

Nature and Character of God

What Is God Like?

November 03, 2019

I. God is a relationship treasuring God

- A. Last Sunday, we used **Matthew 5:21-48, 6:14-15** to see the value God places on relationships, and what we are **not supposed to do** so that we do not unnecessarily damage or destroy any relationship we are in.
 - 1. We saw all this in a general way by looking at six of Jesus' statements in which He gave a fuller, more accurate application of God's laws directly related to relationships. We added a seventh consideration by looking at Jesus teaching concerning forgiveness.
 - 2. We then returned to **Matthew 5:21-22** to take a closer, more detailed look at the way Jesus took the law forbidding murder and applied it to relationships. And in looking at this portion of Jesus' teaching, we saw that God sees us as committing murder when we selfishly, foolishly, angrily, arrogantly, or with premeditation damage or break a relationship and leave it in that condition.
- B. Today, we will begin by looking at God's nature and character in contrast to ours in order to see how far He has gone in making a way for us to be reconciled to Him, and how we work against what God has done and continues to do. Following that, we will look at Jesus' teaching concerning what we **are to do** when we know someone has something against us or is in conflict with us.
- C. Prayer

II. God's nature and character in contrast to ours.

- A. As I just said, last Sunday we looked at **Matthew 5:21-22**, which says, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."
 - 1. Just for the sake of review, I want to remind you that it is in God's nature and character **to go further than justice demands**, or our feelings support, or the world thinks is reasonable in order to heal a damaged relationship and reconcile a broken relationship."

2. And though there are a number of ways we see this, one of them is in the fact that God does not push us away or distance Himself from us in spite of how we treat Him. In fact, He never does anything to damage or break His relationship with us.
3. When there is damage done or distance created or a break caused in our relationship with God, it is solely our doing. Therefore, when distance occurs between us and God, we are the ones who have moved – He is simply accepting our choice to move away and allowing the distance to remain **if we won't** accept His invitation to repent and return.
4. In other words, in regard to relationships, God's nature and character are in stark contrast to the nature and character of unbelievers, and sadly, they are too often in contrast to our nature and character as believers.

B. For example,

1. Though God will take a life, He never commits murder, yet we are guilty of committing various degrees of relationship murder numerous times.
2. God neither commits adultery nor is in any way unfaithful, even though we have been unfaithful to Him and acted in adulterous ways so as to commit adultery against Him.
3. God does not divorce Himself from anyone – except in cases of adultery where the adulterer will not repent and change his way, but continues to commit adultery. Yet should the adulterer repent and turn from his adulterous ways, God will forgive and restore the relationship. We, on the other hand, are willing to turn our backs on God and even walk away from Him simply because we are unhappy over what **He is not doing** to please us or **is doing** to frustrate and disappoint us. And of course, we are prone to treat the people around in the same way.
4. God keeps His word – which makes Him completely trustworthy, yet we have broken our word multiple times.
5. God loves everyone – even His worst enemies. But we tend to despise, show disrespect for, publicly degrade, gossip about, and even hate family members, church members, co-workers, as-well-as our enemies.
6. And God forgives everyone who will repent, turn from their sinful ways, and proceed to live a godly life, while we are prone to cling to bitterness, hold on to grudges, and remain angry with those who have hurt us, even after they apologize and seek forgiveness.

- C. What I am asking you to see is that – in relation to relationships – there is quite a difference between God’s nature and character and our nature and character – even as believers. And if we are to align ourselves with God’s nature and character so as to deal with our relationships as God wills us to, we must change our thinking, beliefs, and values, and conform our behavior to be in line with God’s.
- D. And so with this in mind, let’s look at the rest of Jesus teaching about relationship murder in order to see how we **are to think and behave** when we know someone has something against us – that is, when we know they have been offended or hurt by something we did or by something they think we did. This is found in **Matthew 5:24-26**.

III. How we are to act when we know someone has something against us.

- A. **Matthew 5:23-24** . . . Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and then remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.
- B. **Matthew 5:23a** . . . Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar . . .
 - 1. There were two primary reasons to take an offering to the Temple.
 - a. One reason was to give thanks to God for His goodness to you – whether it be a general giving of thanks or a giving of thanks for something specific.
 - b. The other primary reason was to show God that you want to make things right between Himself and you, after having done something that you knew was wrong and would therefore damage your relationship with God. In other words, you are taking an offering in order to show God that you want to return to being in good standing with God.
 - 2. So picture this. You realize you have done something to damage the relationship with God, and you understand this has caused a loss of some measure of good standing with God.
 - a. But you know that God is a forgiving God and that His door is always open to making things right with Him so that the damage can be healed and the relationship restored.
 - b. Now keep in mind, God hasn’t done anything wrong, you have. **Yet it is God** who keeps the door open for healing and restoration, and it is God – not you – who has made a way for healing and restoration to take place between the two of you.

3. In other words, God is the prime mover, we are the responders. God takes the first step, while we take the second in response to what He has done. Therefore, it is God – and not us – who makes it possible for us to repent, seek forgiveness, heal the damage, restore the relationship, and get back into His good graces. **This is an important truth** for it establishes how we are to think and act when dealing with our own damaged or broken relationships.

C. **Matthew 5:23b** . . . and there remember that your brother has something against you . . .

1. So here you are, on your way to working things out with God – who is the very same God who has taken the initiative to make it possible for you to work things out with Him – and you remember that someone has something against you.
2. In other words, you are on your way to working things out with the forgiving, restoring, and reconciling God who treasures mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships, and before you get there you remember that some damage has been done to a relationship you have with someone near or dear to you.
3. Now the beauty of Jesus' words in this part of **vs 23**, is that they do not state who is at fault. The only call attention to the recognition that there is a fracture in the relationship.
 - a. In other words, who is at fault is not to be our primary concern. What matters most is the health of the relationship and our awareness that some kind of damage has been done to it.
 - b. Therefore, if you are aware that damage has been done, and if you believe in the God of forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation, and if you want a restored relationship with **the** God who treasures relationships and who takes the initiative in making a way for restoration and reconciliation to take place, then you are to follow His lead and take the initiative with the people in your life when your relationship with them is damaged or broken in some way – regardless of who is at fault.
4. Now I am not certain that the order in which you do this is what matters most, though it is always wise to follow Jesus' teaching as it is given. But what I am certain of is that it is hypocritical to seek a restored relationship with God, and to worship and praise the God of reconciliation while neglecting or refusing to take the initiative in restoring and reconciling a damaged or broken relationship in your own life.

5. An example of God's view of this kind of hypocrisy is found in **Matthew 18:21-35**, where Jesus responds to a question about how often we have to forgive someone who in some way continues to damage the relationship by continuing to sin against us.
 - a. Jesus' response goes like this: There were two servants, and both were in debt. One owed his master about ten million dollars while the other owed his fellow servant about \$20.
 - b. The one who owed ten million could not pay his debt, so he begged and pleaded with his master to forgive him – and his master did.
 - c. After being forgiven his debt, he went out and found the fellow servant who owed him \$20. As it turns out, the one who owed \$20 could not pay his debt, so he begged and pleaded for forgiveness. However, the one who had been forgiven the debt of ten million dollars refused to forgive the one who owed \$20.
 - d. Jesus continued His parable by saying that in response to the first servant's unforgiveness, the master who had forgiven him his huge debt rescinded His forgiveness and required that servant to be thrown in prison until he could pay every last cent.
 - e. Now why would the master do this? Because the debtor, after being shown mercy, and extreme mercy at that, did not show even a small amount of mercy to his fellow servant.
 - f. Jesus concluded His parable by saying, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."
 6. I believe this truth is a principle which is to be applied, not just to the forgiveness of a financial debt, but also to forgiving those who have damaged or destroyed their relationships with us.
 7. In other words, if we want to get back into good standing with God after sinning against Him and those around us, and if God mercifully accepts our plea for forgiveness and restores the relationship, we will be just as hypocritical as the servant with the ten million dollar debt if we do not do the same for those with whom we are in a relationship.
 8. In other words, we will be hypocrites who are merely pretending to want a genuinely restored relationship with God, or who are pretending to worship and praise God. Therefore, Jesus says –
- D. **Matthew 5:24** . . . leave your offering there before the altar and go; **first be reconciled** to your brother, and **then come and present your offering**.

1. Here Jesus presents the practical steps we are to take when we are aware someone is upset with us or has been hurt by us or is pulling away from us or has mistakenly concluded we have wronged them.
 - a. We are to put the brakes on our effort to get back in good standing with God, or to worship and praise God, or to take communion, and instead focus our efforts on doing what we can to make things right with the one who has something against us, and restore the relationship.
 - b. This requires **going to** the one we have wronged or who thinks we have wronged him, and doing what we can to resolve our differences, or explain our side of the situation, and if possible, heal the damage and reconcile the relationship.
2. And why is this so important? Because God will not grant forgiveness or fully restore our relationship with Him if we will not do what we can to make things right, forgive, and restore a damaged or broken relationship with those around us.
 - a. Doing what we can to make things right means, if we have wronged someone, we need to right the wrong. If we have taken or broken something, we need to restore it. If we are past due in our payments, we need to pay what we owe or else work out a new, mutually agreed on plan of repayment. If we have slandered someone, we need to go to those who heard our slander, confess our sin, and correct our story.
 - b. And if someone mistakenly thinks we have wronged him, we need to humbly hear his story, ask if he is willing to hear our side of the story, and if so, do what we can to restore the relationship.
3. After making an honest effort to make things right or gain an ear for our side of the story so that the relationship is restored, we can retrieve our offering and return to making things right with God, or return to worshiping and praising God.
4. Now should you be thinking that this is a bit extreme and surely God is not that picky, let me remind you of John's words in **1 John 4:20**, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, **cannot** (*not does not, but cannot*) love God whom he has not seen."
5. And if you need more convincing that Jesus' teaching here in **Matthew 5** came from God, consider these statements:
 - a. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy (**Matthew 5:7**).

- b. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (**Matthew 6:15**).
 - c. The way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you (**Matthew 7:2**).
- E. **Matthew 5:25** . . . Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.
 - 1. In this illustration, Jesus makes it clear that we are either the guilty party or a contributing party to the dispute or the damage done. Either way, Jesus tells us what to do.
 - 2. We are to make friends with the one we have hurt or cheated or been unkind to or ignored or in some other way damaged our relationship with them.
 - a. And how do you make a friend of someone who has been hurt in some way by you?
 - b. By making right the wrong done, and doing so in a friendly manner – which includes humbly and patiently listening to their side of the story, showing empathy for what you put them through, apologizing, asking for forgiveness, and affirming your desire to move forward in a mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationship with them.
 - 3. Jesus final statement in this section shows the seriousness to God of working out our differences, healing the damage done, and reconciling the relationship by stating the cost of not doing so.
- F. **Matthew 5:26** . . . Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there (*prison*) until you have paid up the last cent.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Being in good standing with God requires doing our part to promote and protect the health of every relationship we are in, and when damage is done, doing what we can to repair the damage and restore the relationship.
- B. Worshiping God in spirit and in truth requires doing what we can to promote and protect the health of our relationship. Why? Because it is in God's nature and character to go **further than justice demands**, in order to heal our damaged relationship with Him and reconcile us to Himself. Can we sincerely worship this God and do less ourselves?