

The Attributes of God
“X_n_p_h_l_c”??

Last Sunday night at our community group we played the Attribute of God Alphabet Game-Remember...

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Try to give an attribute / description of God using the letters of the alphabet. It was a bit tricky at times. The letter X was particularly difficult. It seems that most of the “X” words are related to the medical or science field.

Before I give you the Word we came up with we need to understand that it is difficult to focus on one attribute without bringing others into the conversation.

I also want to remind us of the principle from last week – The Bible must be our guide as we consider the Person, Nature, and Character of God.

Eugene Peterson...If we want to understand God, we must do it on his terms. If we want to see God the way he really is, we must look to the place of authority—to Scripture and to Jesus Christ. And do we really want it any other way? I don't think so. We would very soon become contemptuous of a god whom we could figure out like a puzzle or learn to use like a tool. No, if God is worth our attention at all, he must be a God we can look up to—a God we must look up to: “I look to you, who art enthroned in the heavens.” (Psalm 123).

Now the rest of the story...

There aren't may “X” words that we use in general conversation except Xylophone or Xenophobe (fear of strangers- a term thrown around a lot in the media these days).

Those two words were mentioned and then our own Libby Fenn came up with **xenophile** –

A person attracted to that which is foreign, especially to foreign peoples, manners, or cultures.

The adjectival form would be **XENOPHILIC**. And Eureka, we had our “X” attribute of God.

Just think about it, **God loves us and we are truly foreign to him in our manners and culture. He loves strangers from every nation, tongue and tribe.** Though we are created “in His image” there is an enormous gap between us, the creatures, and God the Creator. Yet He still loves us.

God's love for the stranger is seen all through scripture. God Himself calls Abraham from a pagan background in a pagan land and promises to make him the father of a great nation. Throughout the history of that nation, Israel, God is reaching out and bringing in those from other nations. God gives Israel the mission of being a “light to the nations.” Prophets speak of Egypt and Syria joining with Israel in the worship of God. After the Ascension and Pentecost, God's people are sent out to make disciples of all nations. The final book, Revelation shows the Marriage Supper of the Lamb with his bride from every nation, tongue and tribe.

Our God is a Xenophilic God. If it were easy to say and rhyme with, it would be used in songs, but alas...

The way this attribute is commonly expressed is by saying, “God IS LOVE”.

This is not saying God =Love or that Love = God, for that would lead to a worship of “love”.

SPROUL...John obviously had something important in mind when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he penned the words “God is love.” At the very least, we conclude that what is being communicated here is that God, in His divine being and character, is so loving that we can say He is love. This would merely indicate

emphasis, not necessarily identity. We also could conclude that John was saying God is the fountain or source of all true love.

1 John 4:7-8; ROMANS 5:1-5

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Love is A Most Familiar Concept

What is the most commonly cited attribute of God? "Love"

Bumper stickers, - you don't see sticker saying "Smile, God is holy, just, righteous, etc"
most familiar verse Jn 3:16

What is the relational thing we all know we need? "Love"

What are most popular songs dealing with? "Love"

Love is A Most Misunderstood Concept

While the love of God may be the most well know thing about God I'd say it most likely the least understood, believed and practiced thing about God.

THE LOVE OF GOD IS THE FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

IT'S WHAT WE TEND TO DOUBT THE MOST EX: Living in Grace participants

What is the Love of God? (from J.I. Packer, "Knowing God")

"God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, He has given his Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation."

The Christian life is built on the foundation of God's love for us. We are saved because God is a Xenophilic God. - Eph 3:16-19, ROMANS 5:1-5

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Love is "shed abroad" - "to pour out, gush out"

Just think of the pictures of towns flooded during the recent Hurricane Florence- that is what God has done for us in Christ as a completed action.

VoV PRAYER OF LOVE

Grace cataracts from heaven and flows forever, and love never wearies in bestowing benefits

Eph 2:7 - for eternity He will show us the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. The idea for Paul is that he and his readers would live with this ongoing sense of God's love for us.

Paul shows that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ to us; it is to seal our hearts in the love of God for us in Christ.

We get sidetracked when we get pre-occupied with the "manifestations of the Spirit" that some may experience but are not given to all. The ordinary general work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers is to show us Jesus. Rom 8:16

“Well, preacher, why am I not tapped into that?”

Let me ask, “Do you keep yourself in the channel of where that river flows?”

We have to keep our hearts in the flow of the Holy Spirit. – Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

One of the things Paul desires and prays for the Ephesian Christians is that they would know the love of Christ. Eph 3: 19ff

The foundation is the most important part of a structure; you can only build as high as the foundation will support. Paul prays that we will know the depth, length, height, width of the love of God.

It is one thing to know it theologically, “yes God loves me”, but it is another thing to KNOW IT deep in the heart, to have it impact our lives, for it to orient our lives.

As we think about the attributes of God, we must not think that they somehow cancel each other out.

Love vs Justice

Mercy vs Wrath

Etc.

Tozer...

All of God's attributes are true of Him. He is a unity and He does not suspend one attribute to exercise another.

God is not like a buffet line where you can go and pick the stuff you like and pass by the attributes that you find distasteful. To do so is to practice idolatry - making God in our image of what we want Him to be. An idol is a false view of God that is our stand in for the true God who is revealed in scripture.

We know that we are tottering on the edge of idolatry when we hear the phrase, “I like to think of God as...” That statement should trigger an idolatry alert, i.e. like the Amber alert or severe weather alerts that comes to our phones. “Every time someone says, ‘I like to think of God as’, and angel loses his wings”

We learn about the attributes as we see them all together.

We can know, for instance, that because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity; because He is immense, His love is an incomprehensibly vast, bottomless, shoreless sea...

Tozer – Knowledge of the Holy -69-

When Paul talks about the love of God, and when John says, “God is Love” they are not pitting that attribute against any other.

The God who “is love” is the God of creation, the God of the flood in the days of Noah, the God who called Abraham from pagan worship to form a new people (XENOPHILIC), the God who blessed and chastised Israel, the God who sent his son as a baby, the God who predetermined the death of Christ and the God who raised Him from the dead.

PACKER – God is love is not all that scripture says about God, but for the believer, it is the main thing.

The assurance of his love is located and centered in the cross which is the basis for the promise of Rom 8:28 – whatever happens to us passes through the nail scarred hands of Jesus and God works in and through to further His purpose in and for us.

Sproul – Theologians speak of 3 aspects of God's love

THE LOVE OF BENEVOLENCE; BENEFICENCE AND COMPLACENCY

The primary difference between benevolence (goodwill) and beneficence (good doing) is the difference between willing and doing. Just as God's love includes His goodwill, it also includes His good actions in behalf of the creature. Out of His goodwill flow good deeds.

The third type of the love of God is His love of complacency. This type of love is a bit more difficult to define than His love of benevolence or beneficence. The chief reason is because of the common meaning of the word complacency. We tend to think of complacency as a lack of concern about things. ...This notion of complacency has little to do with the theological concept of God's love of complacency. ...The Latin root originally meant "to please greatly." In this sense, **God's love of complacency means that He is greatly pleased with His children.**

Ex: Jesus at his baptism... "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."
Classical theologians saw this love of complacency as the delight God has for His creatures who manifest His image. Jesus is the focal point of the image of God – Heb 1:1-3

The three types of divine love may also be understood in terms of the timing of God's love. The love of benevolence refers to His goodwill toward the creature from eternity past. His love of beneficence is expressed in time and space, and His love of complacency reflects His love in the creature's redeemed state. (Sproul)

Another way of saying this is that, By God's goodwill, we are elected. By His beneficence, we are redeemed. By His complacency, we are rewarded in heaven. It is by His love of complacency that He will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

What is the Love of God? (from J.I. Packer, "Knowing God")

"God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, He has given his Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation."

1. God's love is an uncaused and undeserved exercise of his goodness

God loved us and chose us to adoption as sons according to the KIND INTENTION OF HIS WILL –(Benevolence) Eph 1. This is cosmic generosity. There was nothing in us that caused or deserved God's Love. He loves us because He is Love; it is an attribute of His nature.

Our tendency is to think, "What's there NOT to love?"

2. God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward sinners

Rom 5:6-8 God's love is seen in that while we were helpless ungodly sinners Christ died for us. God gives His son to die for his enemies

We deserve to be hated by God, yet He loves us.

It is common to speak of "God's unconditional love", but in a sense that is not correct. God's love for us is conditioned upon and connected to the perfect obedience of Christ in our place. In addition, it's not simple a neutral love based on our neutral condition.. **His proactive love for us goes against all of our conditions – IT IS CONTRA-CONDITIONAL** we deserved death and the wrath and curse of God.

God does not accept me just as I am; He loves me despite how I am; ... He loves me enough to devote my life to renewing me in the image of Jesus. This love is much, much, much better than unconditional! Perhaps we could call it "contraconditional" love. Contrary to the conditions for knowing God's blessing, He has blessed me because His Son fulfilled the conditions. Contrary to my due, He loves me. And now I can begin to change, not to earn love but because of love. – David Powlison

3. God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners. (Beneficence)

His love is not some vague general force, but it is particularized by effectually calling His elect to salvation in Christ. The Bride of Christ, the Church is made up of individuals who are loved and transformed by Christ.

4. God's love to sinner involves his identifying himself with their welfare.

"Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel".

He became sin who knew no sin 2 Cor 5; a man of sorrows acquainted with grief

God did not remain aloof, but he came down to be united to His people.

"He has in effect resolved that henceforth for all eternity his happiness shall be conditional upon ours." – Packer..."such is the love of God"

5. God's love toward sinners was expressed by the gift of his Son to be their Savior.

(Beneficence)

The measure of love is seen in how much it gives and God gave his ONLY SON. This is a love that surpasses comprehension- Eph 3 19 it is love of such a quality that Paul prays that we'll be enabled to know it and grasp it.

6. God's love to sinners reaches its objective as it brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation. (Complacency a relationship of delight).

God is not in a casual or dating relationship with his people, but a Covenant Relationship in which God has pledged to do the best He can for us, AND HE HAS – ROMANS 8:28; 31-32

Christ in His atonement has removed the barrier to the divine fellowship. Now in Christ all believing souls are objects of God's delight. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

God's love is such that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make him love you less.

Or put it this way, God doesn't love you more now than he did when you first came to faith in Christ. Or we can even say that 10,000 years from now when you are perfectly glorified God won't love you any more than he loves you today, if you are his child in Christ.

THE FRUIT OF HIS LOVE...

Keep our hearts in the love of God

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life- Jude 20-21

Walk in love just as God has loved us.

Eph 5:2

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Col 3:14

14 Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

John 13:35

35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

What would it look like to be a community of faith grounded in God's love for us?

We would walk in love with one another. KEEP YOUR HEARTS IN THE XENOPHILIC LOVE OF God.

