. The attributes that we share with him. The things that he has specifically designed to put in us so that we could bear his image properly to his creation.

So, there's really three things that we're going to look at tonight. There are tons of attributes of God that we could go through. And that's a whole series in and of itself. But I want to focus on three things.

The first is that we're spiritual beings. The next is we all have a sense of justice as well. And then the last thing is God's love.

So, these are the three things that we're going to hone in on tonight. But the first thing is that we're both spiritual beings. Now, as we look at this part of God, it's really easy to kind of put that into the incommunicable side of things.

[4 : 43] Because there's so much different about God's spirituality that we don't share. So, one of the things that, again, that's fun about raising kids. If you're raising them and trying to teach them about God and share with them the Bible every night.

Is that you come up with some of the most interesting questions that you have to answer about God. Well, there's so much about God that's difficult to grasp. They'll ask things like, well, what's God made of?

Why can't I see God? Or, what does God look like? My favorite one was, well, where is God? Well, I just have to tell Skylar, well, baby, He's everywhere.

She'll think about it for a second. And then she'll say the question again, but emphasize one word. She'll know, where is God? Oh, boy. Here we go.

God is spirit. There is no physical substance that really makes up God. You can't measure God in dimension or in physical attributes.

[5 : 45] He is spirit. Now, there are times in God's word where He takes physical manifestations. Where He presents Himself to people in a physical form of some sort, whether communicating through a burning bush or something else.

But the fact is that God is spirit. And the fact that He is everywhere, that's His omnipresence. There is no part of creation where He is more or less in that place.

He is completely in one place, in all places, at all times. David expressed this in one of his Psalms, Psalm 139, 7-10. This is one of my favorite Psalms.

It says, So it's part of God's perfection.

And because God is spirit, He's not limited to any earthly dimension or material. This also leads into why God forbids people from making any carved or graven images of Him.

[7 : 03] In Exodus 20, verse 4-6, I'm just going to read part of it, but you all know this command. This command reminds us that God's existence, His very state of being, is completely higher and separate from anything that we have in creation.

Even though, like we talked about last time, God is completely providential over His creation. He's actively involved in it. He is still completely separate and distinct from anything that we have.

And to put a graven image, to say this is what God looks like, anything like that would just fall drastically short of who God is.

So, Israel obviously had a problem with this. God wants us to know who He truly is, not as we think He should be. And as soon as Israel got out of Egypt, what was the first thing they did?

They somehow decided, you know what, we're going to make a cow out of gold, and this is going to be God. And, you know, notice what they did in this. And I think we've gone through this before in some other lesson.

[8 : 16] They didn't say that, you know, we have gone out of Egypt ourselves. Let's worship this cow now. They said, no, this is the God that brought us out of Egypt. They were still attributing all these great things to God, but they were saying, this is what God looks like.

This is who our God is. There's a few reasons why this was such a grievous thing. First of all, it was just completely against one of the Ten Commandments, to have no graven images.

I mean, you can't be much more plain than that. Don't make a graven image. The second thing is, this was the high priest that made this golden calf. This wasn't just some yahoo from a foreign land. This was a high priest that was supposed to uphold the proper worship of Yahweh. And he was the one that made this golden calf for the people. And then the third reason is, again, this is not a true representation of who God is.

And to worship anything less than the true God is idolatry. And again, this is why we study systematic theology, so we can have a true understanding of who God is.

[9 : 19] Now, all this brings up the question. We talked about how God's spirituality is different from ours. How is this something that we share with God? If it's something that's just so completely magnificent and perfect, how do we share this?

Well, as God is spirit, we too are spiritual beings. God has given us his spirit to call on him and to worship him in a way that's pleasing to him.

If you go to John 4, 24, we had our Sunday school lesson on this not too long ago, the woman at the well. Jesus said that God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

So, there it is again, God is spirit. And for us to truly worship God, we need to worship him in spirit. This is how God has designed our relationship to work.

This is how we are bound with each other, is through the spirit. My bond with my children is very deep. I mean, genetically they're mine, legally they're mine.

[10 : 21] My resources are theirs. I mean, that's how I provide for them. But God has sealed this bond with us in such a deeper way than we could ever possibly fathom. Galatians 4, 6.

This is probably one of my favorite verses that describes the spirit that's within us. Galatians 4, 6. It says, And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Philippians 3, verse 3. It says, We worship God by the spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus. So, according to God's word, we were once completely dead in our sins.

We were enemies of God, with no way of relating to him or calling on him. But in these verses, you can see the depth of what God has done with us.

Not only has he made us his children by all rights and standards, but he has also given us the spirit of his begotten son to be able to call on him truly as our father.

[11 : 27] This goes beyond just a mental recognition of his fatherhood over us. We now have the spirit of his son in us that longs to be pleasing to him, that longs to call out to him as father, and that longs to become more like Christ.

So, God is worthy of our worship, of our love, and he has given us all that we need to love and worship him properly. So, another way that we also imitate God and some of his attributes that we share, this is going to kind of go into our last two, but are his moral attributes.

You know, there are many moral attributes that we could study, but again, the ones that we're going to focus on are his justice and his love. So, we all desire justice. You know, as people that are created in God's image, there's something that's highlighted in everyone that desires some standard of justice that everyone can be held to.

And I love listening to debates, especially when you get a good apologist versus someone like an atheist, and they start talking about their differences in their beliefs and trying to one-up the other. Well, typically, when this gets into a philosophical circle is when the apologist will start talking about morality, justice. What's the absolute standard of justice that you're going for here?

[12 : 43] And he'll start by asking, you know, where does this idea of good that you're talking about come from? And he'll say, well, it's whatever promotes the common good, or morality is determined by the majority of the culture that you're in.

Well, that's kind of a dangerous standard to set. Different cultures have some very different moral objectives. And every now and then, whenever you listen to these people, if you ever want to watch some good ones, have any of you ever heard of Jeff Durbin?

He's a pastor, has a talk show. Anyway, he's awesome. But he does this all the time with these people, and it always goes back to this point. But every now and then, you'll get some moral relativist that is just determined to stick to his guns, no matter how depraved the argument gets. But he'll ask things like, well, are you in favor of human trafficking? I'll say, well, no, that's horrible. Why would anyone be in favor of that? And say, well, there's some cultures, that's a very lucrative business.

And they think it's right, because it benefits them by bringing in money. So how is this wrong? Well, that's typically when they start going in circles. I'm like, well, it doesn't promote the common good.

[13 : 52] But they'll say, well, that's the cultural thing, though. So anyway, you just run in circles whenever you try to remove the absolute standard of justice.

And just to give you an idea of where this could possibly lead, I was listening to him talk to this atheist one time about moral relativity again. And the guy would have hints of saying, yeah, there's

an absolute standard.

But then he would go back to his idea of, no, it's all cultural. So Jeff Durbin asked him, well, are you OK with eating people? Because there's tribes in Africa where they still hunt people and eat them for dinner.

Are you OK with that? I thought about it for a second. He said, yes, I am. That's culturally what's acceptable to them. So it is a moral thing to do.

And I'm thinking, wow. I mean, honestly, that's where it leads. If you remove an absolute standard of justice that God has placed in all of us, there's really no limits to what sin will lead people to do.

[14:58] When people are forced into a corner like this, they're either faced to deal with their existential inconsistencies with their belief, or they're forced to realize that, yeah, we need an absolute standard of right and wrong.

And that desire, that drive is something that God has given all people because we are all made in his image. And because of that, we all share some of his attributes. Now, some of us deny that. If you're an atheist or if you just don't believe in the God of the Bible, you'll deny things like that. But the truth is God has made mankind to bear his image. And some of those inclinations like a desire for justice, that's just part of it.

So, Deuteronomy 10.18, let's talk about some of God's attributes of justice. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves a sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

That's out of Deuteronomy 10.18. If you read Deuteronomy, this is right before the new generation of Israel was about to go into the promised land. And Moses is just giving these sermons and reiterating the law to these people.

[16:02] He says, you're about to go into a land that is completely opposite of everything that God is teaching you to do. And these are areas where you have obviously failed before in the wilderness. So, he's reminding them before they go in to the promised land, you need to uphold this law.

So, he's reminding them of it all. And these are just snippets of it here. But he highlights the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner. What do you think those three types of people are what are highlighted here?

You know, in a culture, in any culture, those are the people that are most likely to be taken advantage of, that are to suffer injustice at the hands of the people that are around them.

Back then, the fatherless and the widow, they didn't have social security back then. They didn't have life insurance. They didn't have a welfare system. So, if the breadwinner, the person that holds all the cards dies, sorry, lady, if you don't have family, you're sunk.

Sorry, kids, if you don't have any parents, there's no DHS to take you in and take care of you, which, having been a part of DHS, that's not much to speak of. So, it's, yeah.

[17:17] These are people that are most likely to get taken advantage of and to suffer injustice at the hands of those that don't follow God's law. So, he's reminding them to remember these people. To think of those that are most likely to suffer at the hands of sinful people.

Because, I'll just tell you, just from the kids that we've taken in and the people that we've had to talk to in DHS, it is the innocent, it is the helpless that will suffer when sin is allowed to reign unchecked.

So, God is trying to prevent this. In Deuteronomy 32.4, it goes on to say, The rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity.

Just and upright is he. So, without iniquity. This is where God's justice and our justice differ. And this is really where all of our attributes that we share with God differ.

God is completely without iniquity. He is completely without sin. All of us, I don't care who it is that's fighting for what cause, all of us are tainted by sin at some level, and none of us are above falling into sin.

[18:28] But God is not. God is perfect in all he does. He is completely just in all he does. In Isaiah 61.8, it says, For I, the Lord, love justice.

I hate robbery and wrong. I will faithfully give them their recompense. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. These are just a few of the passages that describe God's desire for justice.

And this even goes beyond desire. Justice, his justice, I gotta say, is directly linked to his holiness. It's part of his holiness. We oftentimes, we talk about God's holiness like that's one of his traits.

God's holiness is the sum of all of who he is. So when we say that God is holy, we're talking about his righteousness. We're talking about his love. We're talking about his justice.

We're talking about his wrath. All of these things encompass God's holiness. So, anyway, he is just not because he follows any man-made concept of justice.

[19 : 41] He is just because it's directly linked to his character, which is immutable. It is unchanging. It is steadfast. And because of that, we can completely rest our standards of justice right and wrong in God's character.

Because he's never going to contradict himself. He's never going to change. So, this is a major difference between man's standard of justice and God's. You know, a lot of times, people, they'll change with their convictions.

You see laws change all the time about what's right and what's wrong. You've seen it happen just in the last ten years. There's been laws that have changed about what's right and wrong. But with man, it's just, a lot of times, it depends on the circumstances.

You know, I don't normally steal or cheat. But if it's taxes, you know, that's okay. That's a moral line there, right? Another moral issue that, you know, we used to hold to as a culture was that things like pedophilia were wrong.

And I'll just say this. Again, it's coming down the pike. There's been laws that have been passed. There are people that are trying to make this a normal thing.

[20 : 56] I can't tell you how many of these people I had to sit across the table from talking about, how are you going to get your kids back? Because that's what the government was working towards, was reunification.

And I also want to say this. They are in just as much need of Christ as we are. Because they have committed a certain sin, that does not mean that we should never share the gospel with them, that we should not pray for them, that God cannot redeem them.

But as a culture, morals change, unfortunately. Laws change about what's right and what's wrong. And where we see sinful depravity distort justice, at least when we're trying to show God's character through justice, is when we determine what's right and wrong based off of our feelings, based off of what we want to see happen.

Rather than the immutable, unchanging character of God, we choose to decide what is right and wrong based off of how we feel on that day. And when you remove God out of the equation, that's all you've got.

You don't have His standard of righteousness anymore. You just have, as Romans described it, you just have whatever satisfies your stomach at the time. So, all that to say, despite the fact that our sinful nature has distorted God's imprint of justice on the hearts of humanity, He still calls us to reflect that part of His character.

[22 : 22] There are so many commands in Scripture, and we're going to go through them about God's justice and how He wants us to portray that to His creation. Be holy because I am holy.

That wasn't a suggestion. That was a command. And justice is part of that command. So, Deuteronomy 6.20. God has displayed His character to His children all throughout the Old Testament up to this point.

And He's also commanding His children to show that character. Justice and only justice you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God has given you.

So, He's commanding them to be just. And this is just one time that God gives a command like this. But this command to follow and to be just, to follow God's laws, you'll see it time and time again that their success in the land of Israel is going to depend on their obedience to these commands.

So, we can't expect God to bless us if we neglect justice and mercy. Same justice and mercy that He has shown us. And many times when God would give a command, He would also follow it up with a statement, I am the Lord that brought you out of Egypt with a strong hand.

[23 : 39] He would remind them of the great deliverance that He had given them. And all throughout the Old Testament, you just see them gradually slipping and going into this deeper state of depravity where they are pushing God out of their culture, where they are denying justice and mercy.

And in Jeremiah 22.3, you see God that He's also trying to remind them, you know, come back. The orphans and the widows, the sojourners, they are still among you.

Start showing justice to them. In Jeremiah 22.3, He says, Thus says the Lord, Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed, and do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in

this place.

Again, God would always take these commands back to His great act of deliverance in Egypt. And because of their neglect of these commands, after hundreds of years, God, in His righteous judgment, put them back where He found them, back in bondage, in the hands of a foreign pagan nation.

So God has established justice. And He calls us as believers to execute that justice here on earth. And, you know, as we go on, you know, God is always pointing back to this great act of deliverance in Egypt.

[25 : 09] But even now, as a sermon series that we're about to go through on Sunday mornings, we have a greater act of deliverance that we can look back on now that should lead us into wanting to show these characteristics of God.

We can look back to the deliverance that Jesus Christ has given us from our slavery and oppression to sin. And this leads us into our last communicable attribute, which is God's love. You know, I think love is one of the favorite things that people like to talk about. Everyone wants to talk about God's love. But again, God's holiness, this encompasses everything. But nobody wants to talk about His wrath today. Nobody wants to talk about His judgment or His jealousy towards us, towards our faithfulness towards Him. Nobody wants to talk about those things. They want to talk about how God is love. And even when we talk about God's love, people have a misunderstanding of what that really means. What does God's love look like?

[26 : 11] And we just did a Sunday school lesson on this, this last Sunday, and you're going to remember this passage. But we're going to look at two things here. We love as God has loved us, and also because He has loved us.

So 1 John 4, 7-12, it says this, Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. So just a couple of observations from this text.

[27 : 23] We get this famous phrase, God is love. People that know nothing else about the Bible, that have probably never darkened the doors of a church in their life, know this phrase, God is love.

Unfortunately, it's extremely misapplied. A lot of times they say God is love in an effort to do away with the judgmental part of God. Well, God accepts me just as I am. They don't want to be held accountable for their sins.

They don't want to believe that they have to mirror their life to Christ. So they just say God is love to make it sound like He's accepting of anything we're going to throw at Him.

Truth is, yes, God does take us as we are, but He doesn't leave us that way. He's given us His Son so that we can be more like Him, to free us from that sin.

So, again, just three observations from this text. The first one is that God's love for us is not one way. It demands a response from His people, a lifestyle change that reflects His love on others and the love that He has had for us.

[28 : 30] We can't say that God is love and simply go on sinning like we've never met God before. That's not how that works. Unfortunately, though, we often view love that way because as far as humans go, even though we share the love of God, that's an attribute that we share, sin does distort it sometimes.

Because with humans, love is often something that is, I don't know, it's an agreement. We love as long as we're going to get something back from it. We love as long as it's going to benefit us, that it's going to be a mutually beneficial relationship.

I can tell you that just from this text and numerous other texts, that is not the way that God worked out His love with us. It says that while we were still sinners, while we were still enemies with God, He loved us.

He sent His Son to die for us. Even though we had no love for Him, we had no way to cry out to Him, Abba, Father, He still sent His Son Jesus to die to make us His children.

And that kind of leads into our second point here about this text, is that the love that we have for God, it wasn't initiated by us. You know, a lot of people, they try to argue that election is a false doctrine, because they say, well, that's not love.

[29 : 53] And regardless of where you stand on the idea of election, the truth is this. We didn't love God first. Our sin kept us from loving God.

God, He called us. He elected. He called us, sent His Son to die for us, and first showed us that love. And the third thing is that we cannot claim association with God while having no love in our hearts for His people.

God has made this character trait inseparable from our claim to be His disciples. If you read 1 John and you read the Gospel of John, you're going to see a lot of similarities with this.

So, going back to verse 11, it says, Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. John 13, 35, the Gospel of John, written by the same person, says, So, God's love being shown in our lives is, you can't separate it from us being His disciples.

If you're claiming to be a disciple of Christ, you have absolutely no love in your heart. It doesn't really mean much. It's where you get the whole text from 1 Corinthians 13.

[31 : 10] Even if I do all these mighty acts, but I don't have love, it's useless. So, Jesus even summarized all the law with the two greatest commands, which was love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then love others as yourself.

Love is not just a character trait we share, even though it is. It's a command that we are to follow. I just want to close up with a couple of observations.

We share these communicable attributes with God, not because we have attained a higher level of being by our own efforts. That's not how we got these attributes.

We share these attributes of God because a loving, merciful Creator has chosen to make us in His image, and He has placed these things as an imprint. It's His imprint on us.

And what a waste that would be for us to deny all this, to live willfully to our sinful passions. Be holy as I am holy.

[32 : 15] It may seem like an unattainable command. And the truth is, we're not going to be completely holy as God is holy until we get to the other side of eternity. But until that point, God has given us these communicable attributes to illuminate those parts of His character to His creation so that we can be a light in the darkness to bring people to Christ.

It's also God's desire for us to be more conformed into the image of His Son, this side of heaven.

He has given us an example to follow to become more like Him in the person of Christ. I mean, that's who we have to look to.

He is God in the flesh. And the more we become more like Christ, the more that these communicable attributes are going to shine in our life, and we will better represent God to His creation that desperately needs that hope.

Let's pray. Father, we want to thank You that, Lord, You have created us to bear Your image. Lord, You have created us so that we can shine Your light to Your creation.

And Lord, I pray that, Lord, as we are going through this process of sanctification, Lord, that we would always look to Your Son. Lord, that we would look to Jesus so that we could become more like Him and better bear Your light to the world that is in desperate need of salvation and hope that lasts for eternity.

[33 : 45] Lord, I pray that our church at Highland Park would be a light to the community that's around us. Lord, our desire is not for our church name to be made great, but for the kingdom of God to be made great.

Lord, we pray that we would be able to reach out to those that are lost. Lord, that You would bring lost people to our church. And Lord, that as we go out into our daily lives, Lord, that people would see these attributes that You have placed in our lives and that they would be curious.

Lord, that they would want to know why we are the way that we are and that we'd be able to share the gospel with them. Lord, I pray for all these things and thank You for all these things that You have blessed us with.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.