

The Attributes of God - Part 4

by William MacDonald

The sermon explores the attributes of God, specifically the righteousness, immutability, and faithfulness of God, and how these attributes are revealed in the cross of Christ.

Duration: 32:46

Scripture: Genesis 6:6, Numbers 23:19, Deuteronomy 7:9, 1 Samuel 15:29, Psalm 102:24, Psalm 119:90, Isaiah 45:21, Lamentations 3:22-23, Romans 3:26, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Corinthians 10:13

Topics: "Attributes of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of worshiping God for his unchangeable character and faithfulness. He highlights the need for believers to bear the family resemblance of God by being consistent and not fickle or moody. The speaker also addresses the tendency of people to treat their loved ones poorly while putting on a pleasant facade for outsiders. The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in God, highlighting that he is the only trustworthy one in the universe. The speaker also references verses from the Bible that speak about the faithfulness and immutability of God.

Transcript

The first night that God is great, an introduction to the subject, we saw that God is holy. And yesterday we were reminded of the sovereignty of God, and actually we haven't begun the subject. And throughout all eternity the subject would not be exhausted, would it? We can know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, but we can never fully comprehend Him.

And God is greater than the sum of all His attributes, and we're only going to be able to look at a few of them this week. And I'll have to take more than one this morning. First of all, I'd like to think with you about the righteousness of God.

God is righteous. And I think with a lot of people that word does not convey a very specific image to their mind. What does it mean when we say that God is righteous? Well, I'm a very simple believer, and I just try to take the first five letters of the word right.

God always does what is right. God is always fair. He's always honest.

He always acts with equity. He invariably does what is right. Without exception.

Now, Daniel spoke eloquently about the righteousness of God. Let's turn to the book of Daniel, and chapter 9, and I'd like to read a couple of passages there. Daniel, chapter 9, verse 7. There we read these wonderful words.

O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces as at this day. To the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel that are near and that are far off, for all the countries wither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. Verse 14.

Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us. For the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth, that we obeyed not his voice. Daniel is there giving his great prayer of confession, and he's taking the sins of the nation of Israel and making them his own.

Which is something, you know, we should do, but we never do do. We should take the sins of the nation and the sins of the church, as well as our own sins, and confess them to God. And what Daniel is saying here is, Lord, you have made us take some very bitter medicine, but you're right in doing it.

We deserve exactly what you've done to us. We deserve exactly the chastening that you have brought upon us. Then turn to the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 45.

Isaiah 45 verse 21. Tell ye and bring them near, yea, let them take counsel together. Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I the Lord, and there is no God else beside me? A just God and a Savior, there is none beside me.

That word just is a synonym for righteous. God is a righteous God and a Savior, and there is none other. That is, there is no other God that can compare with him.

And then turning over to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul loved to dwell on the righteousness of God. Romans chapter 3 and verse 26. Romans chapter 3 and verse 26.

In this particular section, Paul is giving forth the doctrine of salvation, and he's doing it in a marvelous way, the doctrine of salvation. And he says in verse 26, To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Now, using the language of human appearance, the entrance of sin into the world faced God with a dilemma.

Now, really, understand me, God has no problem. God has no dilemma, but from my standpoint, it appears this way. There's a dilemma here.

God is a righteous God, and we, his creatures, have sinned. His righteousness demands that those sins be punished. But God is also a God of love.

He loves his people. He loves his creatures, and he doesn't want them to perish. And this is the problem.

How can a righteous God justify ungodly sinners and still be righteous in doing it? I call it the divine dilemma, but when I say it, I say it with tongue-in-cheek, because as I say, God has no dilemmas. He has no problems. But that's the question.

How can a holy, righteous God justify someone like me and still be righteous in doing it? And, of course, the answer is the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. The Lord Jesus came and took our sins upon himself. He bore the dread penalty for all of our sins.

He paid the price of the broken law. He died the death that we should have died. And now God can come out to us in grace and say, Look, the penalty has been paid.

I have found a ransom. Come and trust the Savior, and you will enter into the good of all that he did. You know, the fact that Jesus died upon the cross and was buried and rose again doesn't save me.

I still have to receive him as my Lord and Savior. God does not populate heaven with people who don't want to be there. God will not take people to heaven against their will.

It would be like a gangster in a prayer meeting. It would be horrible, wouldn't it? And heaven would no longer be heaven if there were people there unwillingly. But now God can justify all who believe on his Son as Lord and Savior.

There's a hymn in our hymn book. I think it's in this hymn book that says it well. It says the perfect righteousness of God is witnessed in the Savior's blood.

It is in the cross of Christ we see how God can save yet righteous be. God could not pass the sinner by. The law demands that he must die.

But in the cross of Christ we trace his righteousness yet wondrous grace. The sin alights on Jesus' head. His end, his death, sin's debt is paid.

Stern justice can demand no more, and mercy can dispense her store. The sinner who believes is free can say that Savior died for me, can point to the atoning blood and say, that made my peace with God. But that's the solution to the divine dilemma.

God, a righteous God, yet a loving God, has found a way by which he can save ungodly sinners and still be righteous in doing it. And he does it through the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now there's another verse in connection with the righteousness of God.

I'd like you to notice, and that's back in Psalm 85 and verse 10, and this will always be one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I have quite a few. Psalm 85 and verse 10, it says, Mercy and truth are met together.

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Now first of all, I'd like you to notice that there are four attributes of God in that verse. Mercy, truth, righteousness, and peace.

And there's no place where the attributes of God met together in such sweet harmony as at the cross of Calvary. And whether the psalmist knew it or not, he was really describing Calvary in this verse. Mercy and truth are met together.

What does that mean? Well, all of God's standards of truth must be adhered to. God is a God of truth. If he says something, it must stand.

And he says the sinner, the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Ah, but mercy was married to truth at the cross of Calvary because a substitute died for this sinner. And now God goes out to me in mercy.

And he does it without condoning my sin. He does it without overlooking my sin. He does it without winking at my sin.

He does it because my sins have been dealt with effectively at the cross. Mercy and truth are met together. And then it says righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

It's really beautiful, isn't it? God's righteousness was maintained at the cross of Calvary. I'm justified through faith in Christ. And I have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I can say, oh, the peace forever flowing from God's thoughts of his dear son. Oh, the peace of simply knowing on the cross that all was done. It's really wonderful.

Now, we mentioned that every time we study the attributes of God, there should be a personal application. Every indicative becomes an imperative. Every statement of fact becomes a command.

What does the righteousness of God say about me? It says I should be righteous. If I'm going to have the family likeness, it means I must be just and fair and impartial and honest in all my dealings. I'm oftentimes amazed by the number of opportunities that arise every week in life here in the United States to do things that are just a little bit off, you know.

To fudge. To cheat. Look at the opportunities to cheat on exams in school.

If all the diplomas and certificates that were earned dishonestly were ever returned to the schools, the schools wouldn't be able to hold them. They'd have to build sheds to hold them. I think of all of the dishonesty that takes place in business today.

Of all the bribery, of all the graft, of all the corruption. It's really appalling. And the temptation is terribly strong for Christians, especially when the dollar is involved, isn't it? That's where it's keenest.

When the dollar is involved. It might be a building permit. It might be income taxes.

We're all faced with these temptations to engage in shady deals. Lawbreaking are false weights and measures. But God wants us to be impartial.

He wants us to be absolutely scrupulously honest in all of our dealings. I think of many Christian friends of mine who've had to give up jobs rather than succumb to the corruption of the world today. Think of the corruption in politics today.

You know, by its very nature, politics is corrupt. It really is. It's really impossible to go by divine principles in modern politics.

I hear you arguing and mentioning names to me, but I don't care. It's true. Politics by its very nature is a system of compromises.

You have to compromise if you're going to be effective in politics. And I'd like to suggest to you that you and I as Christians can do more for our nation on our knees than we can do in the ballot box. I really believe that.

I believe we can influence the destiny of nations through prayer if we only use it. We don't realize the power that's at our disposal. Then, I think that the study of the righteousness of God should make us worshipers, too.

We should be thankful that he saves us righteously, that he forgives us righteously even after we're saved, and that he's righteous in all his dealings with us. You know, the longer I live, the more 1 John 1-9 means to me. I don't think I could go on another week if that verse weren't in the Bible.

If we confess our sins, he is what? Faithful and tough. He's righteous. He's faithful to his promise, and he's righteous in doing it.

He's forgiving our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. It's really a tremendous blessing to know that we have a righteous God. But he's not only righteous, he's what is known as immutable, and that means unchangeable.

God is unchangeable. And let's think about that for a little while this morning. Psalm 102, verse 24.

Psalm 102, verse 24. First part of the verse. Well, I'll begin in verse 23.

He weakened my strength in the way he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days. And the Father answers him.

There's a change in speaker there in the middle of verse 24. And the Father says, Thy years are throughout all generations. Of old thou hast laid the foundation of the world.

The heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure. Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment.

As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same. Thy years shall have no end.

Psalm 102 is really a beautiful psalm. You hear a conversation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the cross of Calvary. And here, in answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus on the cross, the Father answers him.

And among the other things he says to him is, Thou art the same. This describes the immutability of God. Creation will be changed, but he knows no change.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? Creation will be changed. I've been traveling a lot this summer. I've gone to cities that I visited 20, 30 years ago, and they were beautiful cities.

And today, they're run down. They need rehabilitation. They're tired.

They're dirty. Really. And that verse of a hymn has been going through my mind all summer.

Our earthen vessels break. The world itself grows old. But Christ, this precious dust, will take and freshly mold.

He'll change these bodies vile. He'll fashion like his own. He'll bid the whole creation smile.

And hush, it's grown. That's exactly what he's going to do. Let me read some other verses to you that deal with the immutability of God.

Malachi chapter 3. You don't have to turn to them. I'll be going rather rapidly. Malachi chapter 3 and verse 6 says, I am the Lord.

I change not. James chapter 1, verse 17b, speaks of God as the Father of light. With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Wonderful to have such a Father. In Darby's translation of Isaiah 37:16, he uses the word the same as one of the names of God. He capitalizes the word same and uses it as one of the names of God.

It says, thou the same, thou alone art the God of all the kingdoms of the earth. Interesting, isn't it? That's Isaiah chapter 37 and verse 16, and it's also found in Isaiah 41, verse 4. If you check Darby's version, you'll see that he uses the word the same as a name of God. Well, that's a wonderful thing, that God never changes in his being, his attributes, or his purposes.

We want to think of that and qualify it. He never changes in his being. He never changes in his attributes.

He never changes in his purposes, but he does use different methods, doesn't he? He does use different methods down through the history of the years, and that's why we study the dispensation. Dispensational truth is under tremendous attack today, I know. But I want to tell you, I couldn't understand my Bible apart from the study of dispensation.

I really couldn't. And God has tested men under certain conditions in various ages. He tested men in the Old Testament under innocence, under conscience, under promise, under law.

Today, he's testing men under grace. And man is a colossal failure under each dispensation, isn't he? Only the Lord is the answer to the problems of this poor old world. He tests men in different ways with regard to sin and responsibility, although the way of salvation has always been the same.

As far as the way of salvation is concerned, there's no change. Men were saved by faith in the Lord in the Old Testament, just as we're saved by faith in the Lord in the New Testament. They were saved by faith in the Lord with regard to whatever revelation he made to them.

I don't think they saw Calvary, I really don't. But God saw it. That was what was important.

And when they put their faith in the Lord in the Old Testament, God saved them on the basis of the work of Christ's still future. We look back to the work of Christ, and God saves us on the basis of that work that has already taken place. But you know, the subject of the immutability of God raises another problem, and that is God never changes.

And yet, there are verses in the Bible that speak about God repenting, aren't there? And we want to look at those for just a minute. This seems to be a contradiction, but there are no contradictions in the Bible. Let's turn to Numbers chapter 23 and 19.

It says, God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? And also in 1 Samuel 15:29. 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 29.

And also, the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent. For he is not a man that he should repent. Okay, hold those two verses in your mind, and then turn to Genesis chapter 6 and verse 6. And you read, it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth.

Contradiction in the Bible? Not really. Genesis 6:6, it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth. 1 Samuel 15:11.

It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king. Two verses that say God doesn't repent, and two verses that say that he did repent. What is the explanation? Well, by his very nature, God must reward obedience and punish disobedience.

Keep those two things in mind. God has set certain decrees in the universe, and by his nature, he has to reward obedience, and he has to punish disobedience. Okay, here's a people, they're obeying the Lord.

He rewards them. But they turn around and they change. And all of a sudden, they start becoming disobedient.

And perhaps they abandon the Lord and turn to idolatry. Now, there's no change in the character of God when he punishes them. There's no change in the attributes of God when he punishes them.

There's no change in his being. There's no change in his purposes. It's the very thing he's purposed from the beginning.

But the change that has taken place in his people necessitates a corresponding reaction from God. It doesn't affect his immutability at all. It doesn't affect his changelessness at all.

It seems like repentance to us. And that's why I often use the expression, the language of human appearance. It appears like change to us.

But it's only God reacting to a change that has taken place in his people. It certainly doesn't mean that any of these things took God by surprise. God knew exactly what was going to happen.

It doesn't mean that he's acting out of regret or resentment or irritation. There's no irritation with God. It simply means that what we think of as repentance is God acting in a manner that's consistent with his own character.

I don't think that we should think of the immutability of God or any other attribute of God as simply a dry doctrine. To me, the changelessness of God is a source of immeasurable comfort. Because we live in a world of change.

Change and decay in all about I see. All thou who changest not, abide with me. It's interesting like Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

You live your life and you're young and then you're middle-aged. And then you see a whole generation passing off the scene. And then you see your generation coming into position to pass off the scene.

And you cry out, all thou who changest not, abide with me. How we should worship him for his unchangeable character and his faithfulness to us in all his dealings. But you know, we should be like God.

We should bear the family resemblance. And we shouldn't be fickle and moody and changeable. We shouldn't say one thing and do another.

We shouldn't be a Dr. Jekyll one day and a Mr. Hyde the next. We shouldn't be kind and gracious and outgoing to strangers. And mean and harsh and cruel to our family.

You know, one of the, to me, one of the perversions of human nature. Is how we can have a teasy, a scintillating personality with outsiders. And yet treat the ones we love the most, we treat them the worst.

Can you explain that to me? It's true. It's true. We should be willing to change where progress is indicated.

But we should be unchanging when it comes to standing for what is right. And let's think just now briefly of the faithfulness of God. The faithfulness of God means that God is absolutely trustworthy in all his ways.

And he's absolutely true to his word. What could we do today if he were not a faithful God? It means that no promise of God will ever fail. No word of God will ever fall to the ground.

It means if God says a thing, that's the surest thing in all the universe. It means that truth is what God says about a thing. Best definition of truth I've ever come across.

Truth is what God says about something. And it's no risk, there's no risk in believing God. People say, I forget the man who said it's like stepping out into the dark and finding the solid rock underneath.

That's not faith. Faith demands the surest evidence in all the world and finds it in the word of God. And I say there's nothing more reasonable than for the creature to believe the creator because he's a faithful God.

And he cannot go back on his word. A man would be a fool not to believe God. A fool.

He believes everybody else. He gets on that elevator to go up to the 57th story. He doesn't know whether that elevator's going.

He's driving along the freeway. How does he know about what those people are on drugs that are coming the other way? Trust. He exerts trust every moment of his life, but he can't trust God.

That's so irrational because God is the only trustworthy one in all the universe. Let me just read you some verses on the faithfulness of God. Deuteronomy 7, 9. Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God.

Psalms 119, verse 90. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22 and 23.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.

1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 9. God is faithful by whom ye were called under the fellowship of his Son. 1 Corinthians 10, 13. God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.

Revelation 1, 5. Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness. It's because our God is a faithful God that we can know that his salvation is the correct one. The world says many roads lead to God.

Many spokes lead to the set-apart of the wheel. But it's because God is a God of truth, of faithfulness, that we can know that his way of salvation. It's because of the faithfulness of God that we can have assurance of salvation, isn't it? How do you know you're saved today? Because he's a faithful God.

It's because he's faithful that we can know that our sins are forgiven. The faithfulness of God guarantees the fulfillment of every promise. You know, I've never been in heaven, but I'm as sure of it as if I were already there.

Oh, I think it's God said it. I have eternal security today. Why? Because Jesus said it.

And his word is true. It's the faithfulness of God that accounts for our preservation day by day. You know, you could really have a nervous breakdown if you thought of all the things that could happen to you.

Driving along the highway, there are all the germs floating around you. And here you are eating white sugar and white flour and all the rest. I hope I'm not stepping on toads.

No, but it's the preservation of God. Think of it in the midst of battle, how God guides every bullet. And he does.

He does. There's not a random one as far as God is concerned. We see his faithfulness in the seasons of the year, don't we? Genesis 8, 22.

Seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. In fact, we might well ask ourselves the question today, what do we not owe to the faithfulness of God? Something to ponder. But I want to tell you that this divine attribute should serve not only as a pillow, but as a prod as well.

Dear friends, we should be faithful. We should be men and women of our word. If we say a thing, that should be our bond.

If we say we're going to be there at a certain time, we should be there at that time. People can be very careless, you know, about keeping appointments. But if we're going to be people of our word, we should keep our promises.

We should be true to our marriage vows. Once having made a commitment, we should stick to it, even if it costs us plenty. Because the man of God swears to his own hurt and change is not.

We should be scrupulously honest, avoiding exaggerations and half-truths. Thank you.

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