

# WHAT ARE GOD'S ATTRIBUTES?



## HIS LOVE

God's love, when poured forth into Christians' hearts in its breadth, length, depth, and height through the Holy Spirit, brings a realization of the fullness of God (Romans 5:5; Ephesians 3:18, 19). His love surpasses human knowledge, going beyond any thought of which the most penetrating mind is capable. Some illustrations aid us in appreciating His love.

### Like Our Love for Animals

"A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel" (Proverbs 12:10). A righteous man cares for his animals; he rests them, waters and feeds them, and watches for any discomfort. This is true of one who owns a bird, a dog, a cat, a horse, or an ox. The concern which a person feels in his heart toward animals is a likeness of God's feeling toward human beings.

The trappings of a horse or mule "include bit and bridle to hold them in check" (Psalm 32:9). God does not apply a physical harness (ropes or cords) to human beings, but "bonds of love" (Hosea 11:4). The kindness of God (Romans 2:4), like a horse's harness, should lead humans to do God's will. The love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14), like an ox's yoke, should constrain men to live for the Master.

God's love is like the feeling in animal owners who "as merciful masters lift up the yoke upon the cheeks of their oxen, [that is, they] push it so far back that the animals can eat their food in comfort."<sup>1</sup> God said, ". . . And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their

jaws; and I bent down and fed them" (Hosea 11:4).

### Like Our Love for Children

That a father should feel concern and responsibility for his own children is universally known. At one time Moses, with his patience exhausted, argued that since he was not the father of the Israelites his care for them could not be expected to be that of a father. He asked, "Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'?" (Numbers 11:12). On the other hand, Paul's love for his converts he likened to a father's regard. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. . . . just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11).

God used the illustration of fatherhood in depicting His love for Israel. "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1). However, His love was unrequited. God's prophets kept calling Israel to a pure love for God; instead, the people "kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols" (Hosea 11:2). They did this in spite of the fact that God was a good Father: "Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; but they did not know that I healed them" (Hosea 11:3). Their sinful selfishness blinded them to the fact that God was looking after their every

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*"For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).*

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need. He promised, “. . . I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer” (Exodus 15:26). Israel failed to understand the love God was showing toward them: “. . . the Lord your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place” (Deuteronomy 1:31). Let us not fail to see His love toward us (see 1 John 3:1).

### HIS MERCY

James 5:11 says, “. . . the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.”

Even when the first murderer cried for mercy, He who is full of compassion heard the entreaty and put a sign on him for his protection (Genesis 4:15). God has never wanted to punish; He has always wanted to bless.

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord God, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? . . . For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord God. “Therefore, repent and live” (Ezekiel 18:23–32).

In 2 Chronicles 30, when men of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun were unready even on the second month to eat the Passover, Hezekiah prayed for them: “May the good Lord pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though not according to the purification rules of the sanctuary” (vv. 18, 19). We read in verse 20, “So the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.”

Unfortunately, the beautiful and comforting teaching of God’s tender mercies has been abused. Many have said, “Any God who loves as He loves could not let anyone—however wicked—burn forever!” In truth, we must realize that God’s mercy has a limit. We read in 2 Peter 2 that “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment” (v. 4). He did not spare the ancient world (v. 5), but brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. It grieved Him to have to do it, but it was necessary.

God reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes (v. 6). Did He want to? With

pulsating interest He listened to Abraham pray: “Will you spare them for fifty righteous?” “Yes.” “For forty-five?” “Yes.” “For forty . . . thirty . . . for ten’s sake?” “Yes.” Not even that number could be found. Fire and brimstone came from heaven, and the scene of destruction was like a huge furnace.

God never sent anyone to hell; everyone who goes sends himself. God did and is doing His part to prevent everyone from going there. He loved wicked mankind enough to give the life of His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

No, the existence of hell does not argue against God’s pity and tender mercy. It is just a testimony of the ingratitude and hate with which men spurn divine compassion and will not be saved.

### HIS GENTLENESS

Christians are told “to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (Titus 3:1, 2).

The quality called gentleness is admired by all good men and appreciated by God. The opposite, roughness, has no place among those displaying the fruit of the Spirit. Several noble attributes are envisioned when a man is described as a gentleman: Honesty, wisdom, generosity, bravery, and kindness may be included. Thoughtfulness and consideration are also part of gentleness.

Christians are to develop gentleness, because it is a characteristic of God our Father. When we recognize how much we owe to Him who made us and how sinful we are, we should turn in gentleness to all people. David attributed his progress to God’s gentleness, saying, “. . . Your gentleness makes me great” (Psalm 18:35).

God was gentleness personified as He appealed to Cain: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; . . . but you must master it” (Genesis 4:6, 7).

Let us pray to become more loving, merciful, and gentle, as our God would have us to be.

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament*, vol. X, *Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 138.