

The Goodness of God

Ellet J. Waggoner

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The expression, "God is good," is one that is in very common use among Christians, yet we are morally certain that very few receive the benefit from it that they might. To very many the expressions brings more dread than trust, and the reason is that they have an erroneous and limited, idea of what is meant by the term "good." They connect goodness with sternness or inflexible justice, having an incorrect idea even of justice. Many people look upon a good man as one who is so far above the common lot of people that he cannot sympathize with them. They feel as though he could not make any allowance for their infirmities. As a matter of fact, the opposite of this is the case. But with this false idea of goodness, it is no wonder that men are repelled from God. Be it known, however, that God does not repel any. Those who feel that they cannot approach God, have only themselves to blame, for the Bible declares that the goodness of God leads to repentance. Romans 2:4

From this passage it is evident that the term "goodness" includes more than simple stern virtues. Says Paul, in the passage just referred to: "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" To be good is to be kind and loving as well as virtuous.

This quality of goodness is brought out by the apostle in Romans 5:7: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die." Some might think this is a contradiction, but it is not. *The words "righteous" and "good" are entirely different.* The idea is that no matter how upright a man may be, no matter how honest, one would scarcely die for him; but some might be found who would be willing to die for a benevolent man, one whose whole life has been devoted to acts of kindness to others.

In the above paragraph we came near using the term "law-abiding" to express the character of the righteous man, whose virtues did not draw people to him in tender love. It would not have been really wrong to do so, for righteousness is right-doing, conformity to the law. And yet the righteousness which is not thoroughly permeated with kindness and tender love, is a righteousness that springs more from compliance with the letter of the law than with the spirit of it; for "love is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:10. The law of God is a law of love, for God is love.

In the thirteenth of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul gives some of the qualities of love, which is nothing but the keeping of the commandments of God. "Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil." All that God requires of us is conformity to his own character, yet we are exhorted to be "kind one to another, tender-hearted." In so doing we approach most nearly to the character of God, for he is the pattern of tenderness that is set before us. We are to forgive one another even as God hath for Christ's sake forgiven us.

"God is love." This does not mean that God has love for his creatures, but that he is love itself. Now since God is love, and his law is simply a transcript of his character, it follows that

goodness is tenderness; and when people feel to shrink from God because of his incomparable goodness, it shows that they are yet strangers to true goodness. Take all the knowledge you have either by experience of imagination, of kindness, gentleness, tenderness, and love, and multiply that by infinity, and you have the goodness of God which leads to repentance.

Perhaps the words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 5:19 may make the matter plainer to some: “that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” The whole world unites in praising the gentleness of Christ. He “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” Acts 10:38. The character of God is a most lovable one. How he sympathized with the suffering and the sinful! At the grave of Lazarus he wept; when he saw the multitude scattered as sheep having no shepherd, he was moved with compassion; when the loathsome leper came to him, he shrank not away, but touched him, imparting at once with that touch of sympathy and love both healing and forgiveness; and how wonderful is the tender compassion that is manifested in his dealing with the woman taken in adultery. Most of all does his love shine out at the close of his earthly career, when for those who had reviled him, mocked him, spit upon him, scourged him, mangled his head with thorns, and brutally crucified him, he prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!” Who that rightly considers his life and death can fail to be drawn towards him? And yet, “God was in Christ.” Christ was here simply as a representative of the Father; and so perfect was the resemblance that he could say, when asked to show the Father: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” John 14:9

The goodness of Christ is the goodness of the Father. Who can help feeling that the call, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” is like the reaching out of the mother’s arms for the tired child to nestle in her bosom? And yet when Christ uttered those words it was the voice of the Father speaking through him. So we see that the goodness of God, which leads to repentance, is gentleness; for tenderness, and gentleness alone can win, and God draws sinners to him. And this gentle goodness not only leads to repentance, but clothes the soul with strength, as David sings in the following wonderful verses: —

“He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great.” Psalm 18:34, 35

How much sorrow and unrest we get to ourselves from our failure to rightly understand the goodness of God! “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

“For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man’s mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

“If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be all sunshine,
In the sweetness of our Lord.”