

The Attributes of God #7

The Goodness of God

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If we were to send a questionnaire team out to the shopping mall to ask, “Do you believe that God is good?” how do you think people would respond? It is probable that every answer would affirm the goodness of God. However, what the respondents would actually mean by *good* might vary. For many, a good God is like Santa Claus. He brings them gifts and forgives their sins. While it is true that God’s goodness is displayed in His providing for His creatures in these (and other) ways, how do we account for all the bad things that happen in our lives? What about the man who contracts prostate cancer or the woman who is stricken with breast cancer? Is God still good when these things happen? Or does He have an evil side? Perhaps He is impotent and can’t stop bad things from plaguing us. On the contrary, we know that God is sovereign and omnipotent and therefore it is impossible for Him to lose His grip on any event, either good or bad. Still, how do we square God’s goodness with the bad things of life? When we stand beside our loved one in the hospital as he or she dies, can we still say that “God is good,” and can we lift praises to His name?

One of the problems we have in dealing with the things of God is that we too often tend to listen to the little voice inside us rather than searching God’s Word. He alone can reveal Himself and His ways. Indeed, the Bible says a great deal about the goodness of God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term used of God’s goodness is *tob*, while the

New Testament Greek word is *agathos*. In Exodus 33, when Moses asked to see God’s glory, God responded, “*I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.*” In Matthew 10:19 *agathos* is employed when the rich young ruler calls Jesus, “*good teacher.*” Our Lord responds, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.*” From Jesus’ statement we may assume that all God does is good, for He is in His essence good and can only do good. The uses of the Hebrew term, *tob*, show different contexts in which God displays His goodness. Basically we may say that God’s goodness pertains to His beneficence to His creatures, but it is not to be divorced from His holiness. Therefore, God is not good only when He blesses, but also when He curses.

Let us consider first the blessings of our good God, and then we shall turn our attention to the cursings. Because it is the Book of Beginnings and first shows us God’s goodness, we must turn to Genesis. The first act of God’s goodness is His creation of the world. Having brought the world into being by the word of His mouth, God looked at His handiwork and declared it, “*very good.*” How could it be anything other than that, for God, Himself, is eternally good? Let us consider the goodness of God in His creation.

In the first place, it was good of God to *create* a world for us to live in and to create us to live in His world. Think of it! No burden jumped up on God's shoulders and refused to leave until He had created a habitat for creatures and creatures to inhabit it. God was doing just fine before He created the world. He did not improve Himself by making the universe. It added nothing to God. He was not lonely; God is complete within Himself. Unlike us, He does not have an insatiable ego that must be fed by accomplishment and the approbation of our peers. God has no peer and He need prove nothing to anyone. It was purely out of His goodness that He made the world, and the world He made was "*very good*," indeed.

Every imperfection in the world today and every evil that befalls us was absent when God crowned His creation with the accolade "*very good*." Thorns and thistles had not yet violated the earth; that came later, after man sinned. Work, which many shirk, was not a pressure, but a pleasure. Work by the sweat of one's brow was a byproduct, not of the Creator, but of the creature's sin.

Even with the imperfections of our now fallen world, we still see the goodness of a good God in creation. He causes the "*rain to fall on the just and the unjust*" (Matthew 5:45). His sun shines, warming the world and providing growth to His creation. Our bodies, which the psalmist says are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*," should amaze us. Only a fool would believe that a complex creature such as man evolved into being. We should rather see the

handiwork of our good God who created us from the dust of the ground and breathed life into us. God has given us eyes and ears to enjoy the beauty of nature. He has provided feet and toes, without which we could not walk. We also enjoy hands and fingers that enable us to perform work. We have rational minds that enable us to think and learn. As God works in our lives, we even learn to discern right from wrong so that we can think God's thoughts after Him and do the things that please Him.

God provides everything we need to sustain life. Air, which we all take for granted, is chemically mixed in just the right proportions. Dilute too much of the oxygen from our air and we die. Fill it with a poisonous gas and we gasp our way into eternity. Take away our ability to breathe and they plan our funeral. Have you ever choked on food that went down the wrong way? Perhaps you have suffered with asthma and can recall being panicked when you could not breathe. God created our lungs, and He keeps our world supplied with plenty of good air for them to breathe. God is, indeed, good.

God is also good in giving us all pleasures in this life. Beloved, every time you sit down to a delicious meal and offer a prayer to God, remember that it really is *His* bounty that you devour. Your good God gives you food that is to your liking so that it pleases your taste buds. Is there a food item that you abhor? I have never been a picky eater and usually let others choose where to eat. I'm happy with Mexican food, Chinese food, Indian food, Greek food.

You name it; I'll eat it. I love the varieties of food that are available. But there is one dish that I turned up my nose at as a little boy and have never eaten. I remember my dad trying to get me to eat hominy, and to this day I will not do it. I get sick at the very smell of hominy. What if all food looked, felt, and tasted like hominy? God could have made food all the same and He could have created us with a hatred for it. But instead He provided a great variety of food for us to enjoy. God is good.

Not only does the Lord provide us with tasty food, but He makes our world pleasurable. A friend just returned from a trip to Europe in which he briefly toured part of Russia. After he described some of the beautiful sites in Scandinavian countries, I asked him what it was like in Russia. "Horrible," he replied. "It's ugly. The buildings are ugly, the towns are ugly. It's just ugly." What if God created the world like the Russian cities my friend described? What if everything were a drab grey? No more blue plumbago; no more vivid lantana; no more striking bougainvilleas. All gone would be the colorful crepe myrtles that brighten our city and make our neighborhoods more cheerful. God is so good to give us the simple pleasure of seeing things in various shades and colors.

There is no end to God's goodness in creation. We will consider just one more of God's good gifts to us: our health. Before the Fall of Adam, man had perfect health and disease did not exist. Adam never woke up in the morning and reached for the Ibuprofen

jar. He suffered from not one allergy, and he never needed laser surgery on his eyes. Today we have all sorts of problems with our health. Some of us suffer more than others. The amazing thing is that, at the Fall, God did not send universal disease that made man miserable all the time. The fact is that for most of us, our days of good health far outweigh our bad ones. God would be perfectly just to strike us all with debilitating disease for our whole lives; instead, He gives us a good measure of health. "*Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good*" (Psalm 136:1).

God's goodness is also seen in His spiritual creation or *redemption*. Consider first that He provides redemption at all. God could have wiped out the human race on the spot when Adam sinned. Oh, it is true that God judged Adam and all mankind after him, but God's judgment was much less severe than it could have been. Not only that, but He offered hope in the midst of judgment. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is that the Seed of the woman will crush the head of the Serpent's seed. In other words, God promised to send a Messiah to redeem the creation that had been plunged into sin and misery. God also demonstrates His goodness by developing throughout the Old Testament the covenant promise of a Messiah who would come and redeem poor lost sinners.

After Adam, God progressively revealed His plan of redemption. With Abraham, God began the Israelite people, calling their leader out of paganism from Ur of the Chaldees. He promised to make Abraham's name great

and to bless all the nations of the earth through him. Ultimately God fulfilled His promise to Abraham by sending a Messiah to “redeem some from every tribe, tongue, kindred, and nation” (Revelation 5). But for the next 2,000 years until the advent of the Messiah, God continued revealing His plan of redemption. As the Israelite nation developed, God gave them His Law through Moses to provide them His righteous standard and to show them how far short they fell from it. The Lord even provided the Israelites a sacrificial system that served to teach them how He would ultimately deal with their sins. The sacrifices they were to offer pictured the Redeemer whom God would send to solve their sin problem once and for all.

As God developed the nation, He showed them many kindnesses and spoke through the prophets to keep alive the promise that a Redeemer would come and provide forgiveness for their sins. Isaiah 7 spoke of His birth through a virgin, while Micah 5 revealed where He would be born. Jeremiah 31 foretold the New Covenant that He would bring. Isaiah 53 described the suffering He would have to endure. Zechariah 12 even spoke of Israel’s repentance at having rejected the Messiah God would send. These and many other prophecies foretold the goodness of God in providing a Redeemer for sinners. Galatians 4:4 sums up the goodness of God’s Messianic provision this way: “*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we*

might receive the adoption as sons.”

God’s goodness is evident regarding those for whom God sent His Son. Isaiah 53 says that rather than our being people who in any way recommend ourselves to God, “*All we like sheep had gone astray.*” Ephesians 2 presents us as “*dead in our transgressions and sins.*” Titus 3 also paints a dismal portrait of man: “*For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*” Brothers and sisters, it is not that we in any way commended ourselves to God; rather, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5). How good of God that He would take a saving interest in us, sinful creatures that we are.

God displayed His goodness in the Person He sent to redeem us. It was not at small cost that He gained our redemption. It cost Him dearly. God did not send an angel, for that would have been a small thing. Smaller still would it have been if He had sent a man. Neither angel nor man could redeem sinful men. Therefore, God’s goodness provided the only One who could satisfy divine justice and suffer eternal condemnation. God’s own dear Son became a man and suffered divine justice as man’s substitute. Only a good God would do that.

The way we receive redemption from our sins also signals God’s goodness. Suppose that God told us that we must believe in Jesus and live the best life

we could. In the end, if our good outweighed our bad, He would receive us into heaven. Would that reflect the goodness of God? Indeed not. For how would we ever know if our good deeds mounted up enough righteousness to save us? All our lives we would live in fear that at the last trumpet we would be rejected from heaven and cast forever into hell. We would be on a works basis with God, but, instead, God’s goodness provides grace so that we are saved, “*not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy.*” We are saved by His grace through faith in His Son. Oh, God is good!

The great Church father, Augustin, prayed: “*Command what Thou wilt and grant what Thou commandest.*” God does exactly that, for not only does He require us to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, He is good to give us that faith. Just as God opened Lydia’s heart to believe (Acts 16), so He does with each one who comes to Christ in faith. The Holy Spirit regenerates us when we are dead in sin and He inclines our will to trust Jesus. So, the apostle writes: “*For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God lest anyone might boast*” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Our union with Christ is another example of God’s goodness. Paul writes in Romans 6:5, “*For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.*” What does it mean to be in union with Christ? The Greek word Paul employs

translated “united” is used in the biological sense of skin around a wound growing together or of the ends of broken bones fusing together. It could be rightly translated, “fused together” which would more vividly depict our being bound to Christ. For, when the skin heals or the bone mends, the old and new grow together so that they are one. So it is with Christ and us. We are now inseparably united to Him so that His life is our life and His destiny is our destiny. We died with Him and we rose with Him. Our lives are conjoined to Christ’s so that His dying and rising is both the basis for our very lives and the power by which we live. To put it in terms we should all understand, when we give our salvation testimony, we often say that when we came to Christ everything changed. Paul says it even better, for he maintains that in Christ we are new creatures and a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Isn’t it good of God to do that for us?

There are many other things we could say about God’s goodness in blessing us, but what about the cursings? Proverbs 3:33 says, “*The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked.*” In the case of unbelievers who do not repent and turn to Christ, God will curse them for eternity. Eternal condemnation is just as clear in the Bible as is eternal blessing. The question is whether God can be good and condemn people to hell. Surely the answer lies in God’s justice. Is it good of God to make laws and then punish lawbreakers? We know that it is. In the 1990s we all witnessed several occasions where high-profile people committed atrocious

crimes and were never punished. The very soul of this nation cried out for justice. Why? Because we are created in the image of a good God who demands perfect justice. In our heart of hearts we know that a good God *must* execute justice. It is His nature to do so, and God's nature is essentially good. Therefore, when we read of God's condemnation of sinners we do not question God's goodness; rather, we applaud it.

What about those of us who are believers? Can we see the goodness of God when life slaps us in the face and punches us in the stomach? Let us investigate Psalm 107, for it begins with *"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,"* and then goes on to display God's goodness in dealing with man. God's goodness is first seen in the mercy He shows to His people. The psalmist states that God has *"redeemed"* His people *"from the hand of the enemy"* and gathered them from the four corners of the earth. In context of Israel's experience, it surely points to God's covenant mercy when He brought His people back to the land after the Babylonian captivity. Israel's incessant disobedience brought on God's discipline in the form of the captivity, for God raised up the Babylonians in order to chastise His people.

Verses 10–13 show us also that God disciplines His people: *"There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He humbled their hearts with la-*

bor; they stumbled and there was none to help." The children of Israel suffered because of their recalcitrance. They refused to listen to the Lord's wise counsel and played the rebel. Because of their wickedness, God's heavy hand of discipline was upon them. Their lives were difficult and stressful. They were without hope. Do you ever feel that way? Of course you do; we all do. One of the most humbling things in life is the struggle we all face as we live the Christian life—or try to. Most days it is as if we take one step forward and two steps backward. And more than we'd care to admit, God inflicts discipline upon us, just as He did upon the children of Israel.

Does God reveal a bad side when He brings bad things into our lives and chastises His children? No, not at all. His discipline actually underlines His goodness. After all, when God inflicted His children, Israel, it brought them out of their rebelliousness so that they *"cried out to the LORD in their trouble."* Then God *"saved them out of their distresses"* (Psalm 107:13). Therefore, the psalmist urges in verse 15: *"Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men!"*

Beloved, isn't it true that we are created to worship the Lord? We often hear "I'm at the top of my game" when someone is doing his best work. Aren't we at the top of our game when we worship the Lord? If God's discipline makes us so miserable that we give up our rebellion and submit to Him in humble worship, is that not a good thing? And does that not establish

God's goodness? Indeed it does!

How, then, do we respond to God's goodness in both His blessings and cursings?

1. Be sure to appreciate the Lord's blessings. Some contend that it is unspiritual to enjoy physical things. All I can say is that we should not let those folks spoil God's good blessing for the rest of us. When you eat a wonderful meal, enjoy it to the fullest. When God blesses you financially, use it wisely, but be sure to enjoy the blessing. If God gives you good health, rejoice in it. But above all, remember the source of your blessings and thank Him for it. Even more than the gifts—enjoy the Giver, Himself. He is the prototype of all good fathers and He loves to give gifts to His children. May those gifts help you appreciate your Father in heaven.

Also enjoy His spiritual blessings to the fullest. When you contemplate what God has done for you in Christ, grab hold of those blessings and squeeze all the joy you can from them. God wants you to do that. He desires for His children to be overwhelmed with gratitude for His goodness to them. It is popular in our church when someone asks how you are doing to say, "Better than I deserve." That is

certainly true, but in what spirit is it said? Is the person frowning on grace and refusing to bask in the joy of God's salvation? If so, that one does not have the joy of his or her salvation. If, on the other hand, one makes that statement and smiles because of God's grace, God is pleased that His child truly appreciates and enjoys the spiritual blessings He has bestowed.

2. Be sure to appreciate the Lord's discipline. Sometimes God gives us a bed of roses in which to lie and a soft pillow on which to lay our heads. At other times He provides a bed of thorns and no pillow at all! We must always remember that the Lord has a purpose for these things. According to the great evangelist, George Whitefield, God gives us these uncomfortable times to awaken us from spiritual slumber and to rescue us from the sleep of spiritual death so that we will arise and call out to Him for mercy. Is that not the work of a good God?

Beloved, in all things we must do as the psalmist has said, *"Oh taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Psalm 34:8).

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