

Study Guide #3: What is God Like?

Introduction

In Explorer I, Study Guide #2, we learned the following truths that led us to a belief in God:

- The universe had a beginning. It's not eternal, which means it has not always existed.
- Since nothing can come from nothing, the universe didn't pop into existence without a cause.
- The cause for the universe must be the First Cause, also the Uncaused Cause because it didn't have a cause to effect it into existence.
- The Uncaused Cause must be a personal intelligent Being with free will.
- There is only 1 God.

In this Study Guide, we examine the question of what God's moral character is like.

Question #1: Why can't God be partly good and partly evil?

Answer: Good and evil are qualities of behavior involving relationships with other creatures, both human and animal, although only humans are morally responsible for their behavior because they have free will. Because God is an infinite Being (see Explorer I, Study Guide #2) existing in a universe with other beings that He created, God must either be infinitely good or infinitely evil. When the word "infinite" is used to describe qualities of character, it means "immeasurable" or "inexhaustible," as for example, when we say that someone has infinite patience. Since God is an infinite Being, He could not be partly good and partly evil, but He must be infinitely good *or* infinitely evil—100 percent consistent in one moral camp or the other.

Question #2: Is God infinitely good or infinitely evil?

Answer: The observation and scientific discoveries of the material universe reveal that it consists of order and beauty as well as of disorder and ugliness. Since God, as an infinite Being, would not create both qualities (see Question #1), we are left with 2 options. One option is that God created everything with order



Beautiful Flowers

and beauty, and disorder and ugliness was introduced by another free-will being. The other option is that God created everything with disorder and ugliness, and order and beauty were introduced by another free-will being. From the well-established Second Law of Thermodynamics (Law of Entropy), everything left to its natural state gradually decays and/or dies. In other words, everything—living and inanimate—is naturally moving toward disorder and chaos. This logically leads to the idea that God originally created everything good and perfect (with order and beauty). The notion of order and beauty, with the related idea of good health for living creatures, is universally

associated with things that are pleasant to people. In other words, they are associated with treating others with goodness. Therefore, this evidence answers the question by implicitly meaning that God is infinitely Good.

Question #3: If God didn't create evil, then who did?

Answer: Another entity must have introduced evil into the world because God would not have created a natural law (Second Law of Thermodynamics, see Question #2) to counter what He created. Occam's razor (see Explorer I, Study Guide #2) requires only one such entity to do this. That leaves room for only one being who made a conscious choice to introduce evil as the counter quality to what God created. And an entity who makes a conscious choice is, by definition, a personal being, because artificial intelligence must be created by a personal being—and it only does what it is programmed to do. This actually implies that God did indeed create at least some beings with free will. The Christian Bible says that this being who introduced evil into the universe is an angel called Satan (Revelation 12:7-9).



Satan once was a Beautiful Angel

Question #4: Can you be more specific as to what you mean by the statement that God is Good?

Answer: At its basic level, goodness is the quality of treating other creatures in the same way you would want to be treated. Christians define this as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), with most of the world's religions teaching the same thing. Although the word "love" is badly misused and has different meanings, love that treats others the way you want to be treated is a selfless love. The Greek New Testament calls it "agape," as contrasted with brotherly love and erotic love. This kind of love is not an emotional feeling per se, but rather it is a principle by which a person conducts his life.

The principle of "agape" love includes the quality of justice. In other words, love without justice is not actually love at all. It's justice that tells us *how* we are to demonstrate our love toward others. When we love someone else, we won't steal things from them or their reputation, we won't cheat or defraud them, and we won't harm them. On the positive side, it means that we will attempt to help or benefit that person in reasonable ways. Neither is justice without "agape" love actually justice at all, for a loveless act of justice becomes cold, unfeeling, and judgmental. In other words, without "agape" love, justice is literally tyranny in action rather than true justice. Therefore, when we say that God is Good, we are saying that He wants to benefit, or bless, His creatures, not to harm them. This truth has other implications for God as well, as we will discover under the remaining questions in this Study Guide.

Question #5: If God is good and just, then why does He allow evil to exist in the universe?



Hurricane

Answer: There are 2 kinds of evil—moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil is committed by creatures with free will who choose to do evil things (like human beings). Natural evil are the bad things that happen in terms of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, tornados, hurricanes, tidal waves, wildfires, and volcanic eruptions.

It is self-evident that a God who is good—which specifically includes love and justice—would not allow either type of evil to continue in existence indefinitely.

Moreover, selfless love would certainly motivate God to provide a way to transform those moral creatures (those with free will) whose nature is currently evil and imperfect. Since observation and human history overwhelmingly tell us that all mankind is infected with evil, then God must have a rescue plan for mankind.

Whatever God’s plan is, His character of love and justice requires at least 2 conclusions. *First*, His plan must be offered on a just basis, including His respect for mankind’s free will. *Second*, God must find a way to communicate His plan to the people of earth. In turn, these principles have enormous implications for soteriology (salvation issues) and eschatology (end-time events) because such a plan to restore mankind must eventually end all evil and begin a perfect world all over again. The Christian worldview states that God has laid out this plan in a collection of books called the Bible. We will discuss the most important issues about the Bible in most of the remaining Study Guides in this specific series (“Explorer I: Exploring Christian Foundations”). [NOTE: The reason that God has allowed evil to continue to this point will be discussed in Explorer II, Study Guide #2.]

Question #6: What does God’s character of love and justice mean for His nature?

Answer: *Character* refers to how a being relates to other creatures. One’s *nature* refers to what he is in his own reality. To answer the question about what God’s character of love and justice mean for His nature, let’s discuss the development of His character further. It may well be impossible to list every character trait that is equated with that which is good. But they certainly include beauty, love, justice, peace, mercy, patience, kindness, loyalty, and self-control. When these are analyzed, it becomes apparent that love (selflessness) is the father of all the other good traits. Love produces justice because we have already seen that justice defines *how* one is to express that love. Love also produces beauty (because it wants to please others, which beautiful things do), peace, mercy, patience, kindness, loyalty, and self-control. Every good character trait is the result of selfless love.

If every good character trait stems from the principle of selfless love, then such love must have existed before any of the other good traits existed. Since God is infinitely Good, then He must personify the principle of selfless Love in order to create all goodness. That makes Love a part of God’s very existence

or nature (not only His character). In other words, God is loving and good—and all of the other good character traits—precisely because He *is Love Personified*! Therefore, when the Christian New Testament declares that “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8, 16), it’s simply stating what logic tells you. [NOTE: Other religions, like Judaism and Islam, teach that God is loving toward His creatures. But only Christianity teaches that God *is* Love.]

Question #7: What else does Love tell us about God’s *nature*?

Answer: Love only exists in a relationship, and a love relationship requires at least 2 beings who have free will. Free will is required because love is a choice; beings who are programmed to “love” do not actually love at all—they just act as they are programmed to act. God is an infinite Being. Therefore, His love must exist in an infinite love relationship, which means it must be the most intimate and perfect love relationship possible. In human terms, such a relationship is called marriage between 2 people. [NOTE: Traditionally, marriage is between one man and one woman in the large majority of societies, although not all. We will not presently discuss the issues of polygamy or gay marriage here.]

However, the number of the most intimate love relationship is actually 3, not 2. There is (1) the husband, (2) the wife, and (3) the relationship itself. For example, we say that the married partners *have* a relationship, and that their *relationship* determines how they will treat each other. Now, you are probably thinking that the relationship is an abstract entity, not a reality of nature (a thing in itself). That’s true for human marriage, but not for God. God has been Love personified for an eternity, which means that Love existed before God created anything. Yet nothing existed before the universe was created except God. Therefore, since Love is an eternal reality in itself, it must have existed as a third divine Person in what we might call the God family. [NOTE: The Christian term is the “Godhead” or the “Trinity.”]



Wedding Couple

Question #8: Is this view of God similar to the Hindu belief in many gods?

Answer: Not really. It’s true that Hinduism teaches there is only 1 Ultimate Reality, who is variously called Brahman, the Ultimate, or the Absolute. Brahman is considered to be both personal *and* impersonal, and It/He can manifest Itself/Himself in a virtually infinite number of personal beings called gods, each of whom is a different specific avatar (representative form) of Brahman. Our view—which is the majority Christian view—is that the 1 God consists of 3 individual Persons.

Question #9: How is belief in 3 Persons in the Godhead not a belief in 3 gods?

Answer: It’s a fair question to ask how 1 God can consist of 3 distinct Persons. This kind of monotheism (belief in 1 God) is called *trinitarian monotheism*. It’s still a monotheistic belief if the 3 Persons are viewed as possessing the same mind, personality, character, and will, so that there could never be any conflict among them. In this sense, 3 Persons constitute 1 God. We can illustrate this concept by examining a rope consisting of 3 strands of fiber. If you cut each end off the rope and untangle the strands, you would then have 3 ropes. But when the 3 strands of fiber are united with each other, they constitute 1 rope. The Persons

of the Trinity are completely and eternally united in mind, purposes, personality, character, and will. Therefore, these 3 Persons are 1 God. [NOTES: (1) The word “trinity” is derived from the prefix “tri,” meaning “three,” and “unity;” and (2) Judaism and Islam teach an *absolute* monotheism in which 1 God is only 1 Person.]

Question #10: Does belief in trinitarian monotheism mean that each Person in the Trinity (or Godhead) is only one-third God?

Answer: No. If that were the case, then it would take all 3 Persons—three-thirds—to make the 1 God. Nor does this view state that there is only 1 Person who sometimes expresses Himself—in the Christian sense—as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. Instead, each Person in the Trinity is equally and fully God, but they are 1 in the sense that they each possess the same mind, personality, character, and will. In other words, they are fully and completely united in purpose.