

Goodness

“‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good except God alone’” (Luke 19:18).

Christians say, “God is good, all the time.” This truth, I sadly observe, has become just a slogan. So let me ask, What does it *mean* that God is “good”? Does it simply mean that He’s not evil? Or does it mean more than that? We who love God should understand what God’s goodness means. We probably won’t be able to do more here than begin such a quest, for I suspect God’s goodness is too exalted, too transcendent for any mortal to grasp. But let’s try.

God is a living Person. And persons have moral attributes. God’s infinite Person means His Creation is suffused with morality: It has a moral foundation, moral meaning, and moral purposes. In this intensely moral scheme of things, there are only two options, good and evil. There is no neutral stance, nor any possibility of switching from one to the other, back and forth. God is infinitely good, for that’s His character. His goodness is glorious.

God’s own attributes are all good: Truth, justice, love, holiness, wisdom, faithfulness and immutability, for example. God’s goodness describes all His attributes, such as patience and self-control, and even the so-called omni’s, as well as all His acts in history. He is, Himself, personally and inherently good as well as expressing goodness. His creational intent to bless creatures made in His image supremely indicates His intrinsic goodness. All goodness in this creation derives from God. There is no other goodness. No good exists apart from God; He’s the source and standard of all good. Good is what conforms to His character and will. The original creation was declared to be “very good” for it expressed a good God’s handiwork.

Where evil came from is not revealed, but it exists too. Good and evil are not equal opposites. Evil is transient, limited to the time of this physical creation, whereas good is eternal. Also, evil is expressed as a willful choice by created beings only, unlike good, which is expressed inherently by God and those who willfully imitate God. God’s goodness will eventually prevail over evil, for that’s what goodness demands, and evil must be disposed of, banished from all existence. God is able to bring about good from evil (Genesis 45 and 50:20); but it’s an absurd and false claim that evil must exist so we can know what’s good.

Goodness is not just the opposite of evil, although of course it is that. It stems from God’s will, for sure, but I suspect that God’s goodness may also be more than an abstract moral quality (see and reflect on Psalm 31:19), although what or how it can be that far exceeds my intellectual capacities. I’m not being pantheistic in saying that God’s goodness may be His Person expressing itself in this physical world. Philosophers who allege that goodness is either intuitive or subjective are fools. Scientists who explain origins with evolution and billions of years are being deliberately anti-theistic because their claim impugns God’s goodness.

Now, goodness is not the same as love. Goodness has to do with morality, with what’s right, whereas love is a relational term. Or, let’s say it this way: Love is goodness being expressed in relationships. Love is God giving of Himself to bless others, for the good of others. Likewise, justice is goodness necessarily being expressed in the context of evil; even when sending evil-doers to hell, God is good.

God’s goodness is on glorious display in His creation. **“The earth is full of His goodness”** (Psalm 33:5). All the physical parameters that cause this cosmos to function express God’s goodness. So does the marvel of our bodies—indeed, our very being—and the physiology that makes life possible. His wisdom and sense of beauty in making this world likewise point to His goodness. The immense varieties of kinds (and colors) of birds, fish, butterflies, trees, fruits, celestial objects, and animals—all to delight His beloved human creatures as well as Himself—indicate goodness. The very fact of creation indicates purposefulness, which also manifests His goodness; God has only good purposes. His making creatures that are dependent on Him and His provision for their needs express His goodness. God’s revealing His infinite and invisible self to His time-and-space-bound

creatures by means of Scripture reflects His goodness. His desire to have creatures in fellowship with Himself bountifully expresses God's goodness. Totally apart from the Fall into sin and our need for redemption, God's goodness is tangibly evident. God's goodness can be found everywhere, if we just look for it. If we were to ask Job at the end of Chapter 42 if his suffering was worth it, his reply would probably be, "God is good. All the time. With all my being, I love God."

God's goodness is on display in the acts that are narrated right there in the opening Book of the Bible: God's clothing the first couple with animal skins, delaying deserved death for that couple and their wicked son Cain; preserving Noah and his family (and the entire human race); dispersing humanity to mitigate the effects of sin; the call of Abraham to take blessing to the nations; the repeated preservation of the Patriarchs and then the entire people of Israel in Egypt. It continues on all thru the Old Testament Scriptures, which may be conceived as a record of God's goodness to a failed and undeserving, rebellious humanity. (Paul recounts the ways God showed His goodness to Israel in Romans 9:4,5.) And that goodness will come to a climax in the future when the Messianic Kingdom is established on earth. The overwhelming goodness of God then will be manifest in all its glory to all the world.

But it's in the domain of redemption that God's goodness is so wonderfully on display. The entry of evil into God's beautiful creation necessitated a display of goodness that supremely expressed God's glory. Good must overcome and defeat evil. While God's justice results in judgment, God's kindness is expressed in mercy and grace. Salvation for certain ones. God shows **"the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his goodness to us in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:7; see also Colossians 2:13-20). Paul wrote to Titus, **"When the goodness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us . . . because of His mercy"** (3:4,5). God responds to evil with something far superior: An overwhelming outpouring of good.

Thus election. And regeneration. And justification, adoption, the filling of the Spirit, the gift of resurrection life, sanctification, and glorification. And eternal blessing. All this is God's great work of showering goodness, His own goodness, upon undeserving rebellious creatures. He made humans in His image, but He exceeds even that act of goodness with greater, unimaginably wonderful goodness. It's all a result of the most amazing thing in all history, an act of inconceivable goodness: God sent the Son into this world of evil, a world of violence, hatred and lies, to mediate goodness. The voluntary sacrifice of the Son to atone for all sin and evil on Calvary is goodness so supernal that it's beyond comprehension. And so God's glory is revealed, put on full display: The splendor of His ineffable Person.

Now someone will argue, But what about all the horrors and misery in this world all thru human history? Where's God's goodness in all that? My answer, not meant to demean the suffering millions upon millions have had to experience (and still do), is . . . resurrection! God allows evil to take its course for His purposes, knowing that all will one day be raised again to life. Death only ends physical life, it doesn't end one's existence. Let's get this: The God of Scripture is no Deist god. He sovereignly controls and orders all circumstances of life for certain purposes that are revealed, such as the perfection of our souls, and for other purposes that remain hidden in His will. For the one who loves God, everything that happens—*everything*—is for good (Romans 8:28).

I conclude this study with this: Anyone who has received the goodness of God is under obligation to show goodness to others. If we're following Jesus, God's goodness is ours to share because of the empowering, indwelling Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). We're to clothe ourselves with goodness (Colossians 3:12). **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,"** Paul commands us (Romans 12:21, see also Ephesians 2:10 and 1 Thess 5:21,22). God's great work in this current era is for us, His adopted children, to live out His incomparable goodness in this wicked world. By doing that we participate in His great, cosmic defeat of evil, and we exalt the Son. It's why we're here.