

## **What Is God Like?**

You've heard of Facebook, Twitter and SnapChat, but have you heard of PLURK, Badoo and RenRen? These are all social media sites, some of them exclusive to other countries. They're part of the online communication network that this year will be used by approximately 1.9 billion people worldwide. Why is social media so popular?

The Bible says that we are created beings, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). So, that would mean that the reason for the success of social media is the nature of God. We can't get enough of "social" media, because we are "social". We're social because God is social and we're created in His image. Do you see how useful Bible doctrine is? If you knew more doctrine, maybe you'd be the next person to create a billion-dollar website that meets the needs of our human nature?

Today we come to the center of theology. The word "theology" literally means "the study of God." Some people avoid theology because they think it's purely philosophical, unrelated to their daily problems, challenges and issues. But it's not! It's the study of a person, God! The God of the Bible, our God, who certainly is not disconnected from our daily problems, challenges or issues. Other religions worship a god like that, but not us. Our God is approachable, knowable and extremely practical. How do I know that? That's our topic for today. First we need to see...

### **I. The Ways We Are Like God.**

Last week we saw that the God of the Bible has revealed Himself to all humanity. He's done it through General Revelation (history and creation) and through Special Revelation (direct communication, the Bible and ultimately through His only Son, Jesus Christ). So, what has He revealed about Himself?

First, God has revealed that He is a person with characteristics like us. A healthy human being can think, can feel things emotionally and can communicate those thoughts and emotions. Why are we able to do that? We can do that because God can do that. When He created us He said:

**...Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. (Gen. 1:26)**

And then, immediately after God created the first man and woman, He communicated with them:

**God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen. 1:28)**

So, in verse 26 God thinks up a plan and in verse 27 He activates the plan and in verse 28 He communicates the plan verbally to the people He created. In the next chapter, chapter 2, man begins to carry out God's instructions, demonstrating that he can think and communicate just like God. And in verse 31 of Gen. 1, it says:

**God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.**

In other words, God had an emotional reaction to His own work, just as we do when we work hard on something and it all comes out just the way we planned. We look at it and say, "Nice! That worked well." Or if it doesn't come out the way we planned, we're disappointed or so mad we throw it across the room! Why are we able to have an emotional response? Because God has emotions and we're created in God's image.

But there's a second way we are like God. First, like God, we're a knowable person and secondly, like God, we are very sensitive to moral and ethical issues in this world. People all over this globe have a deep sense of what is right and what is wrong. Now, someone might say, "But wait a minute! Different cultures have different definitions of what is right and what is wrong. In my anthropology class in college I learned that all our morals are culturally determined. That's why different cultures don't share the same morals!"

Well, I'm sorry to tell you this, but your college professor was wrong. C. S. Lewis pointed out, that while there are differences in the moral practices of various cultures, the differences are not at the level of major ethical principles but at the minor level of how to fulfill those principles. He argues that, across all cultures, there is a universal agreement on the existence of a Moral Law. He writes:

If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other... Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of doublecrossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five. Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to... But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. <sup>i</sup>

Lewis's point is that all human beings have the ability within themselves of understanding what is right and wrong because they believe that a Moral Law exists. So, they would agree that murder is wrong. All cultures agree on this and have laws against it. "How then," you might ask, "could the guards in the Nazi death camps murder hundreds of Jews a day and then go home and play lovingly with their own children? Didn't they know murder was wrong?" No, they absolutely believed that murder was wrong but they re-defined the Jews as non-persons, so for them it wasn't murder, it was providing a needed "solution" for their society. This mind game, by the way, is exactly what physicians in abortion clinics do in this country. They say, "Those aren't infants, they're just 'fetal tissue,'" which enables them to do what they do at the clinic by day and go home and play lovingly with their children at night.

Which brings us to another trait that we share with God – free will. **God has free will and can think, choose and do whatever He desires.** God's free will is not only unlimited, it's unlimitable. Add to this the fact that God is holy and we can unequivocally state that God "...does what He wants and it's always good."

**Our God is in heaven;  
he does whatever pleases him. (Ps. 115:3)**

Now, since we are created in His image, we also have free will. However, since we do NOT share the character traits of moral perfection or holiness, our free will doesn't always serve us as well as it does for God. Our free will allows us to make some really bad decisions which bring really bad consequences, which we'll look at in more detail next week when we study "The Nature of Us." But let me address here briefly the issue of predestination, since it might seem like a contradiction to this character trait of free will.

First, let me point out that both predestination and our free will are taught in Scripture. Eph. 1 says:

**In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - (Eph. 1:4c, 5a)**

And at various times Jesus invited all the people listening to Him to exercise their "free will" and believe, as in He did in Matt. 11:

**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28)**

A question often asked about predestination is, "If God predestines some to go to heaven, then doesn't that mean by default that He predestines others to go to hell?" No. In II Peter 3:9 we learn that can't be true because it says:

**The Lord... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)**

So, it's not a question of which is biblical because both concepts are clearly taught in Scripture. Instead, the question is, how can they be harmonized?

Now, since theologians much more learned than I have been debating this for centuries, I could say, "It's a mystery of God. Ask Him when you see Him!" But I think Jesus expects a bit more from me than that, so let me share with you the teaching of my Systematic Theology professor from Bethel Seminary, Dr. Millard Erickson. He points out that if he is offered a choice between having liver or a steak for dinner, he will choose the steak every time. He writes:

I have no conscious control over my dislike of liver. That is a given that goes with my being the person I am. In that respect my freedom is limited. I do not know whether it is my genes or environmental conditioning which caused my dislike of liver, but it is apparent that I cannot by mere force of will alter this characteristic of mine.

There are, then, limitations upon who I am and what I desire and will... My freedom, therefore, is within these limitations. And here arises the question: Who set up these factors? The theistic answer is, "God did."

So now, with regard to the exercise of our free will in salvation, Dr. Erickson concludes:

...God works congruously with the will of the individual; that is, God works in such a suasive way with the will of the individual that he freely makes the choice that God intends.

[To those who hold that freedom must mean total spontaneity and random choice, Dr. Erickson responds...] ...when it comes to human decisions and actions, nothing is completely spontaneous or random. <sup>ii</sup>

So, how are we 'like' God? Dr. Erickson sums it up this way:

[We are] ...beings capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely. <sup>iii</sup>

Now, we also need to see...

## **II. The Ways God Is Different from Us.**

The list of God's characteristics that are different from ours is substantially longer than the list of characteristics we share. Scholarly theologians are kind of like accountants. They love the nano-details of theology and find great profit in describing them in lists that make the common person's head spin. But when it comes to the differences between us and God, these theologians are dead on! Their lists go off the table and out the door! Here's just a small sample:

He is infinite, we are limited

He is all-knowing, we are not

He is all-powerful, we are not

He is present everywhere, we are stuck... here.

He is not limited by time, He can move back and forth. We can't

He is always good, always fair, always merciful, always right; we can barely do one of those a day!

He is the Creator. We are the created.

He keeps all His promises. We don't.

He never sleeps. We do.

He is always safe. We aren't.

He never lies. We do.

He's full of mercy. We dream of revenge.

He's always. We're sometimes.

Through Isaiah, God says:

**"To whom will you compare me?**

**Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.**

**Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?**

**He who brings out the starry host one by one,  
and calls them each by name.**

**Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is  
missing. (Is. 40:25, 26)**

All of this can melt us into a puddle of insignificance, can't it? It can make you think, "Why bother trying to know God? What interest could He possibly have in me?" To which He says: (Is. 40:27-29)

**Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel,**

**"My way is hidden from the LORD;**

**my cause is disregarded by my God"?**

**Do you not know? Have you not heard?**

**The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.**

**He will not grow tired or weary,**

**and his understanding no one can fathom.**

**He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.**

Have you ever thought, "What will happen to those people living in a hidden tribe in Africa who have never, ever heard about God? What hope is there for them?"

Don Richardson, the father of Steve who spoke at our WOW Weekend last November, wrote a book entitled, *Eternity In Their Hearts*. It tells story after story of hidden tribes, like the Mbaka tribe in the Central African Republic. Several Baptist missionaries made their way to this tribe as their first Christian contacts in the early 1920's. They were warmly welcomed and so they immediately began to tell the people about the God of the Bible. But the people already seemed to know most of what they told them! The missionaries didn't know what to expect, but they didn't expect this! When they asked through translators how this could be, the tribal leaders said:

"Koro, the Creator, sent word to our forefathers long ages ago that He has already sent His Son into the world to accomplish something wonderful for all mankind. Later, however, our forefathers turned away from the truth about Koro's Son... Since the time of 'the forgetting,' successive generations of our people have longed to discover the truth about Koro's Son. But all we could learn was that messengers would eventually come to restore that forgotten knowledge to us. Somehow we knew also that the messengers would probably be white-skinned... In any case, we resolved that whenever Koro's messengers arrived we would all welcome them and believe their message!"

Thirty years later, 80% of all the pastors throughout that whole country were either from that first village or were trained by a pastor who came from that village.

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What's your life like right now? Are you walking with God or are you estranged? Did you once walk with Him but now you're living in the "time of forgetting"? How can you get reconnected with this amazing God? Isaiah points the way:

**Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint. (Is. 40:30)**

This incredible God has not given up on you and He has not lost track of you. If you will put your hope and trust in Him, He will renew your strength so you can walk and run and even soar. Why not do that right now?

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<sup>i</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), p. 19

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 357, 359

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. p. 513

<sup>iv</sup> Don Richardson, *Eternity In Their Hearts* (Ventura: Regal, 1984), p. 57, 58