

King's Online Bible School

Doctrine 101: Learning about God — Spotlight Studies

(adapted from Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrines*, 90-92)

God is Good (Lesson 9)

1. Incorruptible Being

"Good" is the word we use to describe whatever is "worthy of approval."

When we say that God is good, we are really saying that Who He is, what He does, and what He says are worthy of *His Own* approval.

God's approval is the original and final standard of good, because He is absolute goodness and He knows Himself perfectly.

"Then Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!'"

"And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you' But He said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!'" (Exod 33:18-20)

God understands Moses' request to see His glory as a request to see Him. Explaining that Moses must not see His face, God complies with Moses' request to see His glory (to see Him) by revealing His goodness. In revealing His goodness to Moses, God reveals Himself to him. God and His goodness are one.

The essence of all that He approves is already recognized by Him in His Own character and actions.

The Law of God expresses and reflects His own goodness. God does not obey some cosmic law outside of Himself that judges Him. But God does obey a law. The law He obeys is the law of His Own character. He never acts in a way that is inconsistent with this law because He cannot be at odds with Himself or false to Himself. He always acts according to His own character, which is eternally, immutably, and intrinsically good.

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

2. "Good, Very Good, Not Good"

When God revealed the record of His creating work, He did so in a concise economy of words. His work and the resulting reality each day is specified within the repeated cause-and-effect formula: "And God said . . . and it was so."

But God interrupts His terse presentation of creation with a repeated comment about Himself. "And God saw that it was good." It is particularly important to Him that we notice His attentiveness to goodness and the total approval and satisfaction He expresses in His completed work: "God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Not only does everything God does correspond to the standard His character anticipates. In the more detailed report of man's and woman's creation that follows in Genesis 2, we see the Lord's perfect goodness in the work He has not done yet, but that must wait to be brought forth in the context and timing its full preciousness and value requires: "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18).

This is God's way and nothing less can be God's way in His constant, watchful care over every person He brings forth into this world. He is always taking pleasure in ensuring that the precise time and way in which He acts in our lives is worthy of His perfection's approval.

3. According to His Great Goodness

Goodness is the eternal principle of God's nature out of which He communicates of His own blessedness and excellence to all those He has made.

"The Lord is good to all" (Ps 145:9).

Because God is only good, we know that He is good to all His creatures. God is always good in all His ways with all men.

We see His gracious ways with men who do not acknowledge Him from the earliest history. He did not withhold natural abilities from Cain's descendants, after Cain went out from the presence of the Lord (Gen 4:16). By His enabling, Cain's descendants established animal husbandry, the arts, and metallurgy (4:20-22).

So it has been to this day in every field of human endeavor and accomplishment. God is the Source and Enabler of all the good (whether great and transforming or momentary and insignificant) that any of His creatures endeavor, achieve, practice, and experience.

a. God's love achieves its total satisfaction in being governed by His commitment to always only desire, think, will, and act in keeping with what is good — what is worthy of His approval.

God's nature is love (1 John 4:8). It is God's nature to act in such a way as to give freely and generously of His goodness for the blessing of His creatures.

b. His goodness to those in misery or distress is **God's mercy.**

“His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps 145:9).

“His mercy (lovingkindness) endures forever” (Ps 136).

“The Lord sustains all who fall,
And raises up all who are bowed down” (Ps 145:14).

c. His goodness toward those who don't deserve it is **God's grace.**

This same self-giving nature is constantly being expressed in every human life, even though men are, by nature, His enemies. In His determination to be good toward those who actually deserve His punishment, God chooses that which is most worthy of approval and determines to take our punishment on Himself in His Son.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“But God demonstrates His Own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23-24).

We receive the opposite of what we deserve.

“He Who did not spare His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32).

4. Worthy of my approval

As persons created in God's image, we are always responding to the wonders of God's good creation and to the realities we experience within us and all around us. We like, we dislike, we prefer, we desire. We are always evaluating. We approve; we disapprove.

"For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, . . . and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they [men] are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:20-22).

Whatever we decide is to our advantage or not to our advantage; whatever is to our liking or not to our liking; whatever we consider good or not good; whatever we determine to be worthy of our approval or not worthy of our approval — our physical features and personal characteristics; our capacities, relationships, abilities, circumstances, and experiences; life's ways, laws, duties — if it is what God has ordained and is bringing about in our lives, it is good and worthy of approval. God always only does good.

When God disciplines us, we find it hard, but He is only doing it because He is good and it is for our good (Heb 12:10). He cannot do less because He is faithful. He will not withhold from us anything that is good for us.

"It is good for me that I was afflicted,
That I may learn Thy statutes" (Ps 119:71).

God chose you before the foundation of the world. He designed you and gives you life and instructs you in it according to His provision for it to be the very best for you. It is the one life you have. This is your reality.

"For You formed my vital parts;
You wove me together in my mother's womb.
I give You thanks for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Your works are extraordinary
And my soul is knowing it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret.
I was skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth
Your eyes beheld my unseen substance.

And in Your book they were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them,

How precious are Your purposes for me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake and still I am with You" (Ps 139:13-18).

5. Better?

Because God is absolutely good and the Source of all good, **anything that is different than His will is evil by the very fact that it is different.** This is what evil is and how it exists: it is whatever is different than the will of God.

In the universe God created and through all eternity prior to creation, evil did not exist. There was no such thing until Lucifer desired more than the glory with which God had already created and endowed him.

In the garden of Eden, the serpent tempted the woman, telling her it was important to decide what is good. "Is it good for God to impose limitations? Is it right that He withholds knowledge from you? Is there something better for you? What would be best?"

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate" (Gen 3:6).

The moment the man decided that good was not good, the purity and innocence of nakedness, with which the couple was blessed and in which they were guarded, became a problem they could not accept, resolve, or cover. Mankind was locked into a need to form judgments about good at the same instant he compromised and ruined human nature so that it could never be good again.

"Transgression speaks to the ungodly in the innermost part of his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
For it flatters him in his own eyes
Concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it" (Ps 36:1-2).

In their need to accept themselves, individuals attempt to live in a way that is worthy of approval and conform their behavior to standards of law. But, convicted and aware of their compromises and failures, they resort to their own evaluations and adopt their own manageable standards of good.

"For when Gentiles do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Rom 1:14-15).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10). The only acceptable and safe response for mankind is to embrace His will and standard for human life and to be conformed to it. But we are helpless to rise above our preferences.

When Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to reconcile men to the Father, His first objective was to live so that His entire life was worthy of the Father's approval. This is what He desired and set His heart and will to do:

"When He comes into the world, He says, . . . "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Heb 10:5, 7).

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me" (John 8:30).

Jesus gave this "good" life of His in exchange for ours at the cross, and now He lives by His Spirit in each of us who receive Him, making our lives good and worthy of God's approval. He is the Second Adam, creating in Himself a new race that delights in doing our Father's good and perfect will. He delivers us from ourselves. He delivers us from evil.

6. Goodness — magnanimous and vulnerable

God is constantly reaching out to the persons He has created. He reveals Himself through all the wonders and beauty of His lavish universe and the vast variety of pleasures that we humans experience.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands . . .
Their line has gone out throughout all the earth,
And their utterances to the extremities of the world" (Ps 19:1, 4).

"Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made . . ." (Rom 1:19-20).

"I Am," the Invisible Source of all good, longs for His estranged creatures to respond to His many kindnesses and His attentive care.

"They all wait for You
To give them their food at the proper time.
You give to them, they gather it up;
You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good" (Psalm 104:28).

"They are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks, . . ." (Rom 1:20-21).

Worthy of their willing love and devotion, God endures their rejection and the ruinous results of their ways in their lives and in the world.

Because His goodness is absolute and perfect goodness, He has always determined to do more — to come into the world and suffer our evil. From beginning to end, it is with goodness that He relates to His creation and it is to goodness that He restores it.

7. Life worthy of approval

Sovereign Perfect Good must and will judge and punish the rejection and ruin of good.

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:4-5).

This is the fear in which our lives as His children must live before our Father. His good requires and rules our allegiance and repeated surrender, because in Christ He is present within us in His omnipotent grace for obedience.

“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” (Jms 1:17-18).

God's goodness is our inheritance. By His own will (John 1:13) we are born of His own seed (1 Peter 1:23). Christ's indwelling goodness is our source and has become our very nature.

We are recreated, expected, and commanded to "do good." "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).

“The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11).

8. Embracing Ultimate Good

Whom have I in heaven but Thee?
And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

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As for me, the nearness of God is my good (Ps 73:25-26, 28).

To live "for His sake" does not mean to do something for Him, but that He is present decreeing and acting goodness; and we, through whom He is doing so, yield ourselves.

A corresponding formula describing the reality of goodness in our lives would be:

- A. Yahweh is goodness.
- B. The good that exists does so because and as He exists, enabling it.

Therefore, C. All the goodness in our lives depends and draws on Him, whether knowingly or unknowingly — whether we are aware or not.

The goodness that flows out of Jesus' life in believers flows freely and gladly, conforming not only to God's character, but also to His heart's desire. We live Him and love to please Him.

In so doing, we arrive!

"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses, the servant of the LORD, commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Joshua 22:5).

"Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live" (Deut 30:6).

God's gift to us in His Son is life; it is nothing less than ultimate good.

God's gift to us in His Son is death — the cutting away of our self life that frees us to embrace our new life that loves Him freely and gladly.

"And in Him (Christ) you have been made complete, . . . and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead" (Col 2:10-12).

"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above."

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth" (Jms 1:17-18).