

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S GOODNESS

- It is common for those who face troubles and trials in this life to doubt the goodness of God
- Often people impugn God for failing to stop some hardship or accuse him of being unkind to them somehow
- But the clear message of Scripture is that God is uniquely good and that he is the standard for all that we call good...the *bonitas Dei*
- God not only desires to reveal his goodness to his people but he is also able to accomplish his good plan in the best possible way
- “The goodness of God...is the loveliness, benign character, sweetness, friendliness, kindness, and generosity of God. Goodness is the very essence of God’s Being, even if there were no creature to whom this could be manifested.”¹
- “God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but daily preserves and defends us against all evil and misfortune, averts all sorts of danger and calamity; and that He does all this out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a benevolent Father, who cares for us that no evil befall us.”²
- This perfection of God has been called “the captain attribute” meaning all his other attributes flow from it
- Some have argued that God’s goodness is the “luster” of all his attributes, that which “animates” the rest of his perfections and under which all his attributes march
- That God is good means that he is not mean, cruel, or bad in any way...he is entirely set apart from all malice and harshness and is characterized by kindness, generosity, and grace
- This is reflected in the prayer many of us learned as children: “God is great, God is good. Let us thank Him for this food.”
- God is the greatest good, infinitely good in all his ways, and entirely good in himself
- He is the original good...the *summum bonum*...the greatest and highest good
- He is not only good, but best...supreme, inconceivable goodness itself

Exodus 33:18-19 ~ Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” 19 And He said, “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.” (see the description of God’s goodness in Exodus 34:6-7...these perfections make up God’s goodness)

Psalm 34:8 ~ O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Psalm 106:1 ~ Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Psalm 107:1 ~ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Psalm 135:3 ~ Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.

Psalm 136:1 ~ Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

¹ Wilhelmus à Brakel

² Martin Luther

Psalm 145:8-20

Nahum 1:7 ~ The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him.

Mark 10:18 ~ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

- Goodness is not what God *has*, but what God *is*...the very essence of his being
- It is not merely his way of behaving or a characteristic he possesses, but what he essentially is in his person
- “Goodness is not a quality in him but a nature; not a habit added to his essence, but his essence itself... Nothing can add to him, or make him better than he is; nothing can detract from him, to make him worse.”³
- He is all good...his goodness is so complete and perfect that all other goodness is like no goodness at all
- All the goodness there is in a creature has been imparted from God, but God’s goodness is underived
- God’s goodness is the essence of his eternal nature...and everything that emanates from him (i.e. his decrees, creation, laws, providences) is good
- But not only is God good in himself, he also expresses his goodness continuously because he is the source of all good
- He is constantly inclined to deal well with his creatures, do what is beneficial to them, and treat them bountifully and kindly...he is the cause of all goodness in his creation
- God’s goodness is his “cosmic generosity”⁴

Psalm 73:1 ~ Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!

Psalm 119:68 ~ You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes.

1 Timothy 4:4 ~ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

James 1:16-17 ~ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

- “All creaturely good is derived from him and is a reflection of him. All that is morally good and all that is beneficial or pleasant may be traced to its source in God. All that I touch, taste, see, feel and know that is pleasing and enjoyable is but a reflection, indeed a dim reflection, of the goodness of God from which it originates.”⁵
- “He cannot be weary of doing good, no more than a fountain or sea are of flowing...It is part of his goodness not to be weary of showing it.”⁶
- “If anything be desirable because of its goodness, God is much more desirable because of his, since all things are good by a participation, and nothing good but by his print upon it: as what being creatures have was derived to them by God, so what goodness they are possessed with they were furnished with it by God; all goodness flowed from him, and all created goodness is summed up in him...If the sparkling glory of the visible heavens delight us, and the beauty and bounty of the earth please and refresh us, what should be the language of our souls upon those views and tastes but that of the Psalmist, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I can desire beside thee’ (Psa. 73:25). No greater good can possibly be desired, and no less good should be ardently desired.”⁷

³ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, II: 285-286.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 111.

⁵ Terry Johnson, *The Identity and Attributes of God*, 238.

⁶ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, II: 388.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II: 392.

THE EXTENT OF GOD'S GOODNESS

Creation

- God was not under obligation to create anything since he was completely happy and satisfied in himself
- He didn't create out of necessity, or need, or because of any lack in himself; rather his decision to create was undertaken freely, a voluntary act that arose out of his goodness and reflected his goodness
- He created in order that he might bring into existence beings who might be the recipients of his bountiful goodness
- God created because he is good and what he created is also good

Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 ~ the light was good...it was good...it was good...it was good...it was good...it was good...it was very good

- "Wherever we cast our eyes, the goodness of God may be seen. At every turn we encounter God's goodness ...The goodness of God in nature is unmistakable...God's goodness is manifest at every hand...Wherever we gaze, even in a fallen world, we see evidence of his goodness, not the least of which is being itself, rather than non-being."⁸
- God's goodness is also seen particularly in his design of creation for humanity in that all of this created goodness was for our benefit
- God made the world for the delight of man
- He made us in his own image, the only creatures in his realm that have the capacity to know him and enjoy fellowship with him
- He made a garden and placed Adam there, surrounding him with beauty and natural delights
- He made him a vice-regent over all creation, giving him authority to exercise dominion over it
- He gave him every imaginable delight and pleasure in the original creation

Genesis 1:26-28 ~ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:29-30 ~ Then God said, "Behold, I have given you **every** plant yielding seed that is on the surface of **all** the earth, and **every** tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to **every** beast of the earth and to **every** bird of the sky and to **every thing** that moves on the earth which has life, I have given **every** green plant for food"; and it was so.

Genesis 2:8 ~ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.

Genesis 2:9 ~ Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is **pleasing to the sight** and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

- "God provided for innocent man a delightful mansion-house, a place of more special beauty and curiosity, the garden of Eden, a delightful paradise, a model of the beauties and pleasures of another world, wherein he had placed whatsoever might contribute to the felicity of a rational and animal life, the life of a creature composed of mire and dust, of sense and reason."⁹

⁸ Johnson, *Identity and Attributes*, 244.

⁹ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, II:312.

- When God stated that it was “not good” for the man to be alone (Gen 2:18), he graciously made for Adam a woman to be his wife (Gen 2:18-23) so that they could become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24)
- Even in a fallen world, this goodness continues in nature as God gives us the physical capacity to enjoy these benefits
- And not only that, God has given us the faculty of reason by which we can understand and perceive the delightful objects of his creation
- “Brush the cheek of a newborn baby with your finger; feel a cool ocean breeze blow over your warm skin on a hot day; or enjoy a warm fire on a cold night – and give thanks for the sense of touch. Drive along Big Sur in California and absorb the breathtaking beauty of the rugged cliffs and the blue waves crashing against the rocks; or head to New England in the fall and drink in the beauty of the changing colours of the leaves; or head to the Mid-West and look out over the vast fields of grain – and give thanks for the sense of sight. Peel a fresh orange and bite into a wedge; or slice into a fresh peach or watermelon on a hot summer day; or enjoy bananas, apples, lemons, strawberries, blueberries, and countless other products of the earth that spring from the ground of their own accord, and realize these are the gifts of a good God to us – and thank him for the sense of taste. Consider the sweet sounds of the chirping birds, the thunderous crashing of the waves, the rustling of the brook, the whistling of the wind through the trees, the melodies of the human voice, the symphonies of Beethoven – and give thanks that God has both created a world full of delights and given us sense with which to perceive and enjoy these delights.”¹⁰

Providence

- Not only is God’s goodness evident in his creation of everything but also in his providential care of everything
- There is nothing in creation that is so small or so insignificant as to be outside of God’s goodness

1. God is Good to All Creatures

- His goodness extends even to the animal kingdom by making sure that they have ample supplies and ample protection

Job 38:41 ~ Who prepares for the raven its nourishment When its young cry to God And wander about without food

Psalms 104:21 ~ The young lions roar after their prey And seek their food from God.

Psalms 147:9 ~ He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens which cry.

Matthew 6:26 ~ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Matthew 6:30 ~ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Matthew 10:29 ~ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

- God even demonstrates his goodness by insisting that his people be good to his creatures and show mercy to their animals

¹⁰ Johnson, *Identity and Attributes*, 246-247.

Exodus 20:10 ~ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

Deuteronomy 25:4 ~ You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.

Proverbs 12:10 ~ A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, But even the compassion of the wicked is cruel.

Matthew 12:11 ~ And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?”

2. God is Good to the Weak and Helpless

- God made special provisions for slaves, the poor, widows, and orphans...and requires that his people treat them with love and impartiality as well

Exodus 22:21-22 ~ You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.

Deuteronomy 15:7 ~ If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;

Deuteronomy 15:12-14 ~ If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. 13 When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. 14 You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.

Psalms 146:9 ~ The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked.

James 1:27 ~ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

3. God is Good to Unbelievers

- God extends to all people his “common grace”...his general goodness which is not redemptive
- Even the wicked are the beneficiaries of God’s goodness
- Unbelievers are allowed to marry, have children, work, advance in their careers, enjoy good food, travel, etc
- They can also enjoy the beauty of God’s creation and the blessings of it

Matthew 5:45 ~ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Luke 6:35 ~ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Acts 14:17 ~ and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

- “[S]ince God controls all that happens in his world, every meal, every pleasure, every possession, every bit of sun, every night’s sleep, every moment of health and safety, everything else that sustains and enriches life, is a divine gift.”¹¹

¹¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 162.

4. God is Good to His Children

- There are many aspects of God's goodness to his children and the goodness God lavishes on His children is not always in the form of material abundance, but any abundance does come from Him
- He is our Redeemer and Savior, the One who has graciously rescued from our sin and certain judgment!
- The supreme expression of God's goodness is the giving of Christ to rescue sinners!

Romans 11:22 ~ Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

- He is our stronghold, our refuge and strength, and our fortress

Psalm 18:1-2 ~ I love You, O LORD, my strength. 2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 27:1 ~ The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

Psalm 46:1 ~ God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

- He protects us

Psalm 91:5 ~ You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day;

- He assigns his angels to watch over us

Psalm 91:11 ~ For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways.

- He watches over us

Psalm 121:8 ~ The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever.

- God delights in meeting the needs of His children

Matthew 7:7-11 ~ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

- He is good in his plans for believers

Ephesians 2:10 ~ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- He is good in that he orchestrates trials and hardships which he uses to conform believers to the image of Christ

Romans 5:3-4 ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope

Romans 8:28 ~ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Hebrews 12:5-6 ~ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

- Even the institution of laws governing human relations is an evidence of God’s goodness because they are for our good
- They are good for us physically and spiritually and are meant to promote our well-being

Genesis 2:16-17 ~ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Genesis 9:6 ~ Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

The entire OT law, particularly the Ten Commandments

Romans 7:12 ~ So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Romans 13:3-4 ~ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- Although God is good to all of his creation, it is clear that he has a peculiar affection and care for his people

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S GOODNESS

Gratitude

- The incredible goodness of the Lord that surrounds us should elicit thanksgiving from our hearts

1 Timothy 4:3 ~ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

1 Timothy 6:17 ~ Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ~ in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

- Were it not for God’s abundant kindness and goodness to us, we would be objects of his wrath and deserving of all judgment...but he has showered us with his lavish goodness
- “Gratitude is the return justly required from the objects of His beneficence; yet it is often withheld from our great Benefactor simply because His goodness is so constant and so abundant. It is lightly esteemed because it is exercised toward us in the common course of events. It is not felt because we daily experience it.”¹²

Trust

- Since God has proven his goodness to us over and over again, we should seek him above all else as our greatest good
- Although we do not know the future, we should trust him entirely for everything that comes our way because we can see his goodness to us in the past

¹² A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 60.

Psalm 16:2 ~ I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good besides You.”

Psalm 73:28 ~ But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works.

Matthew 6:25-34

- “The goodness of God is the life of the believer’s trust. It is this excellency in God which most appeals to our hearts. Because His goodness endureth forever, we ought never to be discouraged.”¹³
- “The God who is offered thee is the well of salvation, the Lord of life, the God of all consolation, a hive of sweetness, a paradise of pleasure, a heaven of joy. He is the richest grace, the dearest love, the surest friend, the highest honour, the vastest treasure, the exactest beauty, the chiefest good, and the fullest felicity. He is one that can enlarge and suit all thy faculties, relieve and answer all they necessities, fill up and satisfy all the capacities of they heaven-born soul. God is a good which Christ died to purchase for thee...And surely if Christ thought him worth his blood, he is worthy thine acceptance. God is a comprehensive universal good, not one, but all good; riches, honours, pleasures, friends, relations, health, life, earth, heaven, this world, the other world, all the good of both worlds, and infinitely more; and art thou not covetous of such wealth, that is better worth than both worlds.”¹⁴

Contentment

- Whatever our circumstances are, we can know that they are ordained by a God who is good and who has our well-being in mind

Psalm 84:11 ~ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Philippians 4:11-12 ~ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

- Sadly, however, we often doubt God’s goodness...in fact, getting believers to doubt God’s goodness is one of Satan’s greatest ploys
- We are often tempted to grumble, complaining that God has mistreated us
- “Often a twisted sense of entitlement mars our perception of God’s goodness. We focus on what we do not have rather than on what we do have...the twist of sinful human nature is such that we will tend to fixate on the one thing we do not have rather than on the ninety-nine that we do have. We have food on our table, clothes on our backs, roofs over our heads, family, friends, jobs, a church home, and all the blessings of redemption...and yet we obsess over the one thing that we are denied. That one thing robs us of our peace and joy. That one thing steals away our contentment. That one thing leads us to question the goodness of God. What pitiful ingrates we are!”¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ George Swinnock, *The Incomparableness of God*, IV: 493-494.

¹⁵ Johnson, *Identity and Attributes*, 253.