

GOD!
Message 15

INTRO: I suppose one of the questions many a theologian has asked is, "Which of all God's attributes is the chief one?" And I also suppose that the most common answer to that question is that it is His holiness. I too have pondered that question, but I do not believe it is God's holiness. I believe it is His goodness. I believe He is holy because He is good. He is righteous because He is good. He is merciful because He is good. And as I see it, you could go on and list every attribute in the very same way.

Henry C. Theissen, in his Systematic Theology says, "In the larger sense of the term, the goodness of God includes all the qualities that answer to the conception of an ideal personage; that is, it includes such qualities as God's holiness, righteousness, and truth as well as his love, benevolence, mercy and grace."

Turn with me this morning to Matthew 19 (read 16-17). Now it is not that there is not some goodness in people. It is that no one is good, that is in every aspect. Such is the case with God. He is good, through and through. So the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:5, "This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." God is good through and through. Psalm 34:8 extends this invitation to mankind: "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good."

Most of us say with our lips that God is good, but we believe in our hearts that He is not. We find it almost impossible to commit ourselves to Him 100%. We have this suspicion in the back of our minds that if we do that, He will require that one thing from us we never wanted to do or be.

2. Goodness

Now our first task is to define what 'goodness' is. Now the English word 'good' comes from the word God. The NT word for 'good' is 'agathos'. We get the name 'Agatha' from this word. What is good? I have come to the conclusion that 'goodness' is anything that is in line with the will and character of God. If you can find anything in God, or discover anything of His

will, whatever you find answers to that which is good.

You see, Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And just what does that mean? Well, His glory is what He is. Any action we do that does not fall in line with His perfect will and character is sin. It fails of His goodness!

Let me give you an example. We say it is not good to be a respecter of persons. That is true because God is not a respecter of persons. He makes His judgments based on truth, not respect of persons. So if we come in line with His character, we will not be a respecter of persons.

Goodness is that which only 'persons' can comprehend and appreciate. Goodness is a personal thing. We call it bad when somebody lies to us. It is not in our interest. It is not a desirable thing to persons. It is not good for persons.

Turn with me to an interesting passage in Exodus 33 (read 12-20). Moses said to God, "Show me Your glory." And what is God's glory? It is what He is. Everything God is and desires is good. Now notice the essence of what His glory is in verse 19 when God answered Moses like this, "I will make My goodness pass before you..." Moses wanted to see God's glory. God said His glory is His goodness.

John Gill says in His commentary, "Which is his glory; the glory of the Lord lies in his goodness, and that appears in the works of his hands, in the methods of his providence, especially in the distribution of his sovereign grace and mercy, and particularly in his pardoning grace and mercy, through the blood of Christ; for as it is "the glory" of a man "to pass over a transgression," #Pr 19:11 much more it is the glory of God, of which this goodness is afterwards interpreted; and may be understood of Christ himself, who is the goodness of God itself, is not only good, but the Lord's good One, emphatically good; as he is called his holy

One, so his good One; because all his goodness is laid up in him, is prevented and filled as Mediator, with the blessings of his goodness; all are proclaimed in him, displayed through him, and communicated by him; and he is that glorious Personage that Moses might be desirous of having a view of, and was favoured with; however, with a view of the divine goodness, as it is conspicuous in him, in what he is, and has done for his people; for God has shown forth the exceeding riches of his grace and goodness in him..”

Now let me make one note here on a verse I have heard numerous times that seems to indicate that God is not altogether good. It is Isaiah 45:7, where according to the KJV God says, “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” How can a good God create evil? Was God the creator of evil? I have not found that in all the Bible, unless this verse alone teaches that. We have learned in the past that God did not even create the Devil. He created a beautiful Cherub angel, but that beautiful angel became evil by his own pride. So, what is the meaning of this verse?

First of all, in the parallelism of the verse we have light and its opposite given. God says He created light and He created darkness. Then He says, “I make peace and create evil...” Now the word translated ‘evil’ is the Hebrew ‘rah’. The KJV has translated this same word by over 17 different English words, so ‘evil’ is certainly not its only meaning.

Consider Job 2:10 where Job talks to his wife like this: “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’” Now the word translated ‘adversity’ in the KJV is the very same word it has translated ‘evil’ in Isaiah 45:7. Again, Amos 3:6 says in the KJV, “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” The NKJV translates this as, “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be

afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*?"

Did God indeed create evil? No! Did He create that which is troublesome to mankind such as floods and earthquakes and pestilences? Yes! And why? Let me tell you where it all began. You will remember the story. God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was in the midst of the Garden of Eden. You know how they failed and sinned against God and sided with the devil and how they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves, that is their own works righteousness. But turn to Genesis 3 to find God's solution to this (read 3:14-19).

There we have it. God caused calamity or adversity. The ground now brought forth weeds and thorns and thistles. The body was now brought forth in excruciating pain and would experience pain in many different forms. And why did God do this? Paul would later write that the woman would be saved in childbearing. To Adam, God said, "Cursed is the ground for your sake." In other words, God told them it was for their benefit. Death is a benefit, did you know that? If it were not for death we could never escape what sin has done to man. If it were not for calamity and pain and problems, we would all jolly well go to hell. It is in these things that God turns man to Himself.

It is an amazing thing that the very things that prove the goodness of God, we set out against God to make Him the author of evil. You see, many people think to label something legitimate against God when they say, "If there is a God how does He allow all this starvation and war and pestilences, such as AIDS and so on." By this they think to have painted the goodness of God into a corner from which there is no escape. So, they reason, He probably does not even exist.

But, the very things we label against God to prove He does not exist or that He is not good, are the very things that prove His goodness and that He exists! I wonder, what do you have in

your life you would get rid of if you had the power to do so? May it be that right there, God is wanting to conform you to the image of His Son? Have you embraced His truth and said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" Yes, God is good! When He allows adversity He allows it for a very good purpose!

And God is so good that He will let us go through almost anything difficult in order to turn us to Himself. Earthquakes, floods, fire, cancer, heart conditions; all of these prove, not that He is missing in some area of goodness, but that He is good through and through.

I want to make another point. For this we go to Romans 2 (read 2:1-4). Today there is an inordinate affection with the concept of not judging others. "Judge not" is the cry of the day. And we don't. We let everything go because we are to tolerate and not judge. Now my point is to get to the 'goodness' of God in this passage but because of the time in which we are I want to take a little rabbit trail and explain the 'judge not' issue.

In the context of Romans 1-3 Paul proves the Gentiles to be sinners in chapter 1. Then in chapter 2 he proves the Jew to be under sin. Then in chapter 3 he sums it all up by teaching that all have sinned. So in chapter 2 he is dealing with the Jews who were judgmental about the Gentiles entering salvation. In chapters 9-11 he will settle the Jewish concerns about this. But here he warns the Jew about judging the Gentile. And the reason for this warning is not that Christians must never judge. The reason for this warning is because the Jews, who were judging the Gentiles were also committing the same sins. This is hypocrisy. So notice this in verse 1 (read). Now notice verse 3 (read). It is hypocritical judgment that is forbidden here.

Turn with me to Matthew 7, one of the very common passages used on this matter of judgment (read 1-4). Now, what kind of judging is forbidden here?

Well, verse 3-5 tell us (read). Here is a man with a plank in his eye judging a man with a speck in his eye. What kind of judgment is this? Verse five tells us that it is hypocritical judgment. That is the same issue as Romans 2. The kind of judging the Bible warns against is hypocritical judgment.

So, let me ask a question: Can a Christian live without judging? Look at verse 6 (read). Now our Christian world has forgotten to read the context of these judgment passages! If, as a Christian, I were to obey this passage and I did not cast my pearls before swine, I would have to make a judgment, a very serious one at that. There is no way around that fact. And if, in our world, we made a judgment like this, the majority of our Christian brothers and sisters would cry 'foul'! "Judge not", would be there cry. And if a person were to 'judge not' in this case, he would fail to be obedient to the Word of God! Look at 7:15 (read). How can you beware of false prophets if you are not to make any judgments? And in the context we are told that by their fruits we would know them.

Let me show you something further with regard to judging. Franklin E. Huling, in a tract called, "Is It Right To Judge?" gives a number of passages showing that we are to judge. In John 7:20-24 some of the people judged that Jesus had a demon and Jesus did not say to them, "Don't judge." He said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." There you have the right kind and the wrong kind of judgment. And Jesus instructed them to judge, but to judge righteously.

In Luke 7:40-43 Jesus asked a certain man by name of Simon who had a lot of trouble with Jesus letting a 'bad' woman wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. He immediately made a judgment and said to himself, "If Jesus really was a prophet, He would know what kind of woman she is and would not allow something like this." And Jesus knew his thoughts and asked Simon about two sons, and which one of those two

was right. Now Simon had to make a judgment to answer Jesus question, and if judging were wrong, Jesus tempted him to sin. And so Simon answered Jesus question and Jesus said, "You have rightly judged." Jesus commended this man for his good judgment regarding His question, but then admonished him for his misjudgment regarding this woman. What did Simon do? He judged according to appearance.

Turn with me to Luke 12 (read 54-57). Here again is a command to judge, but the exhortation is to judge what is right. As Christians we must make many judgments. The devil has us right where he wants us when we believe we are not to make judgments.

In 1 Corinthians 5:3 Paul judged a man in the Corinthian congregation and said he was to be excommunicated. He said, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed." In 10:15 he said, "I speak as to wise men; judge what I say." In 1 Corinthians 2:15 he said, "But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one."

In 1 Corinthians 5 we have an account of where a professing Christian took his father's wife. Turn to chapter 5 (note verse 3). Clearly, Paul judged. But he was not practicing hypocritical judgment. Now note verse 7 (read). How will you do that without judging? Look at verse 9 (read). How will you obey that without judging? Look at verse 11 (read). How will you do that without judging?

Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 3 (read 10-14). Do you know what happens when you obey the Bible in such matters? All the hordes of hell turn on you. If ever you have heard the cry 'judge not' it will be when you obey such passages, and that cry will come from professing Christians. And we find it easier to fear man than to fear God, yet the Bible instructs us to fear God and not man.

So I challenge us as Christians, to judge righteous judgment.

Now that was a bit of a rabbit trail because of the present circumstances of some of our members, but so much for judging. Now back to Romans 2 to the real point. Here is the religious Jew and he is casting judgment on the Gentile and all the while he is hypocritically doing the same things. This is the judgment that is forbidden. And according to verse 5, he is treasuring up to himself wrath for the day of wrath. Hypocrisy has its price.

Now what I want you to notice is verse 4 (read). Those who profess to be believers who hypocritically judge do not realize that in the midst of their hypocrisy God's goodness, forbearance and longsuffering is giving them time to come to their senses and is seeking to lead them to repentance!

Now let me remind us, those who profess salvation, of something here. In our lives we can become unnecessarily judgmental and critical of others. And all the while God's goodness causes Him to exercise forbearance and longsuffering toward us, giving us time to come to our senses and lead us to repentance. It is the goodness of God that does this.

Now we come to the the point I wanted to make from Romans 2. All of us as Christians, are to grow in grace. But our life is filled with many imperfections. We err in so many areas of life. And all the while of our imperfect Christian life, God, in His goodness and patience allows us to continue on in life. As I see it, if it were not for God's goodness there would be no reason why He should not cut us off at any moment. There would be every right for God to cut us off because of our failures. He could cast us off into hell and His justice would be fully vindicated if He did so. There is no reason why He should wait for us to grow.

BUT, because He is good He practices forbearance with us. Now, the word translated 'forbearance' is *anochee*. It means to hold back. It is a delay of punishment. We so often deserve it, but God, because He is good, holds back punishment. He waits for us to come to our senses and repent. We do not only struggle with being hypocritical in judgment. We struggle with all kinds of things. In all those He holds back His punishment in hope of leading us to repentance. Why does He do this? Because He is just? No, because He is good!

How many times have you and I struggled with the same thing. Again and again we failed. I remember when I battled cigarettes. Oh, how many times I failed. Finally I got to the point where I believed I could not come to Him any more, and still He waited for me. You see, this text not only says that He exercises forbearance but He is longsuffering with us. And why is that? Because He is good!

How many do not complain point to all the hunger, diseases and catastrophes in the world and then point an accusing finger at God's goodness? Maybe they even question His existence. "If there is a God", they say, "Why this or why that?" But what are they actually doing? They are despising God's goodness, forbearance and longsuffering. God could drop them in a second, into an everlasting hell, and they would fully have deserved it. His justice would be satisfied. But He is good and He waits, and waits; all in hope that somehow they will be led to repentance. And how many testimonies have we heard of those who deserved nothing less than to be cast into hell time and again, and yet God, because He is good, exercised forbearance and longsuffering and eventually they were saved.

CONCL: This morning we have focused on the goodness of God. What is 'good'? First, it is anything that is in line with the perfect will and character of God. But beyond that, it is a personal thing. Let me ask you, what do you think of a person who is concerned with justice alone. Someone has done wrong and this person insists on justice, now. There is no consideration of the circumstances. There

is no personal concern. How do you like such a person? Now God is a God of justice as we shall see yet. But if He were a God of justice alone, we would never have had a chance at life. It all would have ended with Adam and Eve and they would both be in hell.

You see, God is a God of justice but He is a good God. And His goodness causes Him to exercise forbearance. And His forbearance lasts long because He is longsuffering. And if He did not do either of these, you and I would never have become Christians.

It is required when one studies the character of God that one study more than just one attribute. You see, when we exalt one attribute so high that we fail to see the others, we distort our picture of God. This is what we have done to the love of God. In the days of D. L. Moody, as I see it, the love of God was restored as one of the prominent attributes of God. Then we began to exalt it and thus forgot about God's justice and wrath and now we have a God who tolerates about anything, and that is not the God of the Bible. And as we move ahead in this series, when we look at such things as God's justice we will need to keep in mind that He is good.