

ARE WE SAVED BY THE **BLOOD?**

WEEK 6: “The Character of God”

Overview

Are We Saved by the Blood?

1. The Pattern for Paradise - What was God's **purpose** in creating humans?
2. The Origin of Sin - How did humans get separated from God's *ideal*?
3. The Sacrificial System - What was the point of **blood** sacrifices?
4. The Law and Jesus - What do we mean by God's **Law**?
5. How does the **New** Testament <relate> to the **Old** Testament?
6. Righteous Judgment - Is God's character really perfect and complete?
7. The Substitutionary Atonement – “Jesus *died* in our place” – what does that mean?
8. The Price of Reconciliation - Was “the precious blood of Christ” a **price** that was paid?

“The character of”

..a look back

... In the past five lessons we have been laying the foundations for appreciating in a deeper way the value of our salvation in Christ.

We looked closely at what the revealed Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, teach about Creation, Sin, Sacrifice, and the Law of God.

Last week Pastors David, Paul and Dharshan led us in exploring the relationship between the Old Testament and the New.

Today we are going to develop that theme a little further by digging into what the Scriptures teach us about the character of God, as revealed in the two Testaments

The Righteous Anger & the Love of God.

This is important for two main reasons –

- ✓ One (which we started last week) is to establish the continuity (rather than contradiction) between the Old and New Testaments.
- ✓ The other is to lay the groundwork to appreciate the cross of Christ.

Where to Begin?

The Book of Proverbs gives us a key.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Pr 1:7

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Pr 9:10

(Proverbs is not just a collection of smart and often witty sayings, it actually teaches important lessons about what being a believer looks like in practical day-to-day living. And it is surprisingly modern in its conclusion, which takes as its model of the wise person who fears the LORD (31:30) a wife of noble character who is also a resourceful businesswoman).

Fear of the LORD, and knowledge of the Holy One

Knowledge and understanding - including of the character of God – start with the fear of the LORD, and knowledge of the Holy One.

What do we mean by the fear of the LORD?

“**Fear**” depending on the context can mean real terror..



..but when used about **God**, it means something like **reverence** or **awe**.

And then “knowledge of the Holy One” reminds us that **holiness**, especially when referring to God means an absolute **separation and aversion** to everything which is evil or sinful.

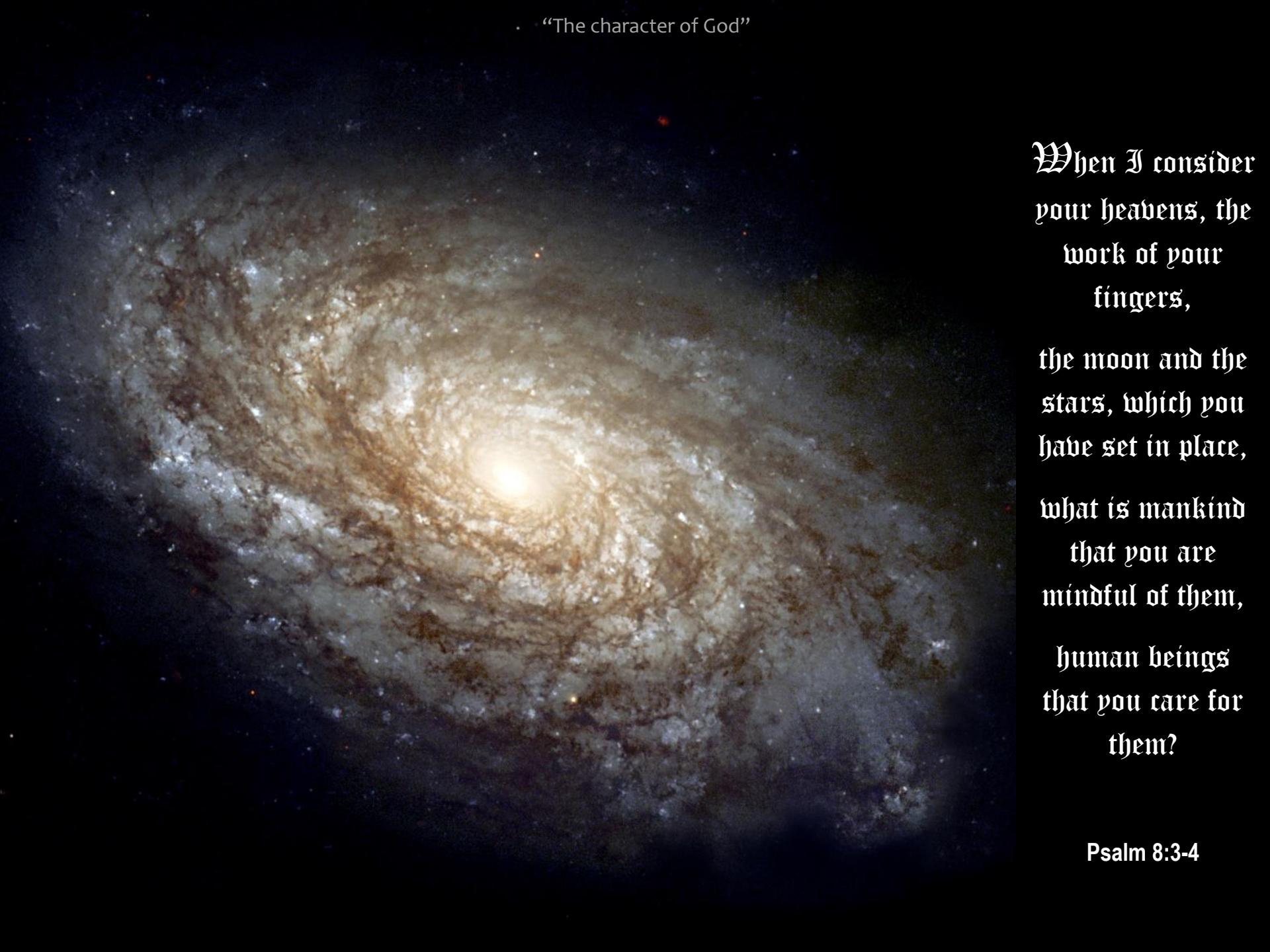
“The character of God”

HE is GOD!

So the Scripture advises us that if we want to understand, it is better to start from a clear position that..

**God is God,
He is to be feared because He is God,
the Creator of the Universe,
and He calls the shots,
He is Holy.**

“The character of God”




When I consider
your heavens, the
work of your
fingers,
the moon and the
stars, which you
have set in place,
what is mankind
that you are
mindful of them,
human beings
that you care for
them?

Psalm 8:3-4

The prophet Amos gives perspective to his harsh judgment messages by the intervening poetic lines about **God’s transcendent greatness..**
(Amos 4:13, 5:8-9, 9:5-6).



***“Seek the Lord and live, / or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire;
it will devour them, / and Bethel will have no one to quench it.”***



**..He who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns midnight into dawn and
darkens day into night,
..the LORD is his name.**

Amos 5:6-8

Likewise, Job’s struggle with God’s apparent unfairness was put in perspective when he saw God’s awesome intervention through the whirlwind (Job 38:1-42:6).

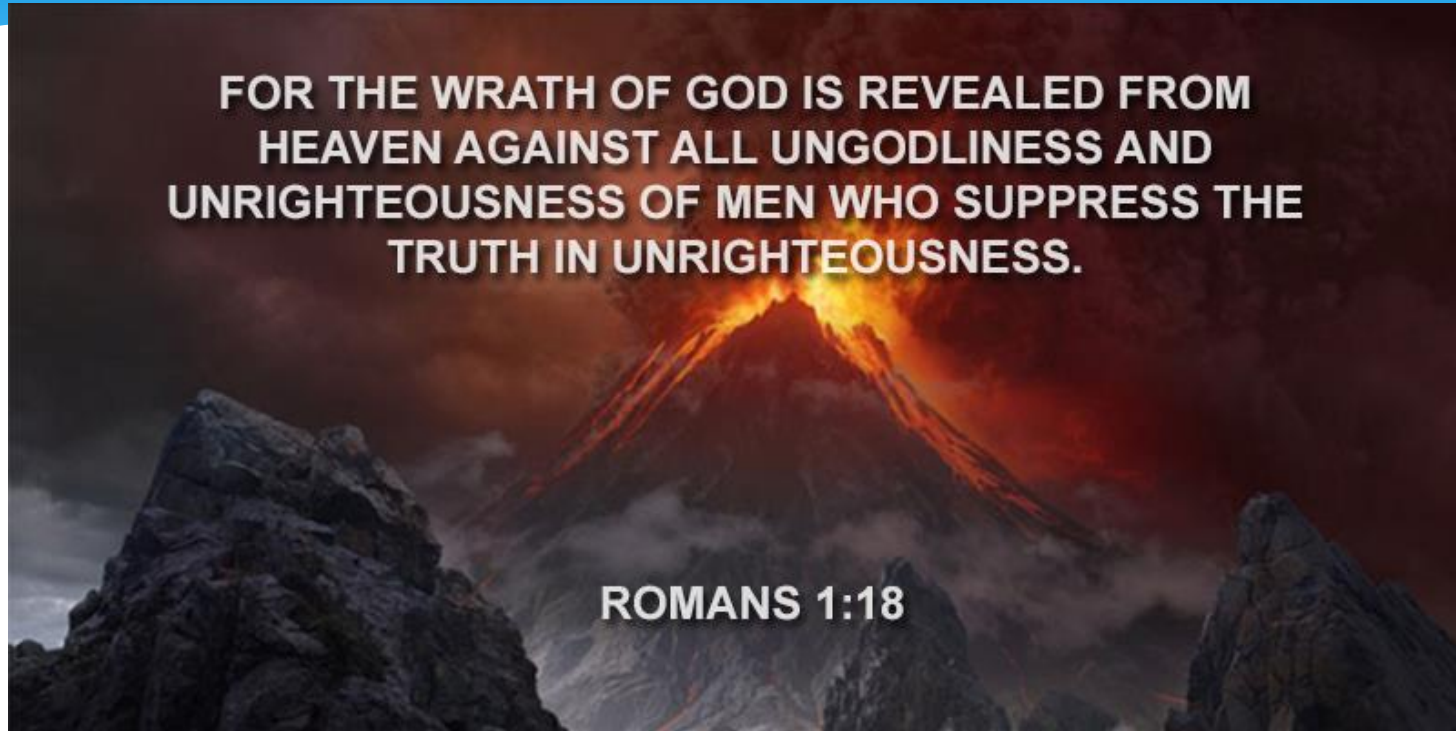


Today our awareness of the extent of God’s creation is vastly greater than that of Biblical times.

..If we would just reflect on the greatness of God, the fact that he would reveal Himself to mere humans and be concerned about our welfare at all is amazing.

So our understanding of God’s extravagant love becomes sharper, when we first have a sober appreciation of **His staggering greatness** as well as the more severe qualities of His **righteousness** and **holiness**.





When the Apostle Paul gives his systematic presentation of the gospel message (Romans 1:18-8:39),

His opening words are **“the wrath of God is being revealed ...”**. This harsh opening prepares the way for the reader to see the **need** and also the **value of the salvation** that God offers in Jesus.

The Character of God

Some attributes of the Creator God we may get from the observation of creation as well as from Scripture – e.g.

- ❖ **He exists in eternity** (independent of limits of time or space)
- ❖ **He is transcendent** (independent of any constraint of space or location)
- ❖ **He is the origin of life**
- ❖ **He has limitless knowledge and power.**

However more than the above (somewhat abstract) attributes, the Bible places much emphasis on the revealed **character** of the eternal God:

God is Holy – (e.g. Lev 11:44-45, 19:2)

- ❖ **God is separated** (from everything impure, evil or sinful)
- ❖ **He is pure, perfect, whole.**
Habakkuk 1:13; Isaiah 6:1-5; Isaiah 57:15;
Heb 7:26; 1 Peter 1:15-16.

The Scriptures speak much more of God’s holiness than of other attributes related to his greatness (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence).

Also God’s holiness is clearly established (in Ex, Lev and Num) before we come to his love in Deut 7:7-9



God is Righteous, Just

- ❖ **God is just, fair, true** to himself and his word. (Deut 32:4, Daniel 4:37, Rev 15:3).
- ❖ He gives rise to and upholds the **moral order** of the universe.
- ❖ He is great and awesome; **impartial** and **defends** the widows and fatherless (Deut 10:17-18).
- ❖ Part of his justice is his wrath or holy **anger against sin**.



God is Faithful,

covenant-keeping, promise-keeping.

He is reliable because He is unchanging –

- ❖ 1 Sam 15:29 (“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind”);
- ❖ Ps 100:5 (“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations”);
- ❖ Ps 119:89-90 (“Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures”).
- ❖ James 1:17 (“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”).

He is truthful

- ❖ Titus 1:2 (“God, who does not lie ...”),
- ❖ John 1:14 (“full of grace and truth”).

God is Loving.

His love is revealed in both the OT and NT:

Ps 107:1, 8, 15; Zephaniah 3:17. John 3:16, 13:1; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5; 1 John 4:8, 16 (“God is love”).

All of the above can be summed up by the simple but powerful statement that **God is good**.

The character of God is fully revealed in **Jesus**, and it is imparted to believers by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

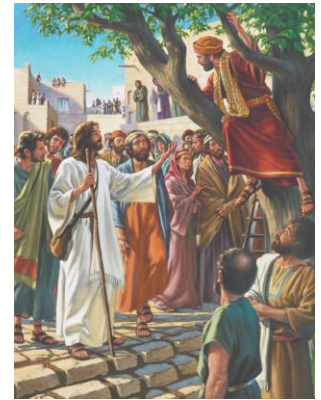
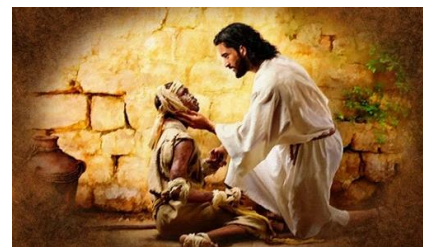


How **Jesus** Reveals the Character of God

- Jesus is the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14);
- He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15).
- If we have seen him we have seen the Father who sent him (John 12:45, 14:9).

Thus **Jesus reveals God to us** – both his character and his salvation.

By seeing the character of Jesus we can understand more fully the character of God.



As we read the 4 Gospels, we can ask ourselves questions like, What were Jesus' priorities? What made him glad? What made him sad? What made him angry? What did he look for in people? How did he treat people? How did he use his authority? What was his attitude to possessions? And so on...

“The character of God”

Despite many people’s imaginary picture of Jesus as a mild person, there is a recorded occasion where we see **Jesus’ anger expressed physically.**

It is when he dealt with people who were selling stuff in the Temple which was supposed to be a place of worship.

Its importance is underlined in that it is recorded in all 4 gospels (John 2:13-17, Luke 19:45-46, Mat 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17).



Preachers often spiritualize this incident and make it into a message about cleansing our hearts. But when Jesus “made a whip out of cords” **it was physical.**

All the gospels seem to agree that the behaviour which offended him was selling the things which people needed for worship, in other words **making a business out of religion.**

Likewise his harshest words were reserved for religious leaders who were hypocrites (actors) (Mat 23:1-36).

Righteousness and Love

God’s righteousness includes **justice, truth** and also **anger!**

*“LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it **not one of us can stand in your presence.**”*

Ezra 9:15

Misunderstandings or errors, in understanding God’s righteousness in relation to his love.

1. God’s righteousness X God’s love

As though one part of God’s nature is the enemy of another, thus suggesting that God has a contradiction within himself. Another version of this is to think that God the Father and God the Son has opposing characteristics. So you might find people who think of God the Father as someone who is judgmental and angry, waiting to punish us, but God the Son (that is Jesus) as someone who always on our side because he loves everybody and therefore does everything possible to stop his Father’s plans to punish us. This dualistic view is entirely different from what the Bible teaches, and is a distortion of Christianity which lends itself to ridicule, especially from those who have fallen into the second error.

2. Righteousness = Love

or at least that Righteousness and Love are bound together like Siamese twins, so that God’s righteousness has to be defined in terms of God’s love. i.e. If something is (from our perspective) loving, then it is righteous, and that which does not appear to be loving, is therefore not righteous.

Thereby someone might ask, **“Since God is Love, how can he possibly be angry?”** But the person who thinks this way will find themselves either ignoring or disputing a lot of words and actions that describe God in the Bible. *Like Marcion (the 2nd century heretic who was mentioned last week), who rejected the OT entirely, claiming that the loving God revealed by Jesus in the NT is a different entity from the vengeful or judgmental God of the OT.*

This idea is quite mistaken; for example the **majority of the Biblical statements on hell actually come from the lips of Jesus!**

**Both of these extreme views are false.
The truth which the Bible reveals is in between the two.**

- That is, righteousness and justice on the one hand, and love and mercy on the other, are not inconsistent or incompatible.
- They are different aspects of God’s character.
- Expressions of righteousness and justice include wrath and judgment.
- Expressions of love and mercy include self-sacrifice and forgiveness. As we shall see, at the cross, the entire character of God is fully expressed.



Righteousness/Justice and Love/Mercy are not incompatible.

Yet there is undeniably a **tension**. And on occasion God himself allows us to see this

a) Hosea 11:1-9

1“When Israel was a child, I loved him, /and out of Egypt I called my son.

2But the more they were called, /the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the Baals /and they burned incense to images.

*3It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, /taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize /it was I who healed them.*

4I led them with cords of human kindness, /with ties of love.

To them I was like one who lifts /a little child to the cheek, /and I bent down to feed them.

5“Will they not return to Egypt /and will not Assyria rule over them /because they refuse to repent?

6A sword will flash in their cities; /it will devour their false prophets /and put an end to their plans.

*7My people are determined to turn from me. /Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.*

8“How can I give you up, Ephraim? /How can I hand you over, Israel?

How can I treat you like Admah? /How can I make you like Zeboyim?

My heart is changed within me; /all my compassion is aroused.

9I will not carry out my fierce anger, /nor will I devastate Ephraim again.

For I am God, and not a man— /the Holy One among you. /I will not come against their cities

b) Matthew 23:33-39

33“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

37“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

So in Matthew 23 we see two aspects of the character of Jesus. His fuming anger towards the “religious” people in Jerusalem (23:13-36), and also his passionate love for the city (23:37-39).



c) 2 Peter 3:3-9

*“In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, “Where is this “coming” he promised? ... 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish**, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”*



When the time is right, the Lord Jesus will come again, triggering the unfolding of the end-time events whereby God will judge the world and its people by fire. But he has delayed now for 2,000 years, waiting, hoping for the nations to come to **repentance**. We can sense the tension.

“The character of God”

God's anger

God is “slow to anger” (Ex 4:6, Ps 103:8, Ps 145:8) – in other words he does not fly into a rage.

Since He is holy and righteous, He is entirely separated from all that is wrong, sinful or imperfect.

Hence He totally disapproves, rejects, condemns, and is hostile towards evil.

So since we are plainly informed that the Creator of the universe hates sin, then it is foolishness for us to flirt with it or to childishly test the boundaries.

..those who believe on Christ for their salvation experience eternal life, but those who reject him are subject to the wrath of God.

John 3:36

God’s character applied to us:

- ❖ God is spirit (Jn 4:24);
- ❖ God is light (1 Jn 1:5);
- ❖ God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

These are characteristics which are to determine our behaviour.

- ✓ Because God is **spirit**, we are to worship in spirit.
- ✓ Because God is **light**, we are to walk in the light.
- ✓ Because God is **love**, we love.

A Quotation to Ponder

“Beware of manufacturing a God of your own: a God who is all mercy, but not just; a God who is all love, but not holy; a God who has a heaven for everybody, but a hell for none; a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as truly an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all.”

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

Summary:

Undoubtedly the **love of God** is the utmost and highest revelation of His character, but we dare not deny or belittle the **severity of God** which is clearly attested in numerous passages of Scripture, including the New Testament (e.g. Hebrews 10:31 **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”**).

God is love, and in His love is both holy and righteous (just), **“the one who is able to save and destroy”** (James 4:12). He will not casually override his own principle of justice (like some local politician). These aspects of His character, which embrace the qualities of justice and truth, are expressed by **His holy anger or wrath against those who rebel against Him**. We are shielded from the wrath of God because of the **sacrifice of Christ** on the cross and thereby we enjoy His love and kindness.

It has been said well that **God hates sin but loves sinners**. Perhaps we have heard this so often that we should change the order: God loves sinners but hates sin. We must consider how this applies to our own situations before trying to apply it to others.

God’s character is perfect and complete. It is revealed little by little through the Scriptures. But all aspects of it work together in his solution to wonderfully and freely reconcile mankind to Himself through Christ.

“The character of God”



Questions ?