

Nature and Character of God

What Is God Like?

October 20, 2019

I. God is a relationship treasuring God

A. It is in God's nature and character to treasure mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships with His created beings, and that includes you and me.

1. And because of this, God is committed to patiently working out the differences we may have with Him, resolving the conflicts we think exist between us, forgiving the wrongs we've done to Him and those He loves, healing the damage we've done to our relationship with Him, and reconciling us to Himself when we've broken the relationship. And in all of this, God remains compassionate, merciful, kind, gentle, patient, and even long suffering.
2. In other words, God not only forgives our relationship damaging and destructive offenses against Him, He heals the damage we have done and restores the relationship when we have broken it so that we can enter anew into a mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationship with Him.

B. Prayer

II. It is in God's nature and character to treasure mutual, meaningful, and faithfully loving relationships with His created beings.

A. It is common for Christians to speak about Jesus' death and resurrection as if its primary purpose is to pay the penalty for sin on our behalf so we can go to heaven when we die.

1. And this is not a wrong way to talk about it, for surely one of God's great gifts is the sacrifice of His son to free us from the penalty of sin so that we would not have to spend eternity in hell. And without question, going to heaven when we die instead of hell is both a great and gracious gift – especially since we deserve hell.
2. But there is something more wonderful than avoiding hell and going to heaven when we die – something is made possible by going to heaven instead of hell. And this something is entering into and maintaining a personal, mutual, meaningful, faithful, and loving relationship with God that begins in this life and lasts forever.
3. Jesus affirmed that eternal life has more to do with a relationship with God than merely going to heaven when we die when He said,

“This is eternal life (or in other words, this is what eternal life is about, or this is the purpose of eternal life), that they may know You, (that is, personally and intimately know You), the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

4. Paul, when giving his testimony of being saved out of pharisaically religious Judaism, affirmed that the personal and intimate relationship he now had with God and with His son, Jesus Christ, was more valuable to him than whatever he had before.
 - a. We read this in **Philippians 3:7-8**, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] **More than that**, I count all things to be loss in view of **the surpassing value of knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord.”
 - b. And skipping down to **vs 10**, Paul lists three things that he wants to personally and intimately know.
 - (1) Notice what he puts first as I read his list: **“That I may know Him**, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.”
 - (2) My point is that twice in his testimony of what he was saved from and was being saved to, Paul emphasizes the value he places on knowing Jesus Christ in a personal and intimate way.
 - c. And assuming he knew what he was talking about, we can conclude that such a relationship is both possible and well worth the effort required to enter into such a relationship with God.
5. So imagine, if you can, that in spite of not being able to see God, we can grow in our faith and in godliness to the place where we become aware that the relationship we have with Him is as real and personal and intimate as the relationships we have with the people in our lives who are nearest and dearest to us.

B. Paul is not the only one to speak about a personal and intimate relationship with God. Throughout the scriptures, we find affirmations of the fact that God wants mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships with us.

1. For example, the scripture refers to God
 - a. as our God and we His people,
 - b. as our Father and we His children,
 - c. as our Husband and we His bride,
 - d. as our Beloved and we as His beloved,

- e. as walking together and engaging in fellowship with one another – all of which speak of going beyond knowing about God to having at least some semblance of a personally intimate relationship with Him.
2. For example, in writing to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote the following words about our relationship to God and His son, Jesus Christ. As I read this portion of scripture, take note of all the words or terms that specifically speak of our relationship to God or that can be applied to relationships in general.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** . . . Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] Or what harmony has Christ with Belial (*transliteration of Hebrew word for worthlessness and applied to Satan*), or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? [16] Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. [17] Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. [18] And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.
 - b. There are 11 relationship words/terms in these verses.
 - (1) Bound together
 - (2) Partnership
 - (3) Harmony
 - (4) In common
 - (5) Agreement
 - (6) Dwell in them
 - (7) Walk among them
 - (8) Be their God and be My people
 - (9) Welcome you
 - (10) Be a father to you
 - (11) Be sons and daughters to Me
 - c. Jesus speaks of our entering into a personal and intimate relationship with God and with Himself in **John 14:23**, “If **anyone loves Me**, he will keep My word; and **My Father will love him**, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”
 - (1) Do you see the mutuality of love here?

- (2) And if such a love exists between you and God, and if you live together in the same home, wouldn't it be natural to engage in personal and intimate fellowship with each other?
- d. John adds these words to the reality of our relationship with God in his first letter, where he says that "If we walk in the Light as [God] Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another (*that is, our fellowship is mutual*), and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (**1 John 1:7**). Is this not an affirmation of the sixth beatitude – "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God?"
- e. And in **Revelation 3:20**, God confirms His desire for personal and intimate fellowship with us while we yet live in this world when He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."
- f. My point is that God, through His Word, gives us a number of indications that He wants a mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationship with us.
- 3. **And not only with us on a personal or individual basis**, but also with the church, the Body of Christ, for as we just read in **2 Corinthians 6:16-18**, "we (*that is, we as a group or as a church*), we are the temple of the living God, and God dwells in us and walks among us (*as a group*) and He is our God, and we (*corporately*) are His people. . . And He is a father to us, and we are sons and daughters to Him."
 - a. Jesus affirmed this truth when He said in **Matthew 18:20** that "where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."
 - b. Unseen? Yes! But nonetheless present and active and able to be known in that personal and intimate way – if we, as a group, will press forward toward purity of heart and life.
- 4. And finally, when describing the new heavens and the new earth, God tells us that these relationships are eternal. We read this in **Revelation 21:3**, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'"
 - a. In other words, just as God enjoyed fellowship with Adam and Eve by walking and talking with them in the Garden of Eden, so God will walk and talk with us in the eternal kingdom.

- C. One of the undeniable proofs that it is in God's nature and character to treasure mutually meaningful, mutually loving, and mutually faithful relationships with His created beings is found in **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, [19] namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."
- D. **Notice**, there are two important truths in these two verses that directly relate to today's teaching.
1. **First**, God demonstrates the intensity or degree of His desire for relationship with us by reconciling us to Himself through the redeeming sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ.
 - a. In other words, God made reconciliation possible so that we could re-enter and experience a personal and meaningful relationship with Him – in spite of the fact that we have behaved so badly and broken the law so completely that we, on our part, have made reconciliation impossible.
 - (1) Paul spoke of the intensity or degree of God's desire for relationship with us when he described how far God went and how much He did to reconcile us to Himself.
 - (2) We read this description in **Romans 5:6-8**, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. [8] **But God** demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
 - b. Do you see the power of love to foster a mindset and attitude that compels us to go to such extremes in order to heal a damaged relationship or restore a broken relationship?
 - c. This is the love God has for us – a love that finds such great joy and fulfillment in personal and intimate relationships that it is willing to make reconciliation possible even while we, on our part, are still making it impossible.
 2. I know we are looking at God's nature and character, but for the sake of considering how all this applies to how we live, here and now, I want to present a situation and ask a couple of questions.
 - a. Let's say you have someone in your life who has treated you so badly and broken the rules so completely that even offering all

they possess and living perfectly from that day forward would not be enough to repair the damage done and restore the relationship to a healthy, mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful condition.

- b. And suppose the only way to bring healing and restoration is for you to bear the burden or pay the price of righting their wrongs so that reconciliation becomes possible – even though there is no evidence they even want reconciliation.
 - c. **And here is my question:** “Do you think love has such a place in your life that it would compel you to do this in the hope of reconciliation?” Yet this is what God’s love is like toward us.
 - d. And my next question is this: “Do you think love has such a place in your life that you would not only make it possible for reconciliation to take place, but you would also re-enter a reconciled relationship with such a person **knowing** that it is highly likely they will sin again, and that it may take some years for them to get to the place of being able to love you in a way that makes the relationship as healthy and as mutual as you know it can be and long for it to be? And here again, this is what God’s love is like toward us!
3. Returning to our focus for today, I want to remind you that the purpose of reconciliation is to restore relationships back to a meaningful, mutually trusting, mutually loving condition.
4. The **second** truth I want us to see from **2 Corinthians 5**, is found in **vs 19**. And this truth is that God wants the world to know that He is a reconciling God who not only wants reconciliation between Himself and sinners, but who also has done what is necessary to make reconciliation possible. Therefore, He has given to us, His saved ones, His children, the task of proclaiming this great truth to the people around us.
- a. Remember, the purpose of reconciliation is to restore damaged or broken relationships to a healthy, meaningful, mutually trusting, and mutually loving condition. To do this means that those who contributed to the damage or to the break in the relationship must stop doing the things that caused the damage and start doing the things that promote and protect the health and intimacy of the relationship.
 - b. And remember, we are the ones who damaged and broke the relationship between God and us, not Him. He is the innocent party in this relationship. In other words, He has done

absolutely nothing to damage or destroy His relationship with us – which means He has nothing to repent of.

- c. Therefore, since the damage done to our relationship with God is solely our doing, we are the ones who must repent, and we are the ones who must stop doing whatever it was we were doing to damage our relationship with Him, and we are the ones who must start doing whatever it is we need to do to promote and protect a mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationship with God.

III. Conclusion

- A. Therefore, if God is a reconciling God – and the scripture says He is, and if the purpose of reconciliation is to heal damaged relationships and restore broken relationships – and the scripture affirms this, then these truths must become an important part of our evangelism.
 - 1. And if we make these truths an important part of our evangelism, it must, of necessity, require making it clear that it is in God's nature and character to **so treasure** mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships with us that He willingly did what was necessary to make reconciliation possible.
 - 2. And it must also require talking about the condition of an unbeliever's relationship with God, which would naturally lead to talking about their need of repentance and the necessity of growing in godliness and love for God from then on.
- B. In other words, if God is a reconciling God, and if the purpose of reconciliation is to heal damaged relationships and restore broken relationships, and if we are God's spokesmen regarding these great truths, and if we expect converted sinners to seriously enter into God's intention for relationship with us, then we must not only present the gospel message, we **MUST** make disciples of those who respond, for it is in discipling new believers that we are able to teach them and lead them and walk them through the process required to become godly so they can enter into and enjoy personal and intimate fellowship with God.