

## The Goodness of God

Psalm 145:1-21; Titus 3:1-8;  
Luke 6:27-36

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

Stephen Charnock (who I have referred to quite a bit, he's the author of the famous and fat book (s) entitled: Existence and Attributes of God) calls the goodness of God the captain attribute. By which he means it is the attribute that is the source, which leads and directs, the other attributes. Another way to put this is to say that, when it comes to the ethical attributes of God (like love, grace, patience, mercy), goodness has a certain foundational role, a certain ethical priority.

Now it may feel like we make claims like this for nearly every attribute, and there is some truth to that. Because God is One, because he is simple and without parts, because he is his attributes, and doesn't have his attributes like we do, there is a good deal of overlap or interpenetration in the way Scripture speaks of the attributes. So, when we say goodness has a certain foundational role, we just mean that it is often the thing which is appealed to, in order to show us God's character, his moral nature, even his essence. Through the prism of goodness we can learn, we can peer into God, as he is in himself, and God, as he is in his works. For, as Psalm 119 puts it: God IS good, and he DOES good.

Thus, we will look at God's goodness under three headings. God's goodness, Common Goodness, and Saving Goodness.

### I. God's Goodness

First, then, God's goodness. God IS good. Emphasis on IS. Goodness is not a quality God has; it is his essence. Scripture repeatedly affirms this essential goodness. Psalm 34: taste and see that the Lord is good. Psalm 100 (opening hymn): Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. Psalm 25: Good and upright is the Lord. Psalm 106, 107, 136 all say: Give thanks to the Lord for he IS good.

God, then, is perfectly, infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, good. He is goodness itself. He is goodness, and the source of all other goodness. Thus the tradition speaks of God as the *summum bonum*, the highest good. The greatest Good.

Let's try and define this goodness. Negatively, it means there is in God, no malice, no cruelty, no viciousness, no undue harshness. Not a shred of moral evil or ugliness. Stated positively, it means God is kind, gentle, gracious, generous (bountiful, beneficent, caring toward his creatures). There is, also, a sweetness and a loveliness in God's being.

And here we should note that the idea of the goodness of God, and the various ways the word is used in Scripture, indicate that it is both moral – God is ethically good – and aesthetic --- God is beautiful, resplendent in his being. So unique is God in his goodness that when someone says to Jesus: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." There is only one who is good. It's almost as if all other goodness vanishes. But the point is that God alone is intrinsically, essentially good. All other things are good by participating in God's goodness. They have no independent goodness. There is no spark of goodness anywhere of which he is not the source. Whether it is the goodness of a person, or a plant or a food, or a sunny day, it is good because it partakes of God's own goodness (in a creaturely way).

Charnock puts this in a much more delightful form, saying: He contains in himself, the sweetness of all other goods, and holds in his bosom plentifully what creatures have in their natures sparingly. Thus we reason, we move from effects back to the cause, from the limited goods we see in creation back to God the fountain and cause of all that is good.

Charnock again: *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 those views and tastes but that of the Psalmist? And here he cites Psalm 73: Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon the earth that I can desire beside Thee? No greater good can possibly be desired and – notice this – no less good should be ardently desired.*

Two things should be noted about this remark. First, we move from the creation to the Creator. From creaturely gifts to the Divine Giver. Second, to not recognize that the created order is a pointer, something like a sacrament, pointing away from itself and to God, and to have one's affections terminate on created things, to ardently desire lesser goods, even though they be good, is idolatry. A robust doctrine of God will relativize (shrink) all other loves, all other concerns. Why obsess over secondary goods when you have access to the *summum bonum*?

One final thing on the supreme importance of God's intrinsic goodness. We would all agree that God is intrinsically glorious and that his glory is of cardinal importance. Yet, when Moses said, in Exodus 33: Please show me your glory. God said, "I will make all my GOODNESS pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' God's goodness, is his glory, is his name, is his very Godness. God IS good.

## II. Common Goodness

Secondly, let's look at how God who is good, does good. First we will do this by looking at what I have called his common goodness. It is, we have said, part of this goodness to include generosity and beneficence. The Good of God, who stands in need of nothing, freely desires to share his goodness, to diffuse it, to spread it abroad. And thus he creates. And in creating, his goodness overflows. So, we see throughout the creation account in Genesis 1, that God sees that it is good. And at the end, having created man in his image, male and female, it is very good. Indeed it is an Edenic Paradise. Where the trees can be described as both pleasing to the sight and good for food. There is the aesthetic dimension of goodness.

Creation is structurally, physically, visibly pleasing – as well as being useful, good, for man. As Paul puts it in 1 Timothy 4: everything created by God is good. And this goodness, even after the fall, remains visible. Psalm 19 tells us the heavens still declare the glory of God, and Romans 1 says the whole created order shows us his divine nature. God continues to pour out, to abundantly diffuse this goodness, through his providentially sustaining and ordering his creation.

This goodness is shown to all, and thus we call it common grace (Not saving grace, but a common manifestation of God's goodness to his creatures). Here the field is wide, for the whole created realm of human beings and animals and things, is the theatre of God's incessant goodness. Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights. The same God who made the heavenly lights, the stars.

And Jesus himself speaks of this common goodness, and draws profound and challenging implications from it: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For – here's the reason – he is kind to the ungrateful and evil, he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Sunshine and rain. All the goods of this life: marriage, children, shelter, food, sun and rain etc. God spreads them abroad. Not everybody gets the same amount, but even if it's inscrutable to us, nevertheless God's goodness is promiscuous, it's indiscriminate, it is common, and lavished upon the creation.

Here's Paul, preaching in Acts 14: *Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good, by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.* And later, in Athens, he says: *he himself gives to all mankind, life, and breath, and everything.*

Everything. That's a lot of things. Too many to delineate in one sermon. The goodness of God is not miserly. God doesn't hoard it. Psalm 65 has a lovely, rich description of this good providence:

*You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.*

Put more simply, from Psalm 145: *The Lord is good to all, his mercy is over all that he has made. And this all includes the animal kingdom.*

Here's Psalm 145 a bit later: *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

Every living thing. Every living thing is a recipient of God's goodness. He feeds the birds of the air, and clothes the flowers of the field, Jesus says (drawing out of this profound teaching about our anxieties). Psalm 104 says all creatures look to God, to give them their food in due season. When he gives it to them, they gather it up; when he opens his hand, they are filled with good things. That's common goodness, abundant and often overlooked or taken for granted.

### **III. God's Saving Goodness**

Finally, let's look at God's saving goodness. We can consider this, first, as an aspect of God's providence. Our confession says that while God's providence is general, and reaches to all creatures, still, in a most special manner, it takes care of his church, and disposes all things to its good. All things work together for (notice) good, for those who are called according to his purpose. In all the trials and afflictions of his people, others may have malicious intent, as Joseph's brothers did with him, yet God means them for our good. Always.

It is an aspect of his goodness, his longsuffering patience, his rich kindness, which even leads us to repentance. Then, as our Shepherd, it is his goodness and mercy which follow us all our days. Those who seek the Lord, we are promised, lack no good thing. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. All the goodness of God, seen and tasted by all, since the beginning of the world, pointed forward to what the Book of Hebrews called the good things to come. The goodness of the new covenant in Jesus.

Finally, then, this goodness, diffused throughout the whole cosmos, is distilled, condensed, into one person. Goodness becomes flesh in Jesus Christ, the GOOD shepherd. Who, Acts tells us, went about doing good. Listen to how Paul describes the appearance of our Lord from Titus 3:

*But when the GOODNESS and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

It is the GOODNESS of God our Savior which appears in Jesus Christ, which saves, which pours out richly that most excellent gift of the Spirit. This goodness exceeds God's goodness in creation. For this goodness will come at an agonizing, unspeakable cost. This is goodness which will be bruised and crushed, disfigured and killed, for our sake. Here God shows us greater goodness, than he does, for a time, to his Son. And this is a goodness that restores us, not merely to Edenic conditions, to our original unfallen state. No, this is a goodness which elevates us to something much higher than Adam enjoyed – that is, to heavenly, eschatological glory.

To the glory Adam, and the creation, would have enjoyed, had he obeyed. To face to face, unveiled communion with God, who is goodness itself. From his goodness, and through his goodness, and unto his goodness (our goal and aim) are all things. And thus, by this goodness, we are called to be, and to do, good, and thus to the imitation of God in Jesus Christ. We are to be now, by the Spirit, diffusers of the divine goodness in the world. For goodness is a fruit of the Spirit.

So Paul exhorts the church: Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Everyone means everyone. Love your enemies, do GOOD to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Jesus said. Paul says much the same in Romans 12: do not be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good. If you do good to those who do good to you, Jesus says, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

And yet, goodness does begin at home, and find its center in the household of faith. With all of the commands of the NT to love, to forgive, to forbear, to show kindness and patience to the saints. To visit the sick, the poor, the brothers of Jesus, in need and distress, so that we might hear that great commendation on the last day: Well done, GOOD and faithful servant.

In short, we are to be GOOD and to be zealous for GOOD works. Rivers of good works are to flow from the church. Let us, then, receive the good creation, the good gifts, including the supreme gift of the Good shepherd, receive them all with gratitude. Indeed, God has richly given us all things to enjoy. For, He who did not

spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? All that we need to reflect his goodness. Let us heed Peter's call, then, to live beautiful lives. Lives which reflect the beauty and moral excellence, the goodness of God himself. For as John puts it: whoever does good is from God. Finally, let us trace every particle of created goodness back to God himself, the fountain of good, and thus, join the Psalmist, saying with joy: Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he IS good. Amen.

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