

A Deeper Understanding of God's GOODNESS

What would be your answer to the question, *“What does it mean that God is GOOD?”* Of course we would all agree that God is good. But what does that mean? You might say that His goodness means that He will always do what's best for me. And certainly that is a true statement. But what does that really mean? Does it mean that God will always do what *I* want and what *I* think is best?

Take a look at the chart below and notice that GOD'S GOODNESS encompasses many facets of His nature. God's character is perfectly GOOD. There is nothing BAD in His being. So actually, the way in which we discover what GOODNESS entails is by studying the details of God's character as described in the Bible.

Theologians often times describe God's character using two categories: GOD'S GREATNESS and GOD'S GOODNESS. This article, of course, covers the latter.

GOD'S GOODNESS

Moral Purity

Holiness

Righteousness

Justice

Integrity

Genuineness

Honesty

Faithfulness

Love

Benevolence

Grace

Mercy

MORAL PURITY

Notice on the chart that GOD'S GOODNESS is first described by MORAL PURITY. Moral purity refers to God's absolute freedom from anything wicked or evil. His moral purity includes the dimensions of (1) Holiness, (2) Righteousness, and (3), Justice.

1. Holiness has two basic aspects. The first aspect of holiness is God's *uniqueness*. He is totally unique. There is no other being in the universe like Him. Exodus 15:11 says, "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness...?" In Old Testament times many pagan gods and national gods were worshiped, oftentimes concurrently by a group of people. But even the angels cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:1-4) Jehovah God is unique because He was (and is) the only true God.

The second aspect of holiness is His *absolute purity*. God is untouched and unstained by the evil in this world. Habakkuk 1:13 says, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.” And James 1:13 says, “For God cannot be tempted, nor does He tempt anyone.” God’s moral purity, then, becomes the basis and the standard against which all else is measured. His moral purity is what we all strive to mimic. Only Christ has shown Himself to be without sin and wickedness as God exemplifies.

2. Righteousness, on the other hand, is God’s holiness expressed in relationship to other beings, namely humans. Therefore, His holy nature becomes the standard for all behavior in the universe. This righteous standard is expressed in His written Word, the Bible. His Word is as perfect as He is. Psalm 19:7-9 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart...” (etc.). In other words, God’s righteousness is the expression of His holiness and the expectation of a holy response from humans.

God’s righteousness also means that His own actions are in perfect accord with His standard. The Lord himself said, “I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight.” Because God is righteous and measures up to His own standard, we can trust him! He is not a dispassionate being who says, “Do as I say, not as I do.”

3. Justice is God’s official outworking of His righteousness. Justice is that part of God’s perfect character that will hold every single individual accountable for his or her actions. God warned Adam and Eve, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Genesis 2:17) In the same way, Paul stated in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...” Out of His perfect justice, God will hold every person accountable.

This perfect justice is often misunderstood, however. As humans we tend to look at the short term. Wickedness **does** seem to be rewarded sometimes. Crime **does** seem to pay sometimes. Thieves get rich for a time. Murderers get away with it sometimes. But we cannot look at God’s justice in the short term. He looks at it in the long term, including, even, eternity. The Psalmist considers the paradox in Psalm 73:3, 16-17, 27... “For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.... Those who are far from you will perish...”

God’s justice also means that He will side with those who are powerless in order to balance social inequities. In His own personal (and sometimes hidden) ways, God will help those who are less fortunate in the eyes of the world. Psalm 68:5 says, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.”

INTEGRITY

Now notice on the chart that GOD’S GOODNESS is also described by His INTEGRITY. Integrity here relates to matters of truth. God is always truthful. There are three dimensions of His truthfulness: (1) genuineness – being true, (2) honesty – telling the truth, and (3) faithfulness – proving true.

1. Genuineness is the basis for God’s integrity. He is genuinely God. He is God. In contrast to the false pagan gods of the Old Testament and the false Greek gods of the New Testament, Jehovah God is real. Jeremiah 10:5,10 make the contrast clear: “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk... But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the

eternal King.” Similarly, Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

2. Honesty is the second dimension of God’s integrity. God represents Himself and all spiritual reality in an honest and straightforward manner. There is no deception in Him. “The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for He is not a man that He should repent.” (1 Samuel 15:29) Further, Paul stated in the New Testament that God is the one who “never lies.” (Titus 1:2) Indeed, lying is contrary to God’s very nature. *He cannot lie.*

God has appealed to us in His Word to do (and be) likewise: honest. For example, He said to the Israelites to have only one set of weights in their bag. Some people had two sets, one of which they used when they were making purchases and one of which they used for selling. God’s people were prohibited to deal in this way. “For the Lord your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly.” (Deuteronomy 25:16) Why? Because God is perfectly honest and we are to mimic His perfect character.

3. Faithfulness is that aspect of God’s integrity in which He proves Himself true. God keeps all his promises. Paul stated, “He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.” (1 Thess. 5:24) Repeatedly throughout Scripture, God is described as the one who is always faithful. *He promised to bless Abraham and Sarah with a son in their old age, and He kept His promise. *He promised to give Israel a land of their own, and He kept His promise. *He promised to send a Messiah to save the world, and He kept His promise. Again and again, God proved Himself as the promise-keeper. Psalm 106:1 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.” And Psalm 36:5 says, “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.”

LOVE

The third overall aspect of GOD’S GOODNESS is His LOVE. God’s love is oftentimes seen as the basis for all of His goodness. And there is Scriptural evidence for such a viewpoint. John said in 1 John 4:8, “He who does not love does not know God; *for God is love.*” In a deeply ontological sense, God does not just exhibit love, but He embodies love. He cannot be anything less than loving. Everything God does is infused and filled with perfect love. The three dimensions of God’s love are: (1) Benevolence, (2) Grace, and (3) Mercy.

1. Benevolence is that part of God’s nature in which He unselfishly seeks the good of all people. He is abundantly concerned for the welfare of every single human. “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16) In John 15, Jesus strives to explain that His love is personal, not legal. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you... I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

This benevolent love was not motivated by our goodness; quite the opposite. “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) John wrote, “In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His son to be the expiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) Jesus’ benevolent love leaves the ninety-nine to find the one (Luke 15:1-7), it looks diligently for the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and it welcomes back the prodigal son when He repents (Luke 15:11-32).

2. Grace is a tremendously important aspect of God's nature. By this we mean that God deals with His people not on the basis of their merit or worthiness, what they deserve, but simply according to their need; in other words, He deals with them on the basis of HIS GOODNESS and generosity. "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and *abounding* in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Exodus 34:6). Paul stated in Ephesians 1:5-8, "He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the *riches* of His grace which He *lavished upon us.*" Notice in both of these passages that God's grace is not just "barely enough" but is super-abundant.

Further, Paul says in Ephesians 2:7-9, "...that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast."

3. Mercy, finally, is the beautiful counterpoint to grace. While grace is gaining what we do not deserve from God, mercy is God's withholding of what we do deserve: punishment. The Psalmist said, "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." (Psalm 103:10) And similarly in Psalm 130:3, "If you Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" The rhetorical answer, of course, is *no one*. In God's mercy he has withheld judgment based on faith in Jesus Christ.

Overall, then, GOD'S GOODNESS is simple and beautiful, but not brief. It has many facets and angles to discover. GOD'S GOODNESS is the foundation of our assurance of faith. As we commit ourselves to learning more about GOD'S GOODNESS and believing more deeply in its truths, we become more stable emotionally, more consistent relationally, and more confident personally. Believing that God is good is a foundation of our faith.

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