

Jason Upchurch - Systematic Theology - Theology Proper - Attributes Lesson 3 - Sovereign Good Love

Last Lord's Day I was in the Tri Cities and I preached on Systematic Theology. It was a sermon I preached here some time ago on the oneness of God and the simplicity of God. And as I was going over my notes it occurred to me that it's been just a little while since we've looked at systematic theology. My plan was every 6-8 weeks to slip in a sermon. But it's been at least twice that so we're long overdue.

You need to know doctrine and love doctrine. You need to know who God is so you're not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and that your life is in line with good doctrine. The Bible commands us as elders to teach it and all people as Christians to know it and grow in it. So here we are.

If you remember - and I don't fault you if you don't because it's been 3 months - but we are studying theology proper. We've covered Bibliology: what the Bible has to say about the Bible. Bibliology is the first major category of systematic theology. And we are into the next major category of theology which is Theology Proper: what does the Bible say about God himself?

We've seen that God is Spirit. The divine being is not a physical being. Jesus, because he has taken on flesh and will forever be the God-Man has a human body. But in his divine nature he is spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit as God are not physical. They are spirit.

We've seen that God is one, that he is not made up of parts but is just God - we call this divine simplicity. And we've looked at the omniscience of God, omnipotence, and omnipresence of God.

This morning we're going to look at 3 more attributes of God. Now, to be fair we could spend 20 or even 200 sermons on attributes of God. This is really just an introduction so if you want to dive deeper you'll need to get a Systematic Theology book and read. Get Grudem or Berkoff or Calvin. Believe it or not this is really a high level overview.

One other thing I want to mention about the attributes of God is that theologians divide God's attributes usually in 2 ways. There are communicable attributes of God and incommunicable attributes of God. Communicable attributes are attributes that we can also have, and are actually commanded to have. God is love and mercy and wise and we are commanded to love and be merciful and wise.

If you think of a communicable disease it's a disease that you can give to someone else. It's communicated (passed) from one to another. That's what a communicable attribute of God is.

Incommunicable attributes are attributes that are not replicated by us and can't be. We can't be omnipresent. We can't be omniscient. Incommunicable attributes are attributes that God has that we are not called to have and can't have.

So omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, spirit are all incommunicable. We're going to look at one last incommunicable attribute and then move to communicable attributes of God.

1. Sovereignty. God is sovereign. Read Psalm 115:1-3

God is sovereign. We use that term a lot. What does it mean? It means that **all things that come to pass are by the decree of God our King**. God makes everything come to pass. Nothing is outside of his control. And that everything that he does makes him happy.

There are a lot of people who think that God only controls the good things that happen in life. He's in charge of nice and good things, and the Satan is somehow in control of the bad things. And there's this cosmic battle between them. And that's not true. God is the one on the throne and God's perfect plan is being accomplished.

We see that in this passage. Our God is in the heavens. He is exalted and lifted up so high we can't possibly imagine his grandeur.

The psalmist says that the heavens and the highest heavens couldn't contain God. Certainly the earth can't contain God. He is infinitely powerful and infinitely wise and infinitely in control of all things. So he is in the heavens and he does whatever he wants to do. **Read 3**

Think about that. Everything that God does makes him happy. We don't serve a grumpy God. We don't serve an old crotchety God who just wants kids to get off his lawn.

We serve an infinitely happy God because he can do and does do whatever pleases him. Does God get mad? Of course, in a sense. There's a sense in which when people rebel against his sovereignty he is displeased with their actions. But even that is not outside of his good pleasure.

Think of Jesus. Was the cross a tragedy or victory? It pleased the Father to crush the Son. And for the joy that was set before Jesus he endured the cross and disregarded the shame. Even what seemed to be the greatest tragedy, the greatest sin ever, God decreed for the greatest good.

Acts 4:28 says of the Jesus's death on the cross was "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." God predestined this evil and planned it out and it came to pass for his glory.

So our God is in the heavens. He does whatever pleases him - whatever makes him happy. No one is thwarting God's plan. No one is undermining God. As RC Sproul once said: there are no maverick molecules in the universe that God forgot about.

Those stars 500 million light years away? God perfectly controls all of those. The yapping dog at night in your neighborhood? You might be frustrated, but God's not. Everything that comes to pass is in his sovereign hand. And so as **Vs.1** says we give God all the glory. Even when other people think they're getting the best of us. Even when people mock us and ask us "where is our God?" We know right where he is.

How far does this extend? **Turn to Job 1:6-22**

You know the story of Job. But notice the interplay here. Notice the sovereignty of God in this whole situation. **Read 6-8** Who mentions Job first? God or Satan? God. **Read 9-12**

It has been said that the devil is God's devil. Satan can only do what God has given him to do. He can't do more or less. He is under the sovereign control of God. **Read 13-19**

Who brought about those tragedies? Why did all those things happen on that one day? Because Satan did it. We just read that God told him to go. God could have just as easily told Satan to get lost. But he doesn't. Look what happens next. **Read 20-22**

Who does Job attribute this calamity? To God. Was that a sin? Was he supposed to say Satan? No. At the end of the day it was God. Because Job knows that whatever comes to pass is in the hand of God.

Now Job didn't know all the stuff going on in heaven. But he didn't have to. Because he knew the sovereign power of God.

It's really the same as the story of Joseph in **Gen. 50:20** isn't it? After being hated by his brothers, almost killed, sold into slavery, handed over to prison and then becoming the second most powerful man in the world. Joseph says to his brothers: What you meant for evil God meant for what? Good.

The whole time, from the beginning, God meant the evil things his brothers did for good.

That's what sovereign is. It's absolute control over all things. And for believers this is cause for us to praise God and rejoice.

When the believers **Acts 4:24** are being persecuted and cry out to God they don't complain that God is weak. They cry out "Ah, sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them."

We don't cry out to a weak, impotent God. We cry out to the sovereign Lord.

The martyrs in heaven say the same thing in **Rev. 6:10** O Sovereign Lord, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

They've died for Jesus. But they know Jesus is sovereign. He's in control. And so what they really want is justice to roll down like water. And they ask the Sovereign Lord to do it.

Paul ends **1 Tim. 6:15** by saying that Jesus is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

I love that: King of kings and Lord of lords. Because when you drill it down, sovereignty is a function of God being king. Kings have sovereignty. They have the right and duty to rule over their kingdom however they want. And since the world and everything in it is God's, he alone is sovereign over all of it. He can and does what he pleases because it's all his!

Isaiah 45:6-7: When God introduces himself to Cyrus, the King who will send the Jews back from exile to the Promised Land he says "I am Yahweh, and there is no other, I form light and create darkness I make well-being and I create calamity. I am Yahweh who does all these things.

God makes good and calamity. The Hebrew word is barah - evil. God doesn't do evil and is not wicked. But he orchestrates even evil to be used for his glory.

Amos 3:6 Is a trumpet blown in the city and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city unless Yahweh has done it?

There are some legitimately evil things in the world. Horrific, unimaginable things. And even then God is sovereign.

Yet at the same time we uphold that God does not tempt anyone with evil and is not tempted by evil. He orchestrates good and evil but he is never the direct agent of evil.

Again, just look at the cross. Who planned the cross? God did. Who is responsible for the sin? Not God. Herod, the Jews, the Romans, the soldiers who nailed him down, and you and I for our sin. God planned this incredibly evil thing that ultimately brought good for us and glory to him.

Spurgeon said that the sovereignty of God is the pillow we can lay our head on at night. It's the attribute of God that means everything is going according to plan even when we don't know what that plan is. That the craziness - even the evil - in the world isn't somehow out of his control. But that God is using all things toward an end.

Let me tell you, I've been through some crazy things. And you want to just go "why?" What could possibly be the point of all of this? How is this on God's radar? What is he doing?

And the answer we have from God - like the answer Job had - was "who are you to question me?" God is the sovereign, not us. God is the creator, not us. God is the one who will get glory in all things, not us. God.

What we can trust is that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **Rom 8:28**

The crazy thing going on right now? In 20,000 years when we're in heaven, we'll be talking about and it and looking back on how God planned and used that for good. Doesn't seem good right now. Doesn't seem like it could ever possibly be good. There are some genuinely wicked things that happen. But we have this promise from God that for those who love him, for Christians who are called according to his sovereign purpose, he sovereignly orchestrates them for good.

God is sovereign and we trust that.

Okay, let's talk about some communicable attributes. Attributes that God has and calls us to have as well. There's a bunch and so this will take at least 2 sermons to unpack. We're just going to cover goodness and love this morning.

Goodness: God is good.

Now, we just got done with sovereignty and I think it's appropriate that the next attribute be the goodness of God. Because God can just do whatever he wants - he is God after all. But what if he weren't good? What if he were the god Mark Twain believed in that was whimsical and evil? What if he was just a tyrannical despot.

What if Richard Dawkins, the infamous atheist is correct that "The god of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak: a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." (Dawkins, The God Delusion)

If that were true - God being sovereign wouldn't be much of a comfort would it? It would be terrifying.

But actually what we find out in the Bible is that God is good. What does that mean? I'm going to borrow and tweak Wayne Grudem's definition: "The goodness of God means that God is the final standard for good, and all that God is and does is worthy of praise."

It's two parts. First, God is the standard of good. So it's the old saying that God doesn't do something because it's good. That would mean there's a higher standard above God that he has to conform to. So God doesn't do something because it's good. What God is and does is good because he himself is the definition of what good is. He is the standard.

And so the second part is also true: all that God is and does is worthy of praise. When we think of God and his attributes what should well up in us - whether it does or not - is praise. And whenever we think of his works, creation, salvation, reprobation, judgment, everything - praise should well up in our hearts. Why? Because he is good.

That's why it was right for Job to fall down and worship God even though his whole family and all his belongings had just been destroyed. Why? Because he knew God had done it.

Psalms 72:18: Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

When God took the life of David's child through adultery with Bathsheba, David arose and worshipped the Lord. Why? Because God is good.

Let me tell you something, you need to cling to these two truths about God: that he is sovereign and that everything he is and does is good. This is going to be your anchor in the storm. This is going to be what keeps you from going off the rails and shipwrecking your faith when the trials come. And they will come.

God is good, all the time. Everything he is is worthy of praise. And everything he does is worthy of praise.

Jesus said In **Luke 18:19:** No one is good except what? God alone.

He is the only one who is good. There is no one other than God that is good.

Psalms 100:5 Yahweh is good, his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalms 34:8: Taste and see that the Lord is what? Good.

In Hebrew it's tob (tov) - he's pleasant, agreeable, of moral excellence.

You remember in **Gen. 1** God would create and then he declares judgement on his creation. And God said it was...good. And God said it was good. Five times until he makes man and woman in his image and then he says it's what? Very good.

Everything God does is good because it flows from who he is. And so everything that God does deserves praise. Did you get a big bonus this year? Praise God. Wonderful provider. Did you get passed over for a promotion? Praise God. In his goodness he saw fit to keep you where you are.

James 1:17: says that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of change.

Psalms 84:11: No good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly.

God is not withholding from you money. He's not withholding from you children or health. He's not withholding from you success. He's not withholding from you ease in life.

God doesn't withhold anything good from us. Or put it a different way, the life you have is the best life possible for you to have from God's perspective. Maybe you want a different life, but God wants you to have this life. And he hasn't withheld anything from you.

There's no alternative universe where you could have had better things. Could have had a better spouse, more money. Had you only taken that job or made that financial decision. No. If you're a child of God, our good Father is withholding nothing from you. Everything you have - or don't have - is by God's good design.

In the parable of the talents Jesus says that the master gave different talents according to each servant's ability. You have 1 or 2 or 5 because God knows that's what you can handle in life. "But I want more. I want something else!" Brother, are you even being faithful with what you do have from God? Just be faithful with the good things he's given you.

I was an operations manager for a while and there was a guy who would get frustrated that he had the hard jobs. But he had only been around for a little while. "Why do I get the hard jobs?" Because you're good at them; and I know you'll get them done. And you'll eventually be rewarded if you stay faithful.

Everything God is and does is good and worthy of praise.

Predestination. Is hard to understand? Yes. It's good.
Damnation, eternal suffering. Is it hard to understand? Yes. It's good.
Church. Is it sometimes hard to be here. Yes. It's good.
The Trinity. Is it confusing? Can be. It's good because it's God.

God is sovereign, God is good.

God is love. **Turn to 1 John 4:7-12**

This is really one of the most beautiful sections of scripture on the love of God. Twice here the apostle John tells us that God is love. **Read 7-12**

So God is love. Two times he says it. What do we know about love? Well first and foremost love is giving. Giving. Love means joyfully giving something to someone.

Vs. 9: In this the love of God was made manifest. John is saying, this is the way God shows love. How? By sending his Son - giving his Son - so we could live.

Love is not just an emotion that we say to others. It does include emotions. It should. It should be expressed and emotions should go with it. Love is primarily giving yourself to another for the greater benefit.

The gospel is a gospel of love. For God so loved the world. The magnitude of God's love was so great that he gave his Son to save us. And John says we really don't even know what love is on our own. But because God is love he has shown us what love is. **Read 10**

And of course this love from God has an effect on us too, doesn't it? If God loved us (and he does) what are we to do to one another? Love them. Because we've been born of God who is love, we are now birthed into his family that is founded on love. And so the chief attribute of a child of God should be love.

That's why John says If you don't love, you're not born of God. You can't be. Imagine coming home and your wife was like "we've another child." And she shows you a fish in a bowl. That's not mine. It doesn't breath air. That's fundamental to humanity - air breathing.

In the same way fundamental to Christianity is loving one another - the brotherhood of believers - because God loved us. If we don't do that we're not legit children.

And this love of God isn't just big pie in the sky, out there, theoretical. This is very personal. **Turn to Gal. 2:20**

Paul is talking about the basic message of the gospel here. That the death Jesus died he died for me and the resurrection he rose, he rose for me. We are united with Jesus in his life and death and resurrection. Why? Paul tells us. **Read 20**

Listen, if you're in Christ - a believer - Jesus loved you personally. Yes he loved the whole church and there's a sense in which he loves the whole world. But he loves you personally. You can say he loved me. And gave himself up for me.

Do you ever feel like this red headed step child in the family of God? Like God is just putting up with you and he wishes you were really someone else?

Well, he doesn't. He loved you. And gave himself up for you.

And Isaiah says that as the groom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. **Isa. 62:5**

I remember getting married. I got me a wife, y'all. She's gorgeous and amazing and she's all mine. There was rejoicing. That's what God does over us.

Zeph 3:17 says God is in our midst and he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love, he will exult over you with loud singing.

You sing God's praise but did you know God sings that you are his? And he doesn't sing like we sometimes do on Sunday morning "how great thou art..."

He exults - rejoices over us - with loud singing.

Turn to John 17:20-23. This is Jesus's high priestly prayer. The prayer he prays to the Father the night before he dies. And in it he talks about how he loves us as much as the Father has loved him. In the gospel we have been brought into the love between God the Father and God the Son. Here Jesus prays for you and me specifically. **Read 20-23**

If you're in Christ, the Father loves you as much as he loves the Son. That is amazing.

There are times when I'm hugging my wife or kissing her and my little ones see us and they don't know how to process it. So they come over and tackle us and try to get in the middle and they don't even know what to do. Its a good thing, and they want to be in the middle of it.

That's what we have in Christ. We're caught up in the midst of eternal, divine, Trinitarian love that is beyond imagination. And yet has been poured out on us in Christ. For his glory.

God is love.

Pray