

The Moral Attributes of God

His Goodness, Love, Justice, and Holy Wrath

A Teaching Lesson · Seminary-level content, high-school-level clarity

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Big Idea: The moral attributes describe God's character — what He is like in relation to right and wrong. They include His righteousness and justice; His goodness, love, grace, and mercy; His patience, kindness, and compassion; and His wrath, jealousy, and hatred of evil. These are not opposites at war; they are one perfect, holy character. God is good AND just, loving AND wrathful toward evil — and all of it is holy.

Memory Verse: *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... but who will by no means clear the guilty."* — Exodus 34:6–7 (ESV)

Contents

PART ONE

Teaching Outline (Leader Notes)

This lesson continues the communicable attributes — the perfections God shares, in a limited way, with us as His image-bearers. Where the last lesson looked at God’s “intellectual” attributes (knowledge, wisdom, truth, faithfulness), this one looks at His MORAL attributes: His character in relation to good and evil. Because there are many, we group them into four families and teach one clear pattern for all of them. Part One is your full teaching material; Part Two is a handout to copy for students.

Teacher’s note: This is a large lesson. If your time is short, you may teach it in two sessions — Sections I–V (God’s justice and His love) in one, and Sections VI–X (His patience and His holy wrath) in the next. The single most important point to land is Section II: these attributes are not in conflict; they are one holy character.

I. Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Explain what the moral attributes are and how they differ from the others.
2. Show why God’s love and His justice are not in conflict.
3. Define righteousness, justice, goodness, love, grace, mercy, patience, kindness, compassion, wrath, jealousy, and hatred of evil.
4. Explain why God’s wrath and jealousy are holy, not sinful.
5. Show how the cross displays every moral attribute at once.

II. The Key Idea: One Holy Character, Not Competing Traits

The greatest danger in studying the moral attributes is to imagine them fighting each other — as if God’s love pulls one way and His justice pulls the other, and He has to pick. That is not the Bible’s God. Because God is simple (not made of parts) and holy (perfectly pure), all His moral attributes are one unified character. He is never torn. Every act of God is fully loving AND fully just AND fully good at the same time.

The place we see this most clearly is the cross. There God’s justice against sin and His love for sinners meet perfectly: sin is fully punished (justice satisfied) and sinners are fully forgiven (love poured out). “Just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26). Teach students to test every moral attribute against the cross — it is where they all shine at once.

III. Made in His Image

As with all communicable attributes, we reflect God’s moral character because we are made in His image. We can be just, good, loving, kind, and patient — and we can rightly hate evil — because God is these things first and perfectly. Sin has twisted our moral sense, but in Christ we are “created after the

likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Keep the pattern from the last lesson: God HAS these perfectly; we RECEIVE them partially; in Christ we GROW.

IV. Family One — God's Righteousness and Justice

These two are closely joined: righteousness is God's own moral perfection; justice is that perfection at work toward His creatures.

Righteousness

God is the standard of right. He always does what is right because He IS the definition of right.

"Righteous are you, O LORD" (Psalm 119:137). There is no higher law above God that He must obey — His own perfect character is the law.

Justice

God gives to each exactly what is due. He rewards good and punishes evil rightly, never partial, never bribed. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Genesis 18:25). His justice is why sin must be dealt with — and why the cross was necessary.

V. Family Two — God's Goodness, Love, Grace, and Mercy

These four flow together, describing God's heart of kindness toward His creatures — love aimed in different directions.

Attribute	What it means in God	Key verse
Goodness	God is kind and generous; the source of every good thing.	James 1:17
Love	God gives Himself for the good of others; "God is love."	1 John 4:8
Grace	Love shown to those who deserve the opposite — unearned favor.	Ephesians 2:8
Mercy	Love shown to those in misery — withholding deserved judgment.	Titus 3:5

A helpful way to teach the difference: Grace looks at our GUILT and gives what we don't deserve (favor). Mercy looks at our MISERY and withholds what we do deserve (judgment). Both flow from God's goodness and love.

VI. Family Three — God’s Patience, Kindness, and Compassion

These describe how God’s love reaches us in our weakness and sin over time.

Attribute	What it means in God	Key verse
Patience	God is “slow to anger,” giving time to repent rather than judging at once.	2 Peter 3:9
Kindness	God treats us far better than we deserve; His kindness leads to repentance.	Romans 2:4
Compassion	God feels for us in our suffering, like a father for his children.	Psalms 103:13

Teach students that God’s patience is not weakness or approval of sin. It is love giving time — “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The delay of judgment is itself an act of mercy.

VII. Family Four — God’s Wrath, Jealousy, and Hatred of Evil

Here we come to the attributes people find hardest. But rightly understood, they are not flaws in God — they are the necessary shadow side of His goodness. A God who did not oppose evil would not be good.

Attribute	What it means in God	Key verse
Wrath	God’s settled, holy opposition to all sin — not a temper, but justice on fire.	Romans 1:18
Jealousy	God’s rightful zeal for the worship and love due to Him alone.	Exodus 34:14
Hatred of evil	God’s pure revulsion against everything that harms and defiles.	Proverbs 6:16

Key teaching point: These are HOLY versions of things that are sinful in us. Our anger is often selfish; God’s wrath is always just. Our jealousy is often petty; God’s jealousy is His right, because He alone deserves worship. Our hatred is often cruel; God’s hatred of evil is love protecting what is good. Wrath is not the opposite of love — it is love’s refusal to make peace with what destroys the beloved.

VIII. Where They All Meet: The Cross

This is the centerpiece of the lesson. At the cross, every moral attribute of God is displayed at once, in perfect harmony:

- **Justice** — sin is fully punished in Christ; God does not sweep it under the rug.
- **Wrath** — poured out on Jesus in the sinner's place, so it need not fall on us.
- **Love and grace** — God gives His own Son for people who deserved the opposite.
- **Mercy and compassion** — He rescues us from the misery our sin earned.
- **Righteousness** — He stays perfectly right while declaring guilty sinners righteous (Romans 3:26).

The one sentence to land: At the cross, God is shown to be perfectly just and perfectly loving at the very same moment — which proves His moral attributes never truly conflict.

IX. Common Confusions (and How to Answer Them)

“How can a loving God have wrath? Isn't that a contradiction?”

No — the opposite of love is not wrath but indifference. A father who felt NOTHING when his child was harmed would not be loving. God's wrath is His love in action against everything that destroys what He loves. A God with no wrath toward evil would be a God who does not truly care about good.

“Isn't jealousy always a sin?”

In us it usually is, because we crave things we have no right to. But God's jealousy is His rightful claim on the worship that belongs to Him alone. It would be wrong for God to be indifferent when His creatures give their hearts to idols. His jealousy is the zeal of a faithful husband, not the envy of a rival.

“If God is so patient, does that mean He's okay with my sin?”

No. God's patience is not approval — it is time. “Do you presume on the riches of his kindness... not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). His patience is an open door, not a locked one. It should draw us to turn to Him, not tempt us to keep sinning.

X. What the Church Has Taught

- **The confessions** describe God as “most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth... and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin” (Westminster and Second London Baptist Confessions, ch. 2). Notice — both sides in one sentence.
- **J. I. Packer** wrote that God's wrath is “righteous anger — the right reaction of moral perfection in the Creator toward moral evil in the creature.”
- **Thomas Aquinas and the Reformers** insisted on divine simplicity: God's love and justice are not separate pieces but the one God acting in perfect unity.

XI. The One-Sentence Guardrail

God's moral attributes — His justice and His love, His mercy and His wrath — are not competing forces but one perfect, holy character, displayed together and forever at the cross of Christ.

XII. Why This Matters for Us

- **It makes grace amazing.** Only when we feel God's justice and wrath against sin do we see how stunning His mercy really is.
- **It gives us a God we can trust.** A God who is loving but not just could be manipulated; a God who is just but not loving could not be approached. Our God is perfectly both.
- **It shapes our character.** We are called to be just AND merciful, kind AND intolerant of evil — reflecting the full moral character of our God.
- **It gives comfort and warning together.** For those in Christ, only love and mercy remain. For those who refuse Him, His justice still stands. The gospel is the door out of wrath into grace.

PART TWO

Student Handout

The Moral Attributes of God — His character in relation to good and evil. Fill in the blanks and follow along as we work through the lesson together.

The Big Idea

God's moral attributes are not enemies at war. His justice and His love, His mercy and His wrath, are one perfect, holy character — shown together at the cross. God is fully just AND fully loving at the very same time.

The Four Families

Righteousness & Justice	God is the standard of right, and He gives everyone exactly what is due.
Goodness, Love, Grace, Mercy	God's kind heart toward His creatures — love aimed in different directions.
Patience, Kindness, Compassion	God's love reaching us in our weakness, giving time and tenderness.
Wrath, Jealousy, Hatred of Evil	God's holy opposition to everything that harms and defiles — love's "no" to evil.

Grace vs. Mercy

- **Grace** — looks at our GUILT and gives what we don't deserve (favor).
- **Mercy** — looks at our MISERY and withholds what we do deserve (judgment).

Why Wrath Is Not the Opposite of Love

The opposite of love is not wrath — it is indifference. God's wrath is His love saying "no" to everything that destroys what He loves. A God with no wrath toward evil would not truly be good.

Key Verses

- **Exodus 34:6-7** — merciful and gracious... yet by no means clearing the guilty.
- **1 John 4:8** — "God is love."
- **Romans 3:26** — God is "just and the justifier." (the cross)
- **Romans 2:4** — God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

The Cross — Where They All Meet

Justice (sin punished) • Wrath (poured on Christ) • Love & Grace (Son given for enemies) • Mercy (misery relieved) • Righteousness (God stays right while forgiving). All at once.

Fill in the Blanks

1. God's moral attributes are not enemies at war; they are one _____ character.
2. _____ gives what we don't deserve; _____ withholds what we do deserve.
3. The opposite of love is not wrath but _____.
4. At the cross God is both _____ and the justifier. (Romans 3:26)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we need to understand God's justice before His mercy feels amazing?
2. Would a God with no wrath toward evil be more loving, or less? Why?
3. How is God's jealousy different from the sinful kind we feel?
4. Where do you need to reflect God's character this week — in mercy, or in standing against evil?

One Sentence to Remember

God is perfectly just and perfectly loving at the very same time — and the cross proves it.

This Week

Memorize Exodus 34:6–7 (or Romans 3:26). Read the account of the crucifixion in one Gospel and look for God's justice, wrath, love, and mercy all in the same event. Then ask God to make you a person who is both merciful to people and unwilling to make peace with evil — just like Him.

Sources & Further Study

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Key passages and classic sources referenced in this lesson:

- Scripture: Genesis 18:25; Exodus 34:6–7, 14; Psalm 103:13; Psalm 119:137; Proverbs 6:16; Romans 1:18; Romans 2:4; Romans 3:26; Ephesians 2:8; Ephesians 4:24; Titus 3:5; James 1:17; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 4:8.
- J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* — chapters on the goodness, severity, and wrath of God.
- Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* — the goodness, patience, and justice of God.
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), ch. 2; Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 2; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (divine goodness and justice).