

# THE GOODNESS OF GOD

## “gracious Savior”

### Key question

Is God really good?

### Key text

## Psalm 103:8

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

### Introduction

1. God is revealed in Genesis one and two as a great Creator God (Elohim) and as a good Covenant maker God (Yahweh).
  2. God’s moral purity, faithfulness, and love constitute the attributes that we as His children are called to emulate. This is the part of His image that we are to bear witness to in our lives.
  3. It is significant that in the temptation of Eve (Gen.3), it is the goodness not the greatness of God that is challenged by the serpent. It might also be noted that Jesus was sensitive to the tendency to question the goodness of God in passages like Luke 11:11-13.
  4. You might ask yourself:
    - a. How has the goodness of God been challenged in my experience?
    - b. Are there Biblical examples that bring into question the goodness of God? The lives of the Apostles, Prophets, and Messiah might serve as examples.
    - c. How does Paul, for example, deal with this question in Romans eight?
  5. We can fall into two errors if we are not careful:
    - a. We can deny that good and evil exist as in Buddhism.
    - b. We can define goodness in a narrow worldly way - my happiness, agreement with my perceptions, and being served.
  6. It is helpful to realize that the broken world in which we live is the best possible environment for the display of **all** of God’s attributes together.
- A. **The Goodness of God** (These are the basic benchmarks of goodness for any society.)
1. **Moral Purity (Humane)** - God is not defiled by sin or evil.
    - a. **Holiness** - God is perfectly good in contrast to a fallen creation that is not.
      1. There are two aspects to God’s holiness.
        - a. His **majestic** holiness - His uniqueness and separateness from His creation.
          1. Ex.15:11 “Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

2. This aspect of God's holiness is transferred to objects, people, and places associated with Him - burning bush of Moses in Ex.3, Holy of holies in the temple Ex.26:33
3. The priest's were holy not only because of their behavior but most particularly because of their position as priest of God.
4. The "holiness movement" in Evangelical tradition sometimes defines "perfection" in terms of consecration to a position (like the OT priests).
- b. His **moral** holiness - His purity with respect to the sinfulness of the world. Jas.1:13 "for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."
  1. I Jn.1:5 "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."
  2. We are called to be holy. I Pet.1:15 "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" II Cor.6:14-7:1; I Thess.3:13; 4:7; Eph.5:27; Matt.5:48
2. The context of the gospel story.
  - a. The Temple and its offerings were designed to teach Israel that God was holy.
  - b. The sacrificial system of the Old Covenant with its substitutionary offerings set the stage for the cross.
  - c. The crucifixion of Jesus satisfied the demands of a holy God with respect to sin allowing all who are in Christ by faith to have access to God.
3. The challenge to the Christian.
  - a. We are holy (positionally) in the sense that we are set aside as a kingdom of priests "in Christ." This is the way Paul most often uses the word. I Cor.1:2 "saints by calling" (In the Greek text the word "saint" comes from the word "holy.") I Cor.3:17 "for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."
  - b. Because we are indwelt with the Spirit of God we are to be holy. I Cor.6:20 "For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."
- b. **Righteousness** - God's holiness is applied to relationships. He fulfills the moral demands of His law perfectly.
  1. God's righteousness has to do with the integrity with which He honors His moral law in His relationships. He does not say one thing and do another.
    - a. Ps.19:7-9; Jer.9:24;
    - b. What is "right?" Is something right because God does it or is the standard of righteousness something that God chooses to submit his actions to? God is true to his nature which is perfectly righteous. This righteousness however must be understood in the grand scheme of things over the whole of God's purpose.
    - c. The essence of sin is not preferring ourselves to others but rather preferring some finite thing to God.
    - d. God relates to his creation with perfect integrity. All of His attributes come together in His relationships through righteousness. He does right by all.
  2. We are called to be righteous.
    - a. This is the theme of Romans.
      1. Chapters 1-11 "God's righteousness expressed toward us in Christ."
      2. Chapters 12-16 "God's righteousness expressed through us to others."
    - b. Paul most often uses the word to denote our position in Christ by faith. Rom.4:5 "faith is counted for righteousness"

- c. But he reminds us that we are to “follow after righteousness, love, peace, and faith” II Tim.2:22
- c. **Justice** - God is fair in the administration of His goodness to others. This attribute is closely related to “righteousness.” It is the social expression of the more general attribute of righteousness.
1. This attribute describes God’s holiness as it relates to the enforcing of the moral covenants that He has revealed.
    - a. Ps.73 highlights the prosperity of the wicked. How does this square with God’s justice? God’s justice must be understood in the scope of eternity. There will not always be justice in this life. This issue will be discussed further in chapter 19.
    - b. It is God’s sense of justice that demands the cross of Christ and the faith of His people. Rom.3:21-26
  2. We are called to be just. Jas.2:9; Amos 5:15, 24
    - a. While social justice is a high priority in the inner workings of the covenant community (the church), it is also to be promoted in the broader society. We will say more about this in the notes that come with our study of chapter 36.
    - b. The difference between liberal and conservative Christians on this issue has to do with the extent to which social justice can be expected apart from regeneration.
2. **Truth (Honesty)** - God is identified with truth.
- a. **Genuineness** - God is the real God, not a false god.
    1. Jn.17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” I Thess.1:9; I Jn.5:20; Rev.3:7
    2. God is reliable in His character and actions. He will prove to be perfectly true to His nature. We may misunderstand Him but this does not detract from his genuineness.
    3. We are called to be genuine - to present ourselves honestly to others and to God. Walking in the light (I Jn.1) is simply walking in reality.
  - b. **Veracity** - God tells the truth. God represents things as they really are.
    1. Heb.6:18 “two unchangeable things, in which **it is impossible that God should prove false.**”
    2. God’s revelation is trustworthy and consistent with His character. Our challenge is to interpret that revelation correctly.
    3. We are called to be true to our word. Eph.4:25 “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”
  - c. **Faithfulness** - God vindicates Himself as true to His word. He comes through.
    1. Num.23:19 “**God is not man, that he should lie**, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” I Thess.5:24 “He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” I Cor.1:9; II Cor.1:18-22; II Tim.2:13; I Pet.4:19
    2. We face a difficulty in that we do not see the whole picture nor do we have a very deep or long time perspective. This can lead us to call into question the faithfulness of God. It seems to us that He is not always acting as we expected.
    3. We are called to be faithful.
3. **Love (Heroic)** - God is identified with compassion.
- a. **Benevolence** - God seeks the good of those loved.

1. **I Jn.4:7-8** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. the one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.**”
2. God is not selfish in asking us to love him in that it is his essence and image in us that constitutes true reality and value.
3. This love is extended to:
  - a. All creatures - Matt.6:26,28; 10:29
  - b. All people - Matt.5:45; Acts 14:17
4. Key texts
  - Lk 15 (three parables of God’s love)
  - Jn.3:16 The classic verse of God’s love.
  - Rom.5:6-10
  - I Jn.4:7-16
3. We are called to be benevolent to others. I Cor.13
- b. **Grace** - God does not bestow blessings on the basis of merit but in spite of our delinquency.
  1. Key texts
    - Eph.1:5-8; 2:7-9
    - Titus 2:11; 3:4-7
    - Ps.116:5
  2. God showers unmerited blessing on those who do not deserve it.
  3. The doctrine of grace is one of the grand themes in the Scripture and one of the uniquenesses of the gospel story.
  4. We are called to be gracious to others. Eph.4:30-32
- c. **Mercy** - God responds to our pain with comfort and relief.
  1. Key texts:
    - Ps.57:10; 86:5; 103:13
    - Mk.1:41; 6:34
  2. God’s heart is to show mercy on those who otherwise deserve harsh treatment. His harsh treatment of individuals or groups is to be understood in the context of the long term best interest of the welfare of His creation.
  3. We are called to be merciful to others. Matt.18:21-35
- d. **Persistence** - God is long-suffering.
  1. Key texts:
    - Ps.86:15
    - Rom.2:4; 9:22
    - I Pet.3:20
    - II Pet.3:9,15
  2. The nature of God’s love produces longsuffering and persistence in relating to His creation according to His purposes for it.
  3. We are called to be forbearing with others. Eph.4:2

God’s attributes	Jesus’ life	Our lives
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Holiness	I Jn.1:5	I Pet.1:15
Righteousness	Matt.3:15	II Tim.2:22
Justice	Matt.5:18	Jas.2:9
Genuineness	Jn.17:3	I Jn.1:6-7
Veracity	Jn.1:9-13	Eph.4:25
Faithfulness	I Cor.1:9	I Cor.4:2
Benevolence	Jn.13:34	I Cor.13
Grace	Jn.1:17	Eph.4:30-32
Mercy	Jn.8:3-11	Matt.18:21-35
Persistence	LK.19:10	Eph.4:2

## B. **Two challenging questions**

### 1. **How do we see God as good?**(a problem of perception and expectation)

- a. What constitutes “goodness”?
  1. The world teaches us to define goodness in terms of what will make me happy (not holy), affirm my perceptions (not truth), and serve my interests (not self sacrificing love).
  2. God has revealed to us in the Scriptures a lot about what constitutes “goodness”. Goodness is not a complete mystery nor can it be reduced to whatever happens as decreed by God.
- b. What are we to make of life’s pain and suffering when it does not seem to have a redemptive purpose?
  1. It is important to note that not everything that involves pain is a problem. Both an athlete and a slave may exhaust their bodies in hard work but with very different hopes.
  2. In Rom.8:18 Paul looks ahead to the glory of fellowship with Christ and finds power to endure suffering in this life.
  3. There is comfort in knowing that suffering is temporary.

### 2. **How do we become good?**

- a. This subject will be explored in more detail in chapter 34 (Sanctification).
- b. We must be willing to make peace with the fact that God really is good even when we can not see the purpose in suffering.
- c. We must trust God even when we can not see the purpose in suffering (Job).
- d. We must be willing to cooperate with Christ’s Spirit in bearing fruit in our lives.

### **The Point**

The goodness of God is revealed most fully in the life of Jesus.

## **Response**

## Head

### **I am to understand that:**

God is good even though my shortsighted perspective may not fully see it.

## Heart

### **I am to believe that:**

God has only good intentions for those He loves.

## Hands

### **I am to behave by:**

Responding to life's trials with patience, grace, and confidence that good will come from them.

## Pastoral advice

### **How can one cultivate a healthy concept of God?**

1. Our experience with authority figures early in life (especially with parents) will play an important role in shaping our relationship with God. For this reason the home is very important in the Christian life, especially the role of the father.
2. If there are distorted images of God that need to be corrected, one should ask the Holy Spirit for help. His role is to reveal the image of Jesus to us. Jesus is the manifestation of God.
3. A congregation must be careful to respect all the attributes of God and help individuals encounter them in the proper context. For example the grace and truth of God that are revealed in Christ are of first importance in the Christian life.
4. When we are tempted to judge God as an abusive parent (telling us He loves us and then allowing terrible things to befall us) we must remember that Jesus and the Apostles had equally good reasons to doubt God's love when they looked at their circumstances, yet they sensed that He loved them. We must long for and seek out their kind of relationship with God.

### **Questions that you should be able to answer.**

1. **Specific facts you should know.**
  - a. What texts speak of the love and grace of God?
  - b. What texts in the NT speak of the wrath of God?
2. **Issues that you should be able to discuss.**
  - a. Which of God's attributes are capable of being manifested in the lives of His people?
  - b. How do Christ's holiness and love work together in the cross?

**3. Questions you should wrestle with.**

- a. How can a powerful and loving God allow suffering that is apparently unjustified?
- b. How can God's love be seen in suffering?