



Lesson 6 – God Is Good

When we studied the love of God, we noticed it was hard to talk about love was because we use the word “love” in so many ways. We “love” everything from pizza to people. Similarly, the word “good” gets used all the time, for all kinds of things. You can have a good week, a good dinner, a good life, a good car, or a good time. In fact, Google’s entry for good includes seven different meanings! So when we talk about the goodness of God, what exactly does that mean?

How would you define good? How would that definition apply to God?

A helpful definition of goodness is “that which is acceptable, desirable, or beneficial.” In other words, when we say something is “good” we mean that it provides benefit or that it does what it is supposed to do. When God One verse that helps us think about God’s goodness is Psalm 119:68: “Thou art good, and doest good.” Goodness describes both the character of God and the work of God. The very essence and being of God is good, and therefore the actions that come from that God are likewise good. In this lesson, we will look first at the ways in which God’s character is good, and then we will see the good actions that flow from that character.

The Description of God’s Goodness

In what ways is God’s character good? Well, on one occasion in Scripture God specifically answered that question. When Moses asked to see the glory of God, God told him that He would hide Moses in the cleft of a rock, and that God would cause all His goodness to pass before Moses as He declared His name, or His character (Exodus 33:18-19). When this took place, God made the following declaration: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness [kindness] and truth [faithfulness], Keeping mercy [doing kindness] for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6-7).

In this definition we see five different aspects of the goodness of God: mercy, grace, patience, kindness, and faithfulness. Like a beam of light hitting a prism and splitting into different colors, the goodness of God is shown in various ways as He interacts with fallen creatures.

God’s Goodness Means God Is Merciful

The first way God describes Himself is “a God merciful.” This Hebrew word carries the idea of compassion or tenderness for another person. Often, this tenderness and compassion leads to showing kindness to those who are miserable because of their sin or because of their suffering (see Lesson 3 on God’s love for

a further explanation of this). God often holds back on His wrath because of His mercy (Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 78:38; 103:8), but God's mercy is also not unlimited or unconditional. God is merciful to those who humble themselves before Him (2 Chronicles 30:9), but for those who persist in their sin, He will execute judgment (Exodus 34:7). Paul goes so far as to warn those who reject God's goodness are storing up wrath for themselves (Romans 2:4-5). As one Puritan put it:

"Take heed of abusing the mercy of God. Suck not poison out of the sweet flower of God's mercy. Think not that because God is merciful, you may go on in sin; this is to make mercy your enemy... To sin because mercy abounds is the devil's logic... He that sins because of God's mercy, shall have judgment without mercy. Mercy abused turns to fury... Mercy is not for them that sin and fear not, but for them that fear and sin not." (Thomas Watson)

Why do you think many people miss this aspect of God's mercy? What happens when people come to take God's mercy for granted?

Why do you think God shows mercy?

God's Goodness Means God Is Gracious

God's graciousness refers to His divine favor. Back when kings ruled, you cared quite a lot what the king thought about you! Kings would often treat certain subjects well, while other subjects would be punished. Those the king treated well were said to have been in the king's favor, or grace (1 Kings 11:19; Esther 5:2). As we think about God, we find ourselves coming into the presence of the greatest King that has ever existed. Coming before Him, we recognize our sinfulness and rebellion, yet it is astonishing and a great comfort to know that as we stand before this king, we have His grace, His favor (Romans 8:31-32).

What does it mean that God favors us?

In what specific ways has God demonstrated His favor?

God's Goodness Means God Is Patient

Tied closely to God's mercy and grace is His patience. The English word longsuffering is a pretty good description of a patient person: someone who suffers long over the wrong things done to them before getting angry. The Hebrew idiom here could literally be translated "long-nosed," because when someone gets angry their nose gets hot, and so the idea is that it takes a long time for God's nose to get hot. Today we might say that God has a long fuse – He doesn't become angry quickly.

Using many of the words found in this description (mercy, grace, kindness), Jeremiah and Nehemiah would describe God as one who does not destroy His rebellious people because of His own good character:

Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God. Nehemiah 9:31

It is of the LORD's mercies [kindnesses] that we are not consumed, because his compassions [mercies] fail not. Lamentations 3:22

If God wanted to, He would be justified in harshly condemning all those who break His law with immediate punishment, and the result would be that we would be consumed. But God, being so very patient with us, chooses instead to show grace, mercy, and kindness.

Why do we struggle to show the same patience that God shows?

Can you think of Scriptural examples of the way God has demonstrated His patience throughout the Bible?

God's Goodness Means God Is Kind

The King James uses the word "goodness," but the word here translated is the Hebrew *chesed*. Although the exact meaning of this Hebrew word is debated,¹ the core idea is doing acts of kindness for others, usually for those that one loves and for those who are unable to help themselves. God's goodness towards us is seen in concrete acts of kindness.

What are some of the ways that God is kind to His creatures? To His children?

James paints a comical if not sad picture for us in James 2:15-16. He describes a fellow Christian who is starving and lacking adequate clothing coming to another believer asking for help. "Wow, that's awful. Hope you figure things out!" is all the response that he gets. No food. No clothing. No money. No help. James shows how ridiculous that would be. Such a person might claim to believe God, but their life betrays what they really think and value. God is nothing like that. When the Bible says He is kind, it means it. God's kindness is seen in our salvation, in the good things He brings to us, in the bad things He keeps us from, in all that happens in our life.

How do we square the kindness of God with difficult things that happen in our life?

God's Goodness Means God Is Faithful

Finally, God's goodness is seen in his faithfulness. The KJV "truth" can also be translated "faithfulness" or "faithful." When God declares to Moses that He is "truth" what that means is that He is true to what He has said. He will fulfill all His promises, God' doesn't say one thing and then do something else. He is totally faithful. If God were only sometimes good, or sometimes merciful, or compassionate, or kind, we would be in trouble! We would never know when we could approach God and when we should stay clear. But God doesn't change, and He is always faithful to His character, His Word, and His goodness.

Can you think of any instances in Scripture where God emphasizes His ongoing faithfulness to His own Word and character?

Why are we not more faithful like God?

¹ The King James translates this one Hebrew word with "mercy," "kind[ness]," "lovingkindness," "goodness," "favor," and others.

The Demonstration of God's Goodness

God is good, we've seen that. But He also does good. God's goodness leads Him to perform acts of kindness, compassion, and mercy towards His creatures. This is true especially of His children, but is also true of all those on earth. In this section, we will look at three specific ways in which God's goodness motivates God's actions.

God's Goodness Leads Him to Provide

James 1:17 is one of the most important verses on the goodness of God. It states unequivocally that God gives good gifts, and that all good gifts ultimately come from God. James has just finished warning his audience that sin brings death (1:12-15), he warns his audience not to be deceived (1:16) and reminds the audience those good things are found with God and God alone (1:17). God brings good things and God never changes, which means only God brings good things.

God's goodness flows, not just to believers, but to all those on earth. Jesus instructs His disciples to treat their enemies well by loving them, praying for them, and doing good to them (Matthew 5:43-44). The reason for this is that God treats all men well, even those who hate Him. Specifically, Jesus makes the point that wicked people and good people both get rain (Matthew 5:45), because God is good to all. In fact, by the end of this passage Jesus ties the perfection of God to His goodness to His enemies! (Matthew 5:48).

Why do people today doubt that God is the One providing for them?

What about other religions who credit their gods for giving them what they need? How should we as believers think about them?

How can we reflect the character of God by doing good to all and seeking to provide for all?

God's Goodness Leads Him to Protect

God protects His people from danger. This is true both physically (Psalm 121:5-7; Ezra 9:9) as well as spiritually (Luke 22:31; 1 John 5:8). God protects us from many physical dangers, even going so far as to "give his angels charge over [us]" (Psalm 91:9-14). This does not mean nothing bad will ever happen to Christians, but it does mean that God seeks to protect and care for His children in unique ways.

Why do some bad things still happen to God's people, even though He protects them?

But God also provides protection from dark spiritual forces opposed to us. We know that we "wrestle not against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). When it comes to spiritual forces, we are hopelessly outgunned. Even Michael the archangel was careful in dealing with Satan (Jude 14). But God protects us from attack, and nothing comes our way that hasn't come by Him first (Job 1:12; 2:6). This should lead to a cautious confidence. Cautious in that we are not reckless, but confident in that we realize with Christ we can resist the devil, and he will flee (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

What would recklessness look like in one's spiritual life?

What would cowardice look like in one's spiritual life?

God's Goodness Leads Him to Pardon

The passage describing God's we looked at earlier in Exodus 34 ends with several actions of God. After describing His character, the first action of God we read about is that God, in His goodness, forgives sins. Psalm 86:5 connects God's goodness and His desire to forgive sins. The greatest demonstration of the goodness of God was His willing sacrifice of His own Son on the cross to purchase our redemption from sin (Romans 5:8; 8:31-34). The world may question the goodness of God and wonder why He would let so much evil occur, but when we look at the cross we realize that God has taken evil very seriously, and His goodness has overflowed to the point where He sacrificed His own Son to save us.

Why do you think God's pardoning is the only of these three actions that God emphasized with Moses?

How does the judgment of God seen in the last few sentences of Exodus 34:6-7 tie in with the goodness of God?

What other actions does God take because of His goodness?

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God told Moses that He would allow His goodness to pass before him. The glory and splendor of God is truly seen in His goodness, the fact that He is merciful, gracious, patient, kind, and faithful. He is a good who provides, protects, and pardons. As we ponder the goodness of God, we should find ourselves overwhelmed by all that our Creator has done for us. The more we think carefully and meditate deeply on God's goodness, the more we should be overcome by that goodness and find ourselves praising and living for our good God.