

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Goodness of God Lesson #10

The goodness of God is usually seen by theologians as a very general, overarching attribute of God. For instance, Erickson lists holiness, righteousness, justice, genuineness, veracity, faithfulness, benevolence, grace, mercy, and God's persistence (in loving us) under the general topic of "God's goodness." It is also true that God's goodness is seen as one of His "moral" attributes. Berkhof, under the general topic of God's moral attributes, lists God's goodness and lists love, grace, mercy, and longsuffering as subcategories under goodness. In this study we will look at the general attribute of God's goodness and seek encouragement and hope for our everyday lives from the knowledge that God is good.

I. DEFINITION OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD

A. Louis Berkhof has written,

"The goodness of God should not be confused with His kindness, which is a more restricted concept. We speak of something as good, when it answers in all parts to the ideal. Hence in our ascription of goodness to God the fundamental idea is that He is in every way all that He as God should be, and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word "God." . . . The goodness of God towards His creatures in general . . . may be defined as that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures."¹

B. Thomas Manton says of God's goodness,

"He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a super-added quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him."²

C. A. W. Tozer writes,

"The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unflinching attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people."³

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 70.

² Thomas Manton as quoted by A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 57.

³ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg. 82.

II. ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD'S GOODNESS

Thomas Watson has said,

"The goodness of God works for good to the godly. God's goodness is a means to make us good. "*The goodness of God leads to repentance*" (Rom. 2:4). The goodness of God is a spiritual sunbeam to melt the heart into tears. Oh, says the soul, has God been so good to me? Has he reprieved me so long from hell, and shall I grieve His Spirit any more? Shall I sin against goodness? The goodness of God works for good, as it ushers in all blessings. The favors we receive are the silver streams which flow from the fountain of God's goodness."⁴

III. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT GOD'S GOODNESS

A. C. H. Spurgeon has said,

"When others behave badly to us, it should only stir us up the more heartily to give thanks unto the Lord, because *He is* good; and when we ourselves are conscious that we are far from being good, we should only the more reverently bless Him that *He is* good. We must never tolerate an instant's unbelief as to the goodness of the Lord; whatever else may be questioned, this is absolutely certain, Jehovah is good; His dispensations may vary, but His nature is always the same."⁵

B. A. W. Tozer writes,

"Divine goodness, as one of God's attributes, is self-caused, infinite, perfect, and eternal. Since God is immutable He never varies in the intensity of His loving-kindness. He has never been kinder than He now is, nor will He ever be less kind. He is no respecter of persons but makes His sun to shine on the evil as well as on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. The cause of goodness is in Himself; the recipients of His goodness are all His beneficiaries without merit and without recompense."⁶

C. J. I. Packer notes,

"God is good to all in some ways and to some in all ways."⁷

4 Thomas Watson, *All things for Good*, pg. 15.

5 C. H. Spurgeon as quoted by A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 60.

6 A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg. 83.

7 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 147.

IV. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR GOD'S GOODNESS

- A. Exod. 33:18-19 – “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.””
- B. Psa. 27:13-14 – “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord In the land of the living. 14 Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord.”
- C. Psa. 31:19 – “How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You, Which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men!”
- D. Psa. 34:8 – “O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”
- E. Psa. 119:68 – “You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes.”
- F. Psa. 145:7-16 – “They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. 9 The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works. 10 All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, And Your godly ones shall bless You. 11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom And talk of Your power; 12 To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts And the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations. 14 The Lord sustains all who fall And raises up all who are bowed down. 15 The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time. 16 You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.”
- G. Nah. 1:7 – “The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him.”
- H. Matt. 6:25-34 -- “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? 27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 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! 31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you

need all these things. 33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

- I. Mark 10:18 – “And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”
- J. 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.”
- K. Rom. 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.”

V. **ERRORS CONCERNING GOD'S GOODNESS**

- A. Error -- God is not good because there is suffering and sorrow in the world.
- B. Error -- God is not good because He executes judgment.
- C. Error -- God is not good because I am not happy.
- D. Error -- God is not good because I have experienced severe trials and tribulation in my life.

VI. **APPLICATION OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD**

- A. When we are suffering, we should thank God for His goodness in never making us suffer as much as we deserve.
- B. When we see God's judgment executed, we should be thankful for the goodness of God that causes Him to deal justly with those who have rejected His Son, and mercifully with those who have accepted it.
- C. We should remember to thank God all the time for His goodness. For God is not only good when things are good for us, but He is always good, even when things are bad for us.
- D. God is so good, that He causes bad things to work together for our good. As Thomas Watson has said, “God can strike a straight blow with a crooked stick.”
- E. It is by the most painful things in life that God often brings about the most good; the death of Christ, the discipline of the Lord, the death of the godly, endurance

producing trials, testing of our faith, blessings from being persecuted for righteousness sake, are transformed by God's goodness into grace.

- F. The goodness of God is best observed against the dark backdrop of our sins and depravity. We tend to forget we are sinners, that God is just, and that we deserve to perish in hell forever. Meditation on our own depravity and the multitude of our sins, followed by the goodness we have received from the Lord and the ocean of goodness that follows, should move us to thankful praise.

“How happy are tried Christians, afterwards. No calm more deep than that which succeeds a storm. Who has not rejoiced in clear shinings after rain? Victorious banquets are for well-exercised soldiers. After killing the lion, we eat the honey; after climbing the Hill Difficulty, we sit down at the arbor to rest; after traversing the Valley of Humiliation, after fighting with Apollyon, the shining one appears, with the healing branch from the tree of life.

Our sorrows, like the passing keels of the vessels upon the sea, leave a silver line of holy light behind them "afterwards." It is peace, sweet, deep peace, which follows the horrible turmoil which once reigned in our tormented, guilty souls.

See, then, the happy estate of a Christian! He has his best things last, and he therefore in this world receives his worst things first. But even his worst things are "afterward" good things, harsh ploughings yielding joyful harvests. Even now he grows rich by his losses, he rises by his falls, he lives by dying, and becomes full by being emptied; if, then, his grievous afflictions yield him so much peaceable fruit in this life, what shall be the full vintage of joy "afterwards" in heaven?

If his dark nights are as bright as the world's days, what shall his days be? If even his starlight is more splendid than the sun, what must his sunlight be? If he can sing in a dungeon, how sweetly will he sing in heaven! If he can praise the Lord in the fires, how will he extol him before the eternal throne! If evil be good to him now, what will the overflowing goodness of God be to him then?

Oh, blessed "afterward!" Who would not be a Christian? Who would not bear the present cross for the crown which cometh afterwards? But herein is work for patience, for the rest is not for to-day, nor the triumph for the present, but "afterward." Wait, O soul, and let patience have her perfect work.”⁸

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Evening reading May 18th.