

The Character of God

God is opening up incredible doors of opportunity for reconciliation ministries in different parts of the world. The task is challenging and daunting. We know that we can't change anyone's heart – only God can do that. So we must be sure that God is with us, doing the work. Having a deeper understanding of His character will help us to increase our trust in Him. We can learn from Moses' experience.

Exodus 33: 12-23

Moses is facing a huge task, & is feeling very insecure. How is he going to cope? Although God has told him that He knows him by name and that he has found favour with Him, Moses is still not sure he believes it. God says His presence will go with him. Moses says, 'If You're not coming, I'm not going anywhere!' Seems he's not really hearing what God is saying, or not believing it? Then he asks God to show him His glory. Who is this God that has promised to go with him? What is he really like? He wants to be more sure of His God.

Exodus 34: 5-7

What is God's response? He reveals His character to Moses. So God's glory is His character. He has a glorious personality!

V6 The first thing He says is that He is the Lord, the Lord. He is the ruler, He's in charge of the universe, He's the Boss, what He says goes. Just suppose that is all He had said, what would we feel? We could be very uncertain, even very afraid. What kind of ruler is He? How will He treat us? We don't know anything about Him... But God was so considerate of us that He went on to explain exactly what He was like, so that we didn't have to be in any doubt about it.

The Compassionate God

The first thing He says is.... The Judge of all the earth who hates sin with a perfect hatred, the utterly Holy One, the Righteous One.... ?? No! The first thing He says is that He is Compassionate. That's the first thing He wants us to know! This word 'compassionate' is an amazing word in the Hebrew language. It comes from the same root as the word for a woman's womb. How does a woman feel about the unborn child within her womb? Does she decide to wait to see how this child turns out before deciding if she is going to love him/her? No! She loves this child unconditionally. She wants the best for him/her; she wants to protect the child..... God says, 'This is what I feel for you, my children. I have loved you unconditionally before you were even born. I have always wanted the best for you.'

The word can also mean, 'to behold with the most tender affection.' How about fathers when they first hold their new-born child in their arms. How do they feel? Remember this child is only capable at this stage of making a mess at both ends... A father feels so proud, so protective, so joyful..... This is how God feels about us!

It also means 'bowels of mercy'.

What is compassion? What is it not?

Revealed in Jesus.

It is often said of Jesus that He was moved with compassion. How did people know that? Examples:

Matthew 9:36 Compassion on the crowd like sheep without a shepherd

Matthew 14:14 Compassion though He was tired and had planned a break, and healed their sick.

Matthew 15:32 Compassion on those who were hungry

This is the very first revelation of His character that God gives in the Bible. He wanted us to know that first of all.

The Gracious God

The Hebrew word here means, ‘to feel sympathy and compassion and to show it by granting a favour, to be favourably inclined towards someone, a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to someone who has a need, a free gift from a superior to an inferior who has no claim for such treatment.

N. T. Grace means :

Undeserved blessing

Unmerited favour

Unconditional love and acceptance

Heaven’s unlimited resources at my disposal

What is it? What is it not?

Revealed in Jesus.

John 1:14 Full of grace & truth.

John 8:4 Woman caught in adultery

Matthew 26:50 Speaking to Judas at His betrayal, ‘*Friend....*’ !

Objections:

- “It’s too good to be true.” But it cannot depend on anything I do, otherwise it would not be grace. Romans 11:9
- “It’s too dangerous. People will continue to sin.” But it’s grace that transforms us not law. See 1 Corinthians 15:10, Romans 6:1; Ephesians 1:6. God knew what He was doing! Law never changed anyone.
- “It’s not fair!” But grace is not justice, it’s an undeserved gift.

There is no boundary to God’s grace regarding

- 1) Time. This is everlasting love. It didn’t begin when I repented. The Cross bought timeless forgiveness.
- 2) Intensity. There is nothing I can do to alter it – to make Him love me more, or love me less. “You can’t stop God from loving you”. Am I really believing this?

If I refuse to believe in grace:

I despise the cross and Jesus has died in vain. Galatians 2:21

I am unable to give grace to others Acts 3:6
I become alienated from Christ and place myself under the power of the law.
Galatians 5:4
I put myself under a curse Galatians 3:13

N. B. Grace is free to us because it cost Jesus everything.

Grace always transforms! If I really believed in grace, what would be different in

- the way I experience life?
- the way I relate to other people?

Slow to Anger

The word means elongated, or stretched out, prolonged....
This is a characteristic of someone who has a very long fuse.
It's someone who is extremely patient, who is long-suffering, who is always ready to give another chance. He is of friendly disposition, not irritable or touchy. He's the advocate, not the accuser! Is this the way I see Him? Or do I see Him as someone who is unpredictable, difficult to please, always looking out for our mistakes, waiting to punish us, angry with us for the least thing, never satisfied because we are not perfect.....

What is it? What is it not?

Psalm 78:37-38 : This whole Psalm shows how incredibly patient God is. Time after time the children of Israel turn their backs on Him, constantly putting Him to the test. But time after time He is merciful, and gives them another chance.

Isaiah 48:9 : For my own name's sake I delay my wrath ; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off.

Micah 7:18 : When God has to judge, it is only for a limited time.

Isaiah 54:8 : His anger is 'for a moment' but His kindness and compassion are everlasting.

Jonah 4:2 Jonah got angry with God because He was too merciful!

Revealed in Jesus

He is so patient with His disciples in spite of their stupidity, their slowness to believe, their selfish ambition.

Luke 22:61 How did Jesus look at Peter after the denial?

Jesus did not show anger towards sinners, but towards religion and religious systems which were keeping people away from God's love.

Matthew **12.9-14** : Jesus was angry with the Pharisees after healing the man with the withered arm, because they cared nothing about him – they simply cared about their own religious rules..

All of God's anger was poured out on Jesus on the cross. Whoever is trusting in Jesus and hiding in Him, can never experience God's anger against him/her. God disciplines in love, not in anger. God is our defender and advocate not our accuser!

Abundant in Steadfast Loving Kindness and Truth (or Love and Faithfulness)

Abundant – What is it? What is it not?

Lots of it, more than enough, endless, plenty, surplus, lavish, extravagant, immeasurable, like the stars or like grains of sand.... It is NOT – mean, grudging, limited, economical, restricted, conditional, rationed,.... **Psalm 36:5-9; 1 John 3:1** (lavished....)

Abundant in what? The Hebrew word for **steadfast loving kindness** is 'Hesed', which is a tender love that issues from a heart of deep compassion and enters freely into a legally-binding, permanent, love relationship and obligation of fidelity (faithfulness) c.f. marriage. It's what is demonstrated in covenant-making. See Ruth & Naomi; David & Jonathan. It's something that endures forever. See Psalm 136.

How would 'Hesed' evident itself in a relationship?

Loyalty, care, putting up with deficiencies, eyes for no-one else, sensitivity to needs, patience, long suffering, considering the other in everything, and unconditional declaration of love.

Psalm 89: faithfulness, faithfulness, faithfulness....! (vs. 1, 2, 5,8,14,24,28,33-34)

Jeremiah 33:19-21 If you can stop My covenant with day and night, then maybe you can stop My covenant with you...!

Revealed in Jesus

Abundance: Feeding the 5, 4000 & 4,000 Baskets of left-overs! Mark 6:42-43
Miraculous haul of fishes – nets almost broke.... Luke 5:6-7

Faithfulness|: The New Covenant

And truth

The basic meaning of the word is firmness or certainty. Utterly reliable the same as the strong arms of a parent supporting a baby, or of pillars supporting the temple. Like a solid rock (Deuteronomy 32:4). We can lean on it. "Truly, truly I say to you...." It's the Amen.

Jesus was full of grace and truth.

Maybe you would like to write your own personal version of Psalm 136

Maintaining love for thousands.

What does maintaining involve? For example a vehicle.....?
What does maintaining a relationship involve? For us? For God?
What is it not?

Here, God says He maintains 'Hesed'. – His steadfast, faithful, covenantal, unconditional love towards us.

- 1) He not only begins the relationship, but He also sees it through to completion
- 2) He guards His steadfast love towards His beloved
- 3) He watches over us continually. He does not forget.

Revealed in Jesus

Matthew 29:28 I am with you always.

Hebrews 13:5 I will never leave you or forsake you.

For thousands.

That means God has a very big heart. He loved the outsider, the outcast, the foreigner... This is also seen in Jesus, like when He healed the Roman centurion's servant.

God so loved the world (the word for world is cosmos)

For us, maintaining love for 1 person is as much as we can handle! It takes a lot of hard work and commitment.

Though God maintains love to thousands, He loves each one individually and specifically.

Forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Forgiving. This word has 3 categories of meaning:

- 1) to lift up (like to lift one's head, hands). To lift up sin means to lift it up and off, which means freedom!
- 2) To carry, bear, support
- 3) To take away

What is it? What is it not?

There are different meanings for wickedness, rebellion and sin:

Wickedness - comes from verb 'to make crooked' It's a perversion of the truth.

Rebellion – to deliberately hit up against truth and refuse it, casting off of authority

Sin - to miss the mark, to fall short, to fail

God says He forgives every category!

Revealed in Jesus

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus covers everything! God's forgiveness is so complete and all-encompassing. 1 John 1:8

Restoring Peter John 21

His response to the paralytic Mark 2:5

Often teaching on forgiveness

Yet by no means clearing the guilty

But – in that case, what does the next part mean?

What is your translation of the next part? NIV says: ‘Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished...’? How can he forgive all types of sin, lifting it off us and carrying it away, yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished?

“NIV is poor translation. Other translations have ‘**and will by no means clear the guilty**’. The Hebrew word is ‘naqah’ which means innocent, pure, spotless, to be free..... The phrase really means ‘he clearly will not clear’, or ‘he cleanly will not call clean.’ It means it is impossible for God to overlook sin; because He is totally just, He will not call something clean that is dirty; He will not call someone innocent who is guilty. Sin is extremely serious. Something that is sinful today will not be ok tomorrow. God is absolutely just. He will never forget things or say it doesn’t matter. Sin must be resolved, either by punishment or atonement, otherwise its effect will last forever, continuing to haunt and plague future generations. The passage of time alone will not change anything.

“God is not an angry God who is sometimes appeased. He is a loving God whose tender love and inexhaustible long-suffering kindness and goodness can be driven, through man’s stubborn and unrepentant sinfulness and wickedness, to that extremity of punishing sin. He takes no pleasure in punishing sin. He pleads with mankind to change his ways and avoid this dreadful extremity. He gives lots of opportunity to repent before this extremity is reached.

“He will forgive and acquit totally the one who repents and turns away from sin, even if the guilty person has committed the most awful iniquity, rebellion and sin (as He has just told us). The repentant sinner’s guilt is atoned for by sacrificial substitute and through forgiveness the guilty person can and will be cleared.

“But this is the **only way** that the guilty can be cleared. If a person does not avail himself of this freely-given love offer, that person will have to bear his own guilt. God will by no means clear the guilty. The guilt of the person remains and will not go unpunished, for God is totally righteous and just and fair.” (John Hymus)

He punishes the children and their children for the sin of their fathers.....?

This is again very misleading in the NIV. Other translations have ‘**He visits the iniquity of the fathers..... to the 3rd & 4th generation.**’

The word is ‘paqed’ which means ‘visiting, inspecting, attending with care.....’ The idea is that God is taking note of unresolved iniquity. He watches the effect passing down the generations. He is grieved and vexed about this. It is impossible to sin in 1 generation without it affecting future generations (especially the 3rd and 4th because 3-4 generations can be alive at the same time.)

Compare this with Deuteronomy 7:9!

Conclusion

God gave 7 aspects of His character to Moses. The first 6 were all saying ‘I love you’ in different ways. The last says ‘and I love you so much that I take sin extremely seriously, because I know it will destroy you and destroy your relationship with Me.’

What an amazing God! This is Someone worthy of our whole-hearted love, trust, obedience and adoration.