

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

C. COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

This term refers to attributes that are true of God, but are also true in some respect or in some finite measure of at least a portion of his creation. That could include angels. For example, holy, for the most part, refers to human beings, created in the image of God, and they possess these attributes in some measure, but God possesses them infinitely.

We are going to divide this discussion into three broad areas of communicable attributes. They are not meant to be air-tight categories. In fact, they bleed all over each other. It is like a screen that separates them, not a brick wall. In other words, these are the prevailing emphasis for these attributes. Many of the attributes could be placed in any of the three categories, though they seem to be predominately in one or the other. The three that we will look at are: Intellectual Attributes, Moral Attributes and Attributes of God's Rulership. Understand that these are categories helpful in discussing them, but realize that many of these attributes really fit in more than one category.

1. INTELLECTUAL ATTRIBUTES

These ones have to do fundamentally with God's mind, his knowledge, and his grasp and use of that knowledge. There are three to look at.

A. OMNISCIENCE

A very simple definition that can be given for omniscience is that God knows all that is knowable, or God knows all that can be known. What can be known? Theologians through history have argued that what can be known is everything possible and actual. God knows not only everything about the actual world that exists like how many people are meeting here for a class this day. He also knows the possible world, in which 3 of you are here or 200 or something like that. He knows all logical possibilities, and he knows all actualities. Theologians have wanted to say that what is knowable is everything past, present and future. God, in fact, knows everything of what has happened in the past from the perspective of any particular point in time; for anything that precedes that point in time God knows everything. He knows everything about the present at any point in time that you give, that present moment and he knows everything future, including the future from this moment and all that will occur in the future. God knows everything actual and possible, everything past, present, and future.

Actual and possible, God knows the hairs of our head (Matt 10:30). Jesus gives this as an example of how detailed God's knowledge is. How many of you know how many hairs are on your head? No one knows that, but God knows that; isn't that an astonishing thing, that even before and after your shower he knows it both ways. Before and after 40 years old, he knows it both ways.

His knowledge is meticulous. Psalm 139 gives us some amazing statements of God's knowledge of what is actual. The Psalm begins extolling the presence of God and his knowledge of all.

Ps 139:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
 Ps 139:2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you understand my thought from afar. Ps
 139:3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

This is an illustration; he is not giving a general theoretical principle that God knows everything actual, but he is

applying it to a very concrete situation, namely his life. Each one of our lives is known intimately by God. He knows every detail of it.

Ps 139:4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it all.

This really gets into knowledge of the future as well. He knows words you are going to speak as well as the ones you have spoken. He knows everything you have done, everything about your life, and everything that is coming as well.

He knows everything possible. There are some passages of Scripture that indicate what some theologians have referred to a "middle knowledge." It clearly indicates what possibly could have been that didn't in fact happen. For example, this happens in Matthew 11, where Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for rejecting him.

Matt 11:21 Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Matt 11:22 Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. Matt 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

God knows what would have been the case that is not the case. He knows what is possible that is different from what is actual. This verse illustrates not only God's knowledge of something possible, but it indicates knowledge of what would have been. Jesus says if this would have been the case, Sodom would be here today; Tyre and Sidon would have repented if it weren't for that.

Another example of this middle knowledge, this kind of possible knowledge is in 1 Corinthians 2:7,8.

1 Cor 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 1 Cor 2:8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

Here you have again the knowledge of what would have been the case. In this case, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory had they known this.

We have these instances of God's knowledge of what would have been. This is called by several theologians "Middle Knowledge". It was developed by a Jesuit theologian by the name of Luis de Molina in the Reformation period. Molina found this to a very promising category of knowledge. It is Middle knowledge. What is it middle between? *It is middle between God's knowledge before he creates the world of all possibilities and all logically necessary truths.* God has this knowledge of every possible world. A possible world is a set of logically consistent states of affairs that would be put together that may be very different from this world. There is a possible world in which unicorns roam freely through the earth. There is a possible world in which whales have feet and they walk upon the shore. There are all kinds of possible, so God knows all these possibilities. He knows the necessary state of affairs; This is God's necessary knowledge. When God chooses to create the world, when he says this is the world that is going to be, then this is God's knowledge of the actual world. It is actual knowledge, *natural knowledge*, knowledge of the actual world. What is in the middle? This middle knowledge is knowledge of what

the world would be if circumstances were different. It is not just bare possibilities, for example Sodom continuing forever. That is a possibility, but God knows had this revelation been given to Sodom it would stand until today. God knows that had this revelation been given to the rulers in Israel, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. It is not just a bare possibility; it is a possibility that would have become actualized if these circumstances were different. God has both the knowledge of necessary truths of all possibilities; he has knowledge of the actual world, and he has middle knowledge in that sense.

The Open Theists proposal, which has been around now for 20 or so years, hinges on its commitment to the idea that God must not have exhaustive knowledge of the future. That is, he must not have knowledge of everything that free creatures will choose and do in the future. Why? Because if he knew it, they couldn't be free. If God knows that tonight you are going to choose pizza for dinner, and God has known that from eternity, are you free to have a hamburger? Open Theists would say no, because God's knowledge is infallible; it can't be wrong. You can go through any mental gymnastics you want to, but you are going to choose pizza. They argue that there isn't freedom. I don't think they are right about that. The reason I do so is because knowledge of something doesn't cause it to be. God can know what you will do; he doesn't cause you to do that, because God's knowledge is not causative in the Arminian understanding of it, then it doesn't determine it. He just knows it in advance in the way that we know things in the past. We know with fixed certainty things that we have chosen and done in the past. God's knowledge of the future renders that knowledge certain, but it doesn't render it determined.

Open Theists disagree with Arminianism that God can know the future and yet people be free; they disagree with that. They argue that if God knows it then it can't be free. They also try to give biblical support for their view. For example, in Genesis 22, this is one of their favorite texts when Abraham takes his son Isaac to the Mountain (Mount Moriah, as we know Jerusalem it became) and was told to sacrifice his son. He was going to follow God's instructions to do so; he had every intention to do it.

Gen 22:10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Gen 22:11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Gen 22:12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

"For now I know" they make the point, doesn't this indicate that God learned something before. He didn't know whether Abraham would do this or not. Hence the statement, "now I know" implicitly what I didn't know. If you look at Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 it is very clear that God knows. Notice what the statement is in Genesis 22:12b. *For now I know that you fear God.* Did God not know previously that Abraham feared God? Notice that it doesn't say, *for now I know that you would destroy your son.* It says, "For now I know that you fear God." Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 both extol the faith of Abraham.

Rom 4:19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; Rom 4:20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, Rom 4:21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, he was able also to perform.

Is that fear of God? Did God know that about Abraham. In Hebrews 11 it talks about Genesis 22.

Heb 11:19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Gen 22:5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

To say God doesn't know until that moment that Abraham believed God doesn't work.

Another interesting point on this is in a few chapters earlier; look back to Genesis 18. God visited Abraham in three people. One of them must have been a theophany who likely left, and then the other two angels went to Sodom and warned Lot to leave. Then the destruction came upon Sodom. The three are there and the Lord speaks.

Gen 18:17 The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

God decides that he is not going to hide it from him but he going to tell him what he is about to do.

Gen 18:20 And the Lord said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. Gen 18:21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

If you applied the same openist hermeneutic here as is done in Genesis 22, what do you have to conclude about God? What doesn't God know in Genesis 18? What you have to deny of God is omnipresence; he has to go there to find out knowledge of the present and knowledge of the future. The question would be, have we got the right hermeneutic here in interpreting this?

The most forceful evidence for God's comprehensive knowledge of the future comes from Isaiah. Repeatedly, in about 8 places in Isaiah from 40-48, the statement is made that God is God because he declares the future. We can know that he is God because he declares the future. For example, in Isaiah 41:21-23.

Is 41:21 "Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," The King of Jacob says. Is 41:22 Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming; Is 41:23 Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods; indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.

Here is the test of deity. Declare the future; tell us what is going to happen.

Is 46:8 "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Is 46:9 "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, Is 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure'; Is 46:11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.

One more example that Open Theism cannot address. Daniel 11. The book of Daniel as a whole is remarkable, but just to get a feel for what God knows of the future look at what is stated here.

Dan 11:1 In the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him. Dan 11:2a And now I will tell you the truth.

Notice the specifics. This is exactly why liberals date the book of Daniel late. How could anyone know this, they say. God can.

Dan 11:2 And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece.

In Daniel 11:2 marvel at how much God claims to know about a future that hasn't happened yet, a future that involved free agents. Three kings, not two, not eight, not one, not seventeen, but three. Then there will be a fourth who will have more riches. How did he know that? Imagine what God must know of the future to know all of those things that will be true. What affects a person's riches? These things are all tied together. What affects if a king is there to reign or not?

Dan 11:3 And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority and do as he pleases. Dan 11:4a But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass,

Here is this other king, and he will have this great kingdom, and then we are going to have it divided into north, south, east and west.

Dan 11:4b though not to his own descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded, for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them.

As we figure it out, we know that these were four generals that took it over; that is what happened historically; they weren't his own children. It is supposed to be children that become heirs of the throne, but it wasn't in this case. So God knows that.

Dan 11:4c nor according to his authority which he wielded, for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them.

And keep reading; it is just incredible. This one chapter alone outlines hundreds of years of future history and what will take place. Then ask, "Does God know the future?" He certainly does in great specificity, and he knows of the future actions and choices of human beings.

B. OMNISAPIENCE

Omnisapience is a term that you don't hear very often in normal Christian parlance; even theological language doesn't invoke it very often. It is another omni attribute of God, in this case all **wise**. God is omnisapient; he is all wise. I think that you would agree with me that there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Someone can be incredibly knowledgeable but not very wise. It is hard to reverse that. It is hard to conceive of someone who is very wise but knows very little. In fact, wisdom relies upon knowledge. If you know very little, it is hard to be wise about what to do with your money in the stock market. But knowing a lot doesn't necessarily mean that you are wise. You might think of wisdom as a certain use of knowledge. It depends upon knowledge; it relies upon knowledge. It makes use of knowledge. Some people in defining wisdom have just stopped there; wisdom is the use of knowledge to accomplish particular ends. But that is not quite good enough.

Wisdom has to be more than just the use of knowledge. It has to be a certain kind of use. It has to be the use of knowledge for particular kinds of ends: good ends. Biblically speaking, wisdom is actually a moral attribute as well because wisdom makes use of knowledge for good ends, for morally good ends. Think biblically. Is there any sense when talking about wisdom, biblically, that doesn't advance the good? No. In the Bible wisdom is using knowledge for the advancement of good ends.

God's wisdom is defined as the application of God's *infinite knowledge* in a manner that accomplishes his *morally perfect ends by the best means possible*. The words "the application of God's infinite knowledge" is an important concept in this whole discussion. Sometimes our plans falter; they prove not to be wise because we lacked relevant information which, had we known, we would have decided differently. Just think of driving, of going from point A to point B. Had I known that there was an accident on the freeway I wouldn't have gone this way. If you never lack relevant information imagine the usefulness of your knowledge in using it to devise wise strategies. God's wisdom is the application of his infinite knowledge in a manner that accomplishes his morally perfect ends by the best means possible.

In Scripture, there are clearly a couple of actions of God that are spoken of more commonly as wise or as displaying God's wisdom. They are creation and redemption. For example, in Psalm 104:24 God made all his creation in wisdom. Proverbs 3:19 is similar. In relation to redemption, the strongest passage is 1 Corinthians 1 where Paul contrasts the work of God in the cross of Christ with what men think about it.

1 Cor 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Cor 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world, through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 1 Cor 1:22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 1 Cor 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 1 Cor 1:24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

As you think about it, both actions, creation and redemption, are huge manifestations of wisdom and power simultaneously present and realized. When you think about wisdom and power being there for creation and being there for redemption you realize how important it is that while God is all wise, without power there is no point. God ends up being a rather pathetic brilliant sage. Wisdom without power is pathetic. Power, unleashed, irresistible, unthwartable power lacking wisdom is fearful. It is absolutely frightening, sort of like an omnipotent

Satan. We probably wouldn't live, but if we did we would live in never ending fear of what could happen, of what he might do, of what horrible thing he is devising. The beauty is that creation and redemption show these in such clear manifest ways. We have a God who is infinitely wise. It is a moral quality. His morally good or perfect ends are accomplished by the best means to do them, and he has all of the power to do them, so he is never thwarted in his purposes to accomplish what he chooses to do.

C. TRUTH

God is truth. A definition involves two aspects as you think of God as truth. One is that God knows all things as they are. In other words, he knows the truth about everything. He knows the truth about you and about me. He is never deceived; he is never fooled by appearances. God knows the truth as it is. The second aspect is his Word in revelation is utterly reliable. God knows the truth as it is; he knows all things as they are; and his word in revelation is utterly reliable. A simple way to put this is God is the truth, and he speaks the truth. God is the truth; God is truth(1 Jn 5:20). He speaks the truth; thy word is truth (Jn 17:17).

One aspect of this is the basis of our confidence that God is faithful. Think how important the faithfulness of God is; think of his covenant keeping quality that Scripture extols. His faithfulness is founded upon the fact that he is, in himself, truth, and he speaks what is true. In fact, he cannot lie. Scripture says in two places (Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18) God cannot lie. Another way to put that is God is so perfectly truth bearing, the embodiment of truth, that he expresses his own nature. His own nature is one of truth, so he speaks from his nature. What will he speak? He will speak the truth. We never have to worry about God lying. He will always speak what is correct. God, in his grace and mercy, is working in our lives.

This then is a communicable attribute; *we are to be people who are truth bearers*. We contain within ourselves increasing truth. "You shall know the truth"(Jn 8:32). We should live out the expression of what that means. "And the truth shall set you free," Jesus says. Being like God is to be the freest, free from lying, free from deception, free from perversion, free from the kind of tricks and smoke and mirror images that sin gives to us to distort the truth. To know the truth is to be free. Sometimes I think that we Christian people just need to take God at his word that God's perspective on things is right even when we don't think so or feel like it is. We live in a culture where feelings are huge. We live in a culture that elevates feelings about things. The problem with this is that our feelings, as well as our thoughts, are deeply affected by sin, and they are not a good guide. They are not a true guide to how you ought to live your life or decisions you ought to make. Sometimes we just have to go with what God says. Sin can even twist and distort our ways of thinking so that we can start thinking that what God says is wrong and what we think is right. One of the most sobering things in the book of Judges is the statement, "*people did what was right in their own eyes*." That is much more fearful than people doing deliberately, intentionally what is wrong in their own eyes, but they do it anyway. At least then they know it is wrong. We can get trapped into thinking what is in fact is wrong is right and we don't even know it. How do we guard against this? You can't trust your feelings; you have got to go with God's word. Be people of the Book. Be people who meditate and who read. Before God, acknowledge your own propensity to read right and wrong from our experiences and our feelings and say, "God deliver me, God help me to see the truth as it is, help me to see it and obey it." In knowing the truth that is where freedom is.

2. MORAL ATTRIBUTES

There are two broad categories in the moral nature of God. We'll call the first category "goodness." The other one is "holiness." These are not conflicting categories. This is not Ying and Yang or black and white. These are categories that are mutually reinforcing. The easiest way to see that, for example, is that to live holy is to experience the good. Or to put it differently, true goodness is found in the living out of holiness. These are not contradictory categories by any means, but they do have different emphases and within them certain attributes that attach in each of these.

A. GOODNESS

Goodness can be understood as the intrinsic disposition of God by which he seeks to show kindness and want the well-being of others. It is an intrinsic disposition. Nobody has to stand there over God and say, "Now, you be good." We have to do that with one another; parents with kids certainly have to do that in a variety of different ways because of our sinful natures. Nobody has to make God be good. He is intrinsically good. Another way to think of it is there is no goodness other than God's. Whatever else is good in this world is good by virtue of its derivation of God's goodness. We have derivative goodness; God has intrinsic goodness. There is a huge difference. The only goodness there is, is God's goodness. If we share in it, it is because God has shared it with us. We have derivative goodness and he has intrinsic goodness. This intrinsic goodness is a goodness that seeks the well-being of others. It is intrinsically inclined toward their welfare. God is good. (All the time)

Now think of God prior to creation, can you still speak of God as a good being, a solitary monotheistic being? There is no world there. Within the trinity there is goodness expressed. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in this social relationship in which goodness is expressed. There is an intrinsic disposition to show kindness to another, Father to Son to Holy Spirit in this joyous Trinitarian social relationship. But when God creates, he creates a world and his own nature is one that inclines him toward goodness.

Ps 119:68 You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

God is good and he gives good to others. In the context of Psalm 119 you can guess what the good gift is that he gives to others. Psalm 119 is about God's word that he gives as an expression of his goodness to others. His Law, the Law of the LORD is good.

A parallel text is when Moses summarizes the moral commandments to the people of Israel before they enter the promised land and he comes to his summation in Deuteronomy 10

Deut 10:12 Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, Deut 10:13 and to keep the Lord's commandments and his statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

If we could help our children grow up with constant reminders that the ways of the Lord are for their good it would help battle what the world is constantly telling them, that ungodly sinful behavior is good for them. Temptation works precisely because the woman looked at the tree and it was good for food, it was a delight to the eyes and it would make one wise. This is how temptation works. It presents a false claim with glitter and balloons and banners and tinsel and candy coating. It says, "Here is good." But it will kill you. God presents good, and it is the real thing. It is the genuine article.

Ps 16:11 You will make known to me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand there are pleasures forever.

God is not bashful about making it clear. You come to me and you get good; you go anywhere else and you make your broken cisterns. (Jeremiah 2)

Jer 2:13 For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What is the key to understanding the anthropology, the psychology of why people would leave a fountain of living water for dry broken cisterns? (Remember, this is Israel; it is dry, barren, not much water, it's hard to come by, a rare commodity; water is precious stuff.) The key to that passage that explains this behavior, that explains your behavior and mine every time we succumb to temptation is in the words, "To hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." I did it my way. It is the epitome of sin. God wants us to know that good is found in him. If we could learn that, how we would resist temptation.

Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish minister, preached in the 17th and 18th centuries. He preached hundreds of sermons. He was a politician turned preacher, turned pastor. The one sermon he most known for is a sermon entitled "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." The point of the sermon is very simple; if you want to remove worldliness, remove sinfulness from a person, it won't do to simply try to push it out. He says this is what we do most often by telling ourselves how bad this is. Committing adultery would be a horrible thing this to my marriage, my family, my ministry; it would just ruin me. It is not wrong to think those things; it helps, but it won't do it. If you have eyes for a woman who is not your wife, those things you will begin to rationalize very quickly. You will figure there are ways to get away with this without incurring the consequences. You will talk yourself into doing it anyway. Trying to remove this temptation by focusing on the negative things won't work. He suggests the expulsive power, what pushes this out, is a new affection which is greater, more potent, and weightier, so it drives out the old affection because of the greater value that now you attach to the new affection.

Goodness is a quality found in God Himself. 1 Peter 2:3 speaks of the kindness of the Lord that makes us eager to want more of him.

1 Pet 2:3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Romans 2:4 is an important verse because it speaks of the kindness and the severity of God. We dare not think that goodness stands on its own apart from holiness and the attributes that are attached to it.

Rom 2:4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Rom 11:22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

There are three different biblical terms, biblical attributes of God which are expressions of his goodness. They are not identical. The three are love, grace and mercy. These are very prominent conceptions that have to do with the expression of God's intrinsic disposition to show kindness, favor, and well-being to others.

1. LOVE

We talked about this briefly when we talked about the self sufficiency and the love of God. There are two main terms for the love of God in Scripture. In the Old Testament, the term is "hesed." The term "hesed" contains two concepts together. One is loyalty, covenant faithfulness, and promise keeping. The love of God most vibrantly, lavishly manifested is a love which is loyal, faithful, and true. The other element is kindness, well-being, and enhancing one's good. Putting the two together "hesed" communicates God's commitment to bring good to others. It is his commitment, his loyalty in bestowing favor, kindness, well being. "Hesed" is translated in the NASB as loving kindness. A better translation is in the ESV. It says steadfast love. Loyal love would also be a good translation. Loyal love, covenant keeping love, steadfast love is the "hesed" of God. To see how your translation translates it, look at Psalm 106 in verse one.

Ps 106:1 Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his lovingkindness is everlasting.

In Psalm 136 you see it used in the refrain all the way through the Psalm.

Ps 136:1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his lovingkindness is everlasting. Ps 136:2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his lovingkindness is everlasting.

The New Testament word for God's love is "agape". It refers to an unconditional nature of God's love, not a because of love; because you are smart, because you are handsome, because you are gifted, because you are rich, because of anything. It is rather an in spite of love. While we were enemies God loved us and gave his Son to die for us.

1 Jn 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The love of God in this broad sense is his unconditional loyal commitment to bring about good to others.

Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

God so loved the world, I don't think that can be limited or restricted to a portion of humanity. I think that ought to be understood as the whole, entire human race; everyone who has lived or ever will live. God loved the world. Here is the universal love of God for all people.

Many Christian people make the mistake of thinking that this is the love of God period. This is all there is in the Bible teaching about God's love; it universal and impartial; it is freely bestowed on all people equally. If you want to be true to Scripture you can't hold to that view. Let me give you some examples of the love of God that is particular, not universal. It is a love whose particularity is up to God. We cannot say that, "He can't love them because they refused it; they rejected it. He is trying; he wants to love them; he is out there seeking to love them." It won't work in these passages. They speak of a love of God that is particular, and the particularity is owing to God's decision. One clear example of this is Romans 9:13.

Rom 9:10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; Rom 9:11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls, Rom 9:12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Rom 9:13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Romans 9:13 is quote from Malachi 1:3. Even if you take this passage in the most kindness, gentleness way possible you have to conclude there is a discrimination. Even if you translated it, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have loved less," (which is a far cry from hated, but is a good translation because it aptly reflects what God said to Esau in Malachi 1:3), you must see that there is a discrimination. It is sort of like I say to my daughter, "Aliyah I love you and to the neighbor kids down the street I love them, too." I do, but don't. I love Aliyah my daughter differently than I do the neighbor kids down the street? You bet I do. To make it more vivid, I say to my wife, "Kerry, I love you." Are we not called to love everyone? What If I said to Kerry, "I love you just the same way I love all women." How do you think this is going to go over with my wife? We do discriminate in love. Here this is discrimination. However, the contrast is not love and love less; it is love and hate. Look in Romans 9:11 so that you can see the particularity of the love owing to what God decides.

Rom 9:11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls,

Isn't he laboring the point that this is not because Jacob was such a great guy and Esau was a jerk? No, it will not work, for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, it was God's choice. So that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." God chooses to violate the law of prima genitor, the favoritism shown to the eldest born. He can because he is God. He wants to choose the younger; he will choose the younger.

I really think that one of the most important steps Christian people have to come to in their pilgrimage, in their growth in life is realizing that part of what God uses to define himself as God is, I decide not you. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion; I will show mercy on whom I show mercy. Part of what constitutes the very deity of God is that he decides. Here is a vivid point. Before the two were born, before ether had done anything good or bad, God chooses. I decide, I say, Jacob, you are the younger, you are going to be treated as the older. Esau you are the older one, you are going to be treated as the younger. I am going to love Jacob and I am not going to love Esau.

Mal 1:1 The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. Mal 1:2a "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?"

This is how the book of Malachi is organized: It is organized with these challenges from the people that God answers. So here the first challenge is, you claim you loved us, how have you loved us?

Mal 1:2 "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob; Mal 1:3a but I have hated Esau,

This sense of the love of God is meaningless without the particularity. If you make the love of God equal to Jacob and Esau it doesn't just change the conception; it eliminates the conception of love in this text. God defines love in this passage not in terms of what he has done for him but what he has chosen not to do or chosen to do negatively toward his brother Esau. He has given Jacob a favored status against his brother Esau and in this is his love, in this the particularity.

Mal 1:2b "How have you loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob; Mal 1:3 but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

How much has God despised Esau? Enough so that his entire inheritance will not stand; it will be destroyed.

Mal 1:4 Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the Lord of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever."

They ask, "God how have you loved us?" And the reply is, "I have hated your brother. And in contrast look at you - favored, blessed, called, chosen."

The point of this is to say that the love of God, in some passages, is primarily with the love of God for his own, for his chosen; it is a love that is particular. It is a love that chooses to lavish upon them enormous blessing and chooses not to give that blessing to others, or worse chooses to bring them to destruction.

Isaiah 43 is a passage that is often read, but a portion of it is skipped over because it isn't pleasant. But the first part of it and other parts are wonderfully comforting.

Is 43:1 But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine! Is 43:2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. Is 43:3a "For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

This is normally where you quit reading or skip down to the next part. But look what comes next.

Is 43:3b "I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place Is 43:4 "Since you are precious in my sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.

He is saying, "When I saved you, I showed my love to you, what did I do to the Egyptians? I brought them to total ruin, didn't I? And in that did I not show you that you were precious in my sight, that I honored you, that I loved you and look what I did to the Egyptians. I opened the Red Sea for you to cross through on dry ground, and every one of you made it. You get to the other side, the Egyptian army is coming after you, and they will kill you if they get to you, so what do I do? I bring the waters back over them. I have given Egypt in your place Israel."