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Exodus 34

"The Dominant Nature of God"

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The closing chapters of Exodus describe the implementation of the instructions God gave Moses concerning the building of the Tabernacle and installing the priesthood. In other words, chapters 35 through 40 are about sewing the fabric, making the articles, and putting the Tabernacle together, as well as making the priestly garments and getting Aaron and his sons dressed and anointed as the first priests.

Our final study in the book of Exodus comes from chapter 34. After Moses, in a moment of righteous indignation, destroyed the tablets, he was told to return to Mt. Sinai to get a new set.¹ While Moses was there, God did not spend time giving him more instructions. The first thing God did was to proclaim his good name,² and in proclaiming his name, he expressed the deeper character of his nature.³

Why is it so important to God that he needed to express the character of his name in these terms? The reason is that for the first time the Israelites experienced God's wrath, which changed their understanding of who God really is. The incident with the golden calf ended with 3,000 people dying, and the survivors had to deal with a plague, which was nowhere near what the judgment was going to be for their sin and disobedience. Remember, that sordid mess nearly moved God to wipe out the entire nation!

¹ [Exodus 34:1-8](#)

² [Exodus 34:5](#) - "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord."

³ [Exodus 34:6-7](#) - "And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'"

God's anger was justifiable, because the people just 40 days earlier had vowed to obey him and keep his commandments, according to [Exodus 19:7-8](#).⁴ Their promise lasted just a few short weeks before they broke the 1st Commandment - "*You shall have no other gods before me.*"

They had never seen God angry, so he didn't want them to think that wrath was his dominant nature, because it's not. God wanted the people to know about his true nature. He wanted them to know he is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful, the one who maintains love to thousands, forgives wickedness, sin, and rebellion, as well as being the one who punishes the guilty. These seven attributes express the dominant nature of God, while the last one expresses his lesser nature. That one, however, is necessary to validate the first seven. Why? Because, if he allowed the guilty (unrepentant) to go unpunished, how could he really be a loving God?

For example, if a parent has set boundaries, rules and guidelines for their child(ren), because they love them, want to protect them, and want the best for them, and they don't correct their child(ren) with specific consequences for their behavior, how could they really be a loving parent? In the same way, when a child exhibits brokenness over what he or she has done, a loving parent would choose to exercise grace and compassion, because they see that the child's brokenness was punishment enough, so they extend forgiveness.

When God exercises his justice, it validates his loving nature, and his loving nature validates his justice, which relates to his lesser nature. We learned about this in Pastor Gary's message on the 2nd Commandment.⁵ The Scripture doesn't say punish or curse, nor does it say generation in the original Hebrew. In fact, the word, punish, doesn't even exist in Hebrew! So what does God mean when the Bible says: "*... visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation*"?⁶

In that day, a household was made up of three or four generations, so when a father disobeyed God, the consequences of his sin affected the entire household. It is critical that we understand that the consequences of the father's sin were limited exclusively to that one household. So, when the Israelites started accusing God by saying that they were suffering for the sins of their parents, God had to correct them.^{7 8}

⁴ "*So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, 'We will do everything the Lord has said.'*"

⁵ *No Idle Idols*, [Exodus 20:4-6](#), October 6-7, 2012. http://cornerstonechapel.net/?page_id=21

⁶ [Exodus 34:7b \(KJV\)](#)

⁷ [Jeremiah 31:29-30](#)

⁸ [Ezekiel 18:1-4](#)

The focus of this message is that people need to get rid of their belief in the false doctrine of what some people call generational curses. The reason God stresses the dominant side of his nature is because he wants Moses and the Israelites to know who he really is, rather than have them make an evaluation over one incident. This is extremely important to understand, because some thing or some one along the course of our lives shapes our view of God. It may be a particular incident or a particular person that impacts our impression of God – sometimes for good and sometimes for bad.⁹ In this study we'll learn what a correct view of God looks like, and how we can scrap a misshaped view of God.

Misunderstanding #1 – He's An Angry God

1. The Bible does describe several times when God's anger was aroused, but it's important to note that his anger was over this issue of sin.
2. The truth is that God is merciful, and it takes a lot to make him upset, so it's clear that anger over sin is not a dominant characteristic of his nature.
 - a. **Nehemiah 9:17c** - *"But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love."*
 - b. **Psalms 86:15** - *"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."*
 - c. **Psalms 103:8** - *"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love."*
 - d. **Joel 2:13b** - *"Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..."*

Misunderstanding #2 – He's A Punishing God

3. The truth is that God is not a punishing God, so when something bad happens (e.g., cancer, death of a loved one, being fired or laid off from work) we should never mistakenly believe that it was because he is punishing us.
4. **John 9:1-3** - *"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"*

⁹ Pastor Gary shared some of the details of billionaire Ted Turner's personal pain (his younger sister suffered terribly and died, plus his father committed suicide) and specific events shaped his view of God. Turner, a deeply religious boy who had hoped to be a missionary, became one of the most openly hostile people against God. In a 1990 speech to the American Humanist Association, Turner remarked, "Christianity is a religion for losers."

<http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=2004>

'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' "

5. The truth is, we experience pain and suffering simply because we live in a corrupt world that Jesus came to rescue us from; and it has nothing to do with us being punished by God.
6. It's also true that sometimes we add heartache to our lives because of our own sinful choices.

Misunderstanding #3 - He's A God We'll Never Be Able To Please

7. We try to do things that make God happy but we never really feel like the kind of person we are or what we've done is good enough to please God.
8. The truth is, God does accept us!
 - a. **Ephesians 1:6** - *"[To] the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."* (King James Version)

Misunderstanding #4 - He's A God Who Doesn't Love Us

9. The truth is that he does love us!
 - a. **Psalm 103:11** - *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him."*
 - b. **Ephesians 3:17b-19** - *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

Misunderstanding #5 - He's A Distant God

10. The truth is that he is ever-present!
 - a. **Psalm 34:18** - *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

Misunderstanding #6 – He’s An Unfair God

11. Some believe God is a God who seems to let other people get by with things, but the truth is that he will not let the guilty (unrepentant) go unpunished, even though it may appear that way.
12. Some people look at the world and all of the injustice people suffer and wonder, “Where is God?”
13. **Habakkuk 1:13** – *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”*
14. God gives a series of warnings about the wicked, but in the end, he simply says, according to **Habakkuk 2:20**: *“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”*

The Conclusion

15. When Moses understood the true character and nature of God, he had one simple reaction: *“[He] bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.”* (**Exodus 34:8**)

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Exodus 34:1-8** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and discuss **Proverbs 22:1**.
 - a. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s statement: “All the money in the world can’t buy a good name, and a good name is more valuable than all the money in the world.”
 - b. Provide an overview of the account of how Dr. Samuel Mudd’s name became a catchphrase.¹⁰

¹⁰ In 1865 Dr. Samuel Mudd (<http://drmudd.org>) was convicted by a military tribunal and given a life sentence for aiding President Lincoln’s assassin, John Wilkes Booth. After Booth shot Lincoln, he broke his leg when he jumped from the balcony of Ford’s Theatre in Washington, D.C. He made it to the farmhouse of Dr. Mudd, a country doctor in what is what is known today as Waldorf, Maryland (Charles County). Dr. Mudd set Booth’s leg, put a splint on it, and gave Booth lodging for a few days. The

- c. How would you rate your character and reputation?
 - d. What would others say about your character and reputation?
 - e. Are there examples you can share of people you know or people you've heard or read about who were able to restore his or her tarnished reputation?
 - f. More importantly, do you think the Lord is pleased with your character, your reputation, and how you're living out your Christian witness?
4. Share examples of situations that shaped your view of God.
 5. Share examples of people who shaped your view of God.
 6. Read and discuss the Scriptures found in #2 above.
 - a. Why do you think people believe God is an angry God?
 - b. Are these Scriptures enough evidence to remove any doubt that God's anger and judgment is a lesser characteristic of his true nature?
 7. What was your understanding of the so-called doctrine of generational curses before hearing Pastor Gary's teaching?
 - a. Read and discuss [John 9:1-3](#).
 8. Have you tried to please God with your words, actions and deeds in order to earn his acceptance?
 9. Is it possible to personally know that God accepts you?
 - a. Read and discuss [Ephesians 1:6](#). (See #8 above)
 10. Spend time talking about [Psalm 103:11](#) and [Ephesians 3:17-19](#), which remind us that we are loved by God in ways that are almost too remarkable to fully understand.

controversy is did Dr. Mudd have any previous knowledge or involvement in the assassination plot or was he just doing his duty as a doctor to treat a patient who just happened to show up on his doorstep. A military tribunal came to the conclusion that he was a co-conspirator and he was found guilty as charged. His family, however, have always maintained his innocence. In 1869, President Andrew Johnson commuted his life sentence, because of Dr. Mudd's life-saving help during a deadly outbreak of yellow fever at Fort Jefferson (in the Dry Tortugas, about 70 miles west of Key West, Florida), the prison where he was being held. The charges against him have never been dropped, and his family and descendants have spent the last 147+ years trying to clear his name. As recently as 2002, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia denied the family's appeal. Dr. Mudd's family, however, remain steadfast in their efforts. From this man's life came the slanderous expression, which is still used today, that is used to identify someone who has a tarnished reputation - *"His name is Mudd!"*

11. Share examples of times when the Lord has been true to his Word when it comes to the nearness of his presence, when you've experienced times of trouble, difficulty, and grief.
 - a. Read and discuss [Psalm 34:18](#).

12. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: reject the false doctrine of generational curses; personally know the love and acceptance of the Lord; remember that the Lord *is not* an angry, punishing, unloving, distant, unfair God; rejoice in the fact that the Scriptures reveal the truth that he is accepting, loving, and near.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).