

I. Intro. & Review

A. Review

1. We finish up our treatment of the attributes of God

- Remember, an attribute is a characteristic or quality (better “perfection”) of God.
 - God IS His attributes – He IS them perfectly and infinitely.
 - There are two kinds of attributes: incommunicable and communicable (the latter can be reflected in God’s children, II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:29)
- #### 2. There are six incommunicable attributes: *independence*, *simplicity* (oneness), *infinity* (eternity and omnipresence), *immutability*, *omnipotence* (sovereignty) and *omniscience*.

B. We began looking at the communicable attributes

- As such: God gives us to reflect His perfections in a creaturely way, but we will never become gods; we grow in these virtues.
- The six attributes of God are: *holiness*, *righteousness*, *wisdom*, *mercy*, *grace* and *love*.
- Holiness (God’s perfect self-consecration and aversion to all impurity *in us* is our devotion to God and separation from sin); Righteousness (God’s unswerving commitment to Himself as His own perfect standard *in us* is our conformity to God); Wisdom (God’s adaptation of everything to serve His own glory *in us* is our ability to adapt everything to serve God’s glory).

II. God’s Communicable Attributes (of Goodness)

A. **God is good.** In fact, our English word “God” is derived from the word good. When we speak of God’s goodness we speak of His absolute perfection (His moral or ethical goodness), we confess that He is the sum total of all perfections (all virtues are infinitely in Him) and that He is the overflowing fountain of all good (*Belgic Confession*, Art. 1). **When we speak of God’s goodness, we mean His benevolence or kindness toward creatures, specifically His elect people. God’s goodness is traditionally subdivided into grace, mercy and love.**

B. Grace

1. The root idea of grace is beauty.

- We use that word in English. We speak of graceful movements such as dancing or ice-skating. The dictionary defines grace as elegance or beauty.
- God is beautiful.* Grace is an attribute of God before it is shown to any creature. The Bible calls God the God of all grace. And because He is the God of all grace He is infinitely beautiful. Ps. 27:4 (“to behold the beauty of the Lord”); Ps. 29:2 (“worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”); Ps. 90:17 (“Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us”). As the beautiful God, God delights in Himself as the highest good.
- But sinners are ugly, and the utterly gracious and beautiful God cannot fellowship with sinners.

2. From this root idea of beauty, we see what grace is when shown to creatures.

- Many have defined grace this way: “God giving to us what we do not deserve.” But that is an inadequate definition because God can give to someone what he does not deserve without being gracious.
- Grace is not in what God gives or does not give. *Grace is in God’s attitude.* Grace is a beautiful attitude of favor. Understand that and the issue of common grace becomes clearer.
- God gives the wicked an abundance of good things but that is not grace to them if He gives the abundance *without His favor but in His wrath.* God is gracious to His people at all times, but at all times (even when He is angry and is chastising them; even when He withholds from them good and sends upon them evil) His attitude is favorable toward them (see Ps. 73:17-19; 37:7-9, 22, 38; 92:7, etc).

3. God’s grace is a beautiful attitude of favor toward those who are guilty.

- God’s grace is never merited, never earned and never deserved. God’s grace is free, sovereign, particular and efficacious. God is free to be favorable to whomever He wills, and He is free to set His face against whomever He wills. The word grace first appears in the Bible in Gen. 6:8.
- God is not gracious/favorable to all men. God’s grace actually saves those to whom it is directed. God’s beautiful attitude of favor does not end or change into fierce wrath, nor is God’s beautiful attitude of favor a general desire for the wellbeing of all men, but this is *God’s* beautiful attitude of favor. Tit. 2:11

4. **There is third idea in grace (first, God's beauty; then, God's beautiful attitude of favor; and third, it is a power to make us spiritually beautiful).**
 - a. We are ugly, spiritually deformed by sin, and therefore an abomination to God, but God has favor on us and will make us spiritually beautiful with His holiness.
 - b. Grace is a power. It works effectually in God's people. I Cor. 15:10.
 - c. Because of that work of God's grace in us, we are able to be gracious to others: to show them a beautiful attitude of favor, to will their good, etc.

C. Mercy

1. **Mercy is an attribute of God and so we must begin again with Him.**
 - a. How is God merciful in Himself? God's mercy is that attribute acc. to which He is perfectly blessed in Himself, He knows and wills Himself to be the most Blessed forever.
 - b. The Bible speaks of God being rich in mercy; within Himself he has tenderhearted affection, but that mercy is also shown to the creature (Eph. 2:4).
 - c. Mercy is compassion, pity, tenderheartedness or lovingkindness.
2. **Mercy toward the creature is first, pity or compassion.**
 - a. Mercy is an attitude of the heart toward those who are miserable or wretched; the great biblical figure of mercy is bowels; deep emotional response to the misery of others (I Kings 3:26; Phil. 1:21). Mercy was what the wretched asked of Christ: lepers, blind, etc. *They were miserable, they needed mercy.*
 - b. The Bible speaks repeatedly of God's mercy or pity and of our misery. We need mercy because we are miserable. Contrast with grace: we need grace because we are guilty. See Ps. 136, 103:13.
 - c. Is God simply merciful because of misery. Is God moved with compassion toward all misery? No, in fact, our misery is self inflicted (we sinned); we deserve misery. God's mercy is free: Rom. 9:15, 18.
3. **Mercy is second a desire to alleviate and remove misery and to make blessed and happy.**
 - a. Again, a common definition of mercy is inadequate: "Mercy is God's not giving us what we deserve." That does not include the element of compassion, and can lead to an idea of common mercy (God does not give many wicked what they deserve; He delays punishment, for example).
 - b. God does more than simply feel sorry for us, but He desires to bring about our blessedness, by the removal of our sins (neg. aspect) and by making us blessed in Him (pos. aspect).
 - c. But since God's mercy is eternal, unchangeable and efficacious, God does make all those on whom He had mercy blessed.
4. **Third, mercy is a power to make the miserable blessed.**
 - a. It is not enough that God pities us, or that He has a desire to deliver us; God's mercy actually delivers us.
 - b. That is the difference between God and us: our hearts yearn for someone but we can do nothing; God's heart is filled with compassion and He actually delivers. However, He has no mercy on the wicked.
 - c. We are called to reflect God's mercy: we must be tenderhearted toward others.

D. Love

1. **God loves Himself within the Trinity**
 - a. The Father loves the Son in the HS; and the Son loves the Father in the HS. I John 1:8. He did so before any created being came into existence.
 - b. Love is a delighting in someone who is precious and dear, it is a seeking after that in which one delights.
 - c. The Biblical words for love: one word means to breathe after, to pant after with ardent desire and affection. Another word means to cleave to or to cling to. John 1:18, 14:11. A third word for love is to take pleasure in, to set one's affections on, to prize and treasure above all things. That is how the Father loves the Son and the Son the Father and that is how the Triune God loves us.
2. **God's love for creatures is a sovereign determination of His will.**
 - a. God chooses to love; He does not simply love everything and everybody, and there is nothing in the creature (esp. the sinful creature) which would cause Him to love. Deut. 7:7.
 - b. God's love is an attribute. Therefore— God's love is unchangeable, holy, righteous, almighty and eternal.
 - c. God loves only in Jesus Christ – Eph. 1:4, Rom. 5:8, 8:38
 - d. God's love is foundational to His mercy and grace. Why is God moved in pity at the misery of some sinners? Because He loves them. Eph. 2:4-7.