

The Problem of Evil and the Goodness of God

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Epistle of James

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 1. It's so good this morning to have Robert and Ruth back with us, worshiping with us. Praise God for the healing that has happened. Thank you for your prayers for them and your ministry to them. I know they've been encouraged by the love of the body of Christ. We're delighted to have you back here with us this morning.

James 1. I'm going to be talking again about what I think is his focus as he's helping us deal with trials, his concern, his pastoral concern is to help us knowing that we cannot persevere if we are doubting who God is. As I said earlier, the most important thing is what you believe about the nature of God, the person of God, the character of God. James is concerned that these people that he loves, these Jewish believers know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God can be trusted and this is his focus.

You know, the title of the message is "The Problem of Evil and the Goodness of God." Last week was "The Problem of Evil" and so just adding "the Goodness of God." The focus will be verses 16 and 17 of James 1. I feel the need to say as we go into this passage just to realize the point of the passage. I heard someone say one time, it was Alistair Begg actually, at a pastor's conference, he is a good Reformed theologian but he said when the text, he said at times when you preach the word of God, you sound like an Arminian, and he said, "If the text leads me in that direction, I'm not ashamed to sound like one when I preach the text." And I think there is real biblical wisdom in that, that when you preach the word of God, you preach what the text says and then put it all together and, of course, you come out with a more beautiful composite picture of a right theology and who God is. So I want to say right up front that I am a five-point Calvinist. I believe in unconditional election, particular redemption, but as we look at this passage, I'm going to say some things that as we go through it that I think the text is saying and I don't want you to react too quickly. You search it out and see if this is not true and, as always, be a Berean.

But this passage is essentially, verses 16 and 17, James is making the case and he's actually making it in the previous verses too, the utter and complete goodness of God. He realizes that there lingers in the hearts of the sons and daughters of Adam real profound doubts about the character of God. The lie that Satan told in the garden which essentially

can be summed up in the lie is you can't trust God, he is not good, that is in the wiring, in the hard wiring of our fallen nature, that God cannot be trusted, that he is not good. That's essentially what Satan was arguing with Eve and she believed the lie, and Adam believed the lie and therefore those who have been born into a world believing the lie. It's the truth that sets us free and the truth is God is good and James is making this claim as a clarion call and emphatically that God is good.

Last time we saw in verses 13 to 15 he made this argument negatively, that is, he basically said God is not the author in any way at any time of evil. You see how it's a negative argument. He's not the author of evil. In verses 16 and 17, he's going to say God is always and continually a fountain and source of goodness without exception because God is not variable, he doesn't shift like we do, and he believes we need to know this if we are going to persevere under the very difficult circumstances in which we will find ourselves as we walk through this life in a fallen world.

The problem of evil and the goodness of God. Let's read verses 12 to 17.

12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we come to this passage, we are especially mindful of our need of grace. Lord, these things are too wonderful for us, the infinite beauty of your character, the perfection of all of your attributes, who can measure them? And yet, Lord, you have spoken truly in your word and we pray that your Spirit might help us. Open our minds, open our hearts that we might see that which is true, that we might repent of the ways in which we have doubted you, spoken wrongly about you, and we might be more faithful followers of our glorious Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.

The problem of evil and the goodness of God. Now, the problem of evil we mentioned last time is the classic way that it has been phrased throughout the history of philosophy as people have wrestled with the existence of evil. Why if God is sovereign and God is good, does he allow evil? There is certainly an element of mystery and we will not understand fully throughout all eternity but we will understand more wondrously when we are in the presence of God, but his word gives us enough now to be an anchor to the soul to show us that evil is essentially the product of God allowing for freedom.

When you look at the way the Scripture defines the existence of evil, it makes real clear that evil has come into this world through man's sin. Romans 5, you find Paul there articulating that through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men. Where does evil, remember evil means calamity, destruction, harm, it's the opposite of that which is good, beneficial, delightful. Where did the damage come from? Where did the destruction come from? Romans 5 makes clear it came through sin. In fact, if you go back a little further in the picture, we are given a glimpse into where evil originated in the heart of the angelic world, in Satan himself in Ezekiel 28, and if you read that passage, later read it, you see that God, he's talking to the king of Tyre, a real earthly king in the first few verses, the first 12 or so verses of that chapter, and he's calling Ezekiel to prophesy against the king of Tyre for his incredible audacious pride and vanity. But then in verse 14 it seems that the prophet is no longer speaking to the king of Tyre, he's speaking to the spirit behind the king of Tyre, he's speaking directly to Satan, to Lucifer, to the prince of darkness because he talks about, "You were in Eden. You were perfect in beauty." And what he points out is that, "until unrighteousness was found in you, until wickedness was found in you," you see, God allowed for there to be freedom and Satan rebelled and the demons rebelled. God allowed man freedom and man has rebelled.

Evil has not originated in any way in God. He is sovereign over it, yes. He created a world where it was possible, yes. He ordained it, yes, but he is not the author of it and we must be careful of our brains, it's kind of like when I was in college, took a course in physics and you know how you have – I shouldn't go down this road. Some of you who are mathematical will appreciate this more than others, the others just trust me on it. But essentially in physics, to understand how the force of gravity, objects in motion, how things work, you have to really operate on calculus math, that is, math as it really is. It describes what's really happening, that's calculus. Well, very few people have had calculus in college and so they teach physics with algebraic approximations. The formulas are just approximations of what will really happen if you drop a ball, and they give you an algebraic formula. It's not accurate. It's close but in reality over time as you extend it out, you get farther and farther off.

Well, I think that was not the best illustration. I was a mathematics major, I'm always looking for a way to bring math in. Anyway, the point though is that we have a way of wanting to shortcut and short-circuit and not think through in a full way the reality of things as the way they are and you can't do that when it comes to God. Beware of algebraic approximations, bumper sticker theology. There has to be a sense of reverence and awe. We come to the word and we keep letting him fine-tune our understanding of who he is, of how he operates. So this is the point of this passage today. James wants us to understand as we go through trials and difficulties, as we hopefully are persevering under trial so that we can be approved and receive the crown of life, he wants us to know that we can trust God implicitly and always. He will never do anything harmful. He will always do that which is beneficial and which brings blessing.

Now, I want us to organize our thoughts as we try to look at this passage, verses 16 and 17, under three points. We're going to use the same three points I used last week, three

D's. I think he's saying the same thing he said last time. He said it last time negatively, now he's saying it positively. God knows that we are hard-headed. We need it said both ways. The three points are, first of all, the danger. James is concerned about the danger, the very real danger for those to whom he writes. He's writing to believers, in verse 16 he's writing to his beloved brethren, those who profess to love Jesus; as we said, probably writing to those who were Jewish believers who used to be part of the church in Jerusalem but had been dispersed through persecution.

"Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." There is the danger of being deceived. That's the danger. It's the danger of being deceived. The verb means "to be led astray." There is the danger of being misled. Led astray. "Don't be misled," James commands, and this verb is in the present tense. It's an imperative. It's a command, "Do not be deceived," but the verb "be deceived" is in the Greek present which has the idea of continuous ongoing action. When you say, "Do not go on being deceived," is the way you could translate it. "Do not go on being deceived. You are being deceived, don't go on being deceived," or in other words, "Stop being deceived." There is a sense in which we are being deceived because we came into this world with a bent to believe the lie and the world is lying to us every day, telling us God is not good, and we in our hearts, we doubt his goodness. Those of us who have been born again and who know he's good still the doubts are there that linger and expose themselves, and so there is this wrestling of faith against doubt and James is wanting to give us great aid in putting to death the doubts. Essentially this part, by saying it positively, essentially he's saying now God is always and continuously a source of good things. He is always and continuously a fountain of blessing.

We wonder that we think there is some deficiency in God, some shortcoming, some lack. We wonder that he might be lacking in love, lacking in goodness. This is a very real and profound thing and it is so much into our wiring we don't recognize it. It's kind of like a fish doesn't know he's wet. We don't know that we have these profound doubts but our words betray us. We say things like, "Well, plan a picnic if you really want it to rain." Or, "I knew this would happen." Why did you know this would happen? Because you believe God does bad things to you. There is some deficiency in God. It can be unearthed when we deal with some of the most profound areas of concern, when we think about his eternal wrath, we wrestle with that, and it's true that it's not an easy thing to deal with because the Bible teaches about those who do not know Christ and who die without Jesus. The Scripture is clear that those who die without Christ will get their just reward which is eternal suffering separated from God, and when you see how the Scripture describes it, a place Jesus said on more than one occasion, "where the flame is not quenched and the worm does not die," it's almost too terrible for us to conceive. The wrath of God, that God's just punishment of sin would require an eternal suffering.

We see this and we wonder at his goodness. If his wrath is good and we know, those of us who are beginning to think biblically because of his grace and his word, we know that wrath is good. Wrath is essentially the attribute of God whereby he is determined to root out and punish evil and sin. He is determined to seek it out and to put an end to it, to bring it to justice, and that's good. How would you want to live in a world where there was no one who was doing justice? Wicked people were never brought to justice? You

lived in a world where it was just anarchy? What a terrible place that would be and if we feel that way when we see wicked sin unpunished, how much more must it be a burden to a holy God? So wrath is a good thing. We understand that but even the way he expresses it is therefore good because God is good, and one of the things that we struggle to understand is that God can be at the same time loving and wrathful toward the same person because he is God and we are not.

Listen to what D. A. Carson says about this. He deals with a cliché. Like I said, kind of a bumper sticker theology, it's an algebraic approximation I'm going to read here in a second. Remember that algebraic approximations are not accurate. D. A. Carson writes, "One evangelical cliché has it that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. There is a small element of truth in these words," Carson writes. "God has nothing but hate for the sin, that's right, but this cannot be said with respect to how God sees the sinner." That is, he doesn't fully hate the sinner in the same way he hates the sin but that doesn't mean that the cliché was right, God hates the sin but loves the sinner. He goes on to say this, "Nevertheless, the cliché is false on the face of it and it should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first 50 Psalms alone the psalmist states that God hates the sinner, that his wrath is on the liar and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests on both the sin and the sinner. Our problem in part is that in human experience, wrath and love normally abide in mutually exclusive compartments. Love humanly speaking, love drives wrath out. Wrath drives love out. We might come closest to bringing them together in our responses to a wayward act by one of our children. You are close to be able to have love and wrath," he's saying, "in relation to a child but normally we do not think that a wrathful person is loving. But this is not the way it is with God. God's wrath is not an implacable blind rage. However emotional it may be, it is an entirely reasonable and willed response to offenses against his holiness. At the same time, his love wells up amidst his perfections and is not generated by the loveliness of the loved. Thus there is nothing intrinsically impossible about wrath and love being directed toward the same individual or same persons at one time." Did you get that? There is nothing illogical about God having wrath and love toward the same person at the same time. God in his perfections must be wrathful against his rebel image bearers for they have offended him. God in his perfections must be loving toward his rebel image bearers for he is just that kind of God. That's a mystery and it's true. This is what the Scriptures teach.

So James is helping us understand how his goodness is always there; that he is always good at every moment; and that there is never evil. There is no evil in God. It's not that there is good and evil in God. No, unthinkable. That's essentially what we covered last week in verses 13 and 14 and 15. It is unthinkable that God would tempt someone. It is unthinkable that God would be tempted by evil himself; that he would be motivated out of a desire to harm his good works.

It's unthinkable and now he turns to the other side of the argument. There is the danger that we think that there is some deficiency. In the same way last time, we were worried that God might be the author of evil, that he might be responsible for my sin in some way, that his sovereignty allowing circumstances that I can't handle that he is responsible. That's a lie. Now the danger is that we wonder if there is some deficiency in God, "If he

was just more merciful than he would save everyone." That's a lie. There is no deficiency in God and his goodness.

Now the doctrine. So how do we see this? He answers that and he's going to tell you that there is no deficiency in God. Verse 17, he says, God is a source of all that is good. Verse 17, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." First of all, consider the gifts of God, James says. Sub point under the doctrine: the gifts of God. We considered the danger, now we're on the second main point, the doctrine, and in the first sub point, the gifts of God. James says consider the gifts of God. If you doubt that God is good, if you think that there might be some deficiency in his goodness, consider his gifts. "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above," so essentially he says every good gift and every perfect gift, the emphasis on the word "gift." He could have said every good and perfect gift. I think one of the translations does that but the NASB keeps it there to show you the emphasis in the Greek. It says every good gift and every perfect gift so you hear the word "gift" twice. God is a God who gives. It is of his nature to give.

So the gifts of God, think about the nature of these gifts. We continue to look at the gifts of God, not just the fact that he gives but the nature of his gifts. He says every good gift and every perfect gift. His gifts are good and his gifts are perfect. Good, that's the opposite of evil. Good is that which brings blessing; that which is useful, profitable; delightful; brings joy and pleasure; that which is as it ought to be. And perfect, that which is complete. There is nothing lacking. Every good and perfect thing that you have has come from God, James is saying. Every good and perfect gift.

The nature of his gifts is they are good, they are beneficial, they are perfect, they are complete, and he said "every" twice. Did you see that? Every good thing given and every perfect gift. The emphasis there, you see that he doesn't want us to miss. It's not most of the gifts that God gives are good and perfect, no, they are all that way and if you find something that is truly good or perfect in this world, you know where it came from, it came from God.

It has come from above, coming down from the Father of lights. Coming down is another verb, it's a participle in the Greek present which, again, speaks of continuous action. It's from above, coming down continually from the Father of lights. The picture is these good and perfect gifts are just emanating continuously from the Father of lights. "This is what God is like," James says. "Do you think there is some deficiency in his goodness? Do you not see that every good and perfect gift is coming from him?"

So he says look at the gifts of God, the doctrine. Number 2A we said was the gifts of God. If you doubt the goodness of God, look at the gifts of God. Secondly, look at the heart of God. The second sub point under our main point, the doctrine: look at the heart of God. He is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. James uses the word "Father" of God, a word that was almost unknown in the Old

Testament to speak of God, but Jesus Christ has made him known as our Father and he sent the Spirit in our hearts crying, "Abba, Father."

So he speaks of the Father, "You're doubting the goodness of your Father," but then he says, "the Father of lights" and he uses an interesting word picture here. He seems to be calling on his readers to look up. "You're wondering if God is good, look up." Look up into the heavens and you see the sun during the daytime, you see the moon and the stars at night. I mean, think about that, the beauty and glory of a night sky. Isn't that something when you get away from the city lights and you go out maybe by the ocean and you look up and the sky is just so much more brilliant and bright. You didn't even realize it because you have gotten away from all of the extraneous light that we have. You see the glory of his creation, the beauty of it. God put those galaxies, the constellations in place for us to marvel. Think about the sun and how the sun is everything. I mean, you know, when you've had several rainy days, isn't it amazing even for us who live in a place where we have a lot of sunshine, I imagine if you lived in England or something or Seattle, you know, you've heard about the sun, there's a rumor, there is one, but what the sun does. I mean, the sun starts the whole process of life. It's photosynthesis that makes all of the green things green and starts the food chain. Everything flows from sunlight. If sunlight is gone, life is gone. God made the sun, God made the stars. He's the Father of these things. And think how often men have worshiped the stars and worshiped the sun. He says, "No, those things are not to be worshiped. They are the offspring, they are the creation of the Father of lights." You see there just an expression of his character. He's the one who gives to all life and breath. As John says about him, "He is light and in him is no darkness at all." God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

So look at the lights and what do you see? You see blessing. You see beauty. You see constancy. The sun rises every day. The stars are in the sky every night. Now, the clouds come over and sometimes we don't see them but they are there. The constellations, isn't it something when you figure out as a young person that they change. As you start watching them, you say, "Oh, that's the winter sky," and you won't see that again until next winter. But when next winter comes around, what do you see? There's that same constellation. It hasn't gone anywhere. It didn't fall apart because God is holding it all together. The constancy of those things. James says, "Look at those and realize that those things have come from God."

Then he says to consider the heart of God as if he then thinks about the lights, he goes on to say, "But the Father of lights who has birthed them is even better than they are because in the Father of lights there is no variation or shifting shadow. The constellations are hidden by the clouds. The sun is obscured. In the winter it is reduced but God, there is no variation or no shifting shadow. His character which is blessing and beauty and constancy is always faithful and perfect." That's what James is saying. He is one who brings blessing and benefit continually without exception. He is showing kindness. He is showering love on all things and all people at all times.

Now the difference, the third point. We considered the danger, the doctrine by looking at the gifts of God and the heart of God, now we come to the difference, the difference that

this doctrine makes in our lives. One of the things that we need to see and this is where at first glance this can appear controversial but bear with me. What we need to see is that God loves all men without exception. That's the first point. God loves all men without exception and let me tell you something: I'm not saying he loves all men without distinction. I'm not saying he loves all men to the same degree. I believe in election. I believe in particular redemption. I believe he loves the elect more than he loves the rest but I want to tell you that I think the emphasis of Scripture and the emphasis of this passage is the amazing love of God for all people. There is no deficiency in God's love for those who are not elect. They are not in hell because he didn't love them enough. That's not the way the Scripture comes at it.

Now, we like to do our algebraic approximations and get comfortable with our logic, the reality is the indignation of Scripture is always on the sinner and never on God. God has never failed anyone at any time in any way and that's the powerful argument of Scripture. I mean, we are tempted when we understand the deeper things of God and the doctrines of grace which are true and lovely and beautiful, we are tempted to start making some algebraic approximations and we can wonder and we can be indignant in subtle ways hidden in our hearts and wonder that God is just not doing enough. I mean, you share Christ with someone you love, a friend or even more painful, your children or family members, and you're praying for them and you're sharing with them and they don't come to faith. There is no deficiency in God in that. The fact that he has not chosen them is not a deficiency in his love. There is no shortfall. There is no shortcoming in him. He has shown overwhelming love to all people.

Let me show you this. First of all, God's love for all men, he loves all men without exception, let's talk about his common grace and then we're going to keep working this out a little bit. His love for all man is seen, first of all, in his common grace. Common grace is that God's gifts to all men without distinction that are common to all people. All good things come from him.

Look with me at Acts 14:15-17. Here Paul is on his first missionary journey preaching the Gospel and he has an amazing, as he's healing people, he heals a gentleman and the crowd is so amazed that they begin worshipping Paul and Barnabas. They think the gods have come down. Verse 15, Paul and Barnabas tear their robes, Acts 14:14, rush out into the crowd crying out, and this is what they preached to these people at this point, "Men, why are you doing these things?" verse 15, "We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." He is talking to people that have never heard the Gospel before who were not a part of the Jewish people. These are Gentiles and he said, "Look, God did permit them to go their own ways yet he never failed to provide for all of you, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

I mean, think about how wonderful food is, how God has made it. I've talked about this before and I know I do it too much and late in the sermon is not a wise thing to do but just go with me for a moment there and then we will quickly retreat and forget about what we talked about. But how wonderful the taste that God has put into the things that we eat. It's not like we are a car filling up with gas, he's made all these different tastes for us to delight in. All these spices, all these delicacies, they have come from God. They are good gifts from God that are an expression of his desire to bless and to give pleasure and every pleasure, every true pleasure is from God.

Now, the temptation that Satan uses is to get you to take the pleasures God has ordained and created and use them in ways that are outside of his will and when you do that, you end up losing the pleasure. You get less and less pleasure as you pursue pleasure outside of God's will. But something that is really profound is even the person who is the most wicked sexual sinner and who is becoming less and less human as he pursues sexual sin, the reality is that whatever pleasure he gets out of that sin, even though he's doing something wicked, that whatever small amount of pleasure that is there is actually a kind token of God's gift to him. It doesn't mean that God is endorsing what he's doing but God made that. The pleasure is from God and the reality is God gives good things because God is a giving God. It's his nature to give good things. Essentially it's another way of saying he loves. Love is self-giving for the benefit of others. Wayne Grudem defines it that way in his "Systematic Theology," self-giving for the benefit of others. God is a self-giving God. He gives of himself to others. Every good thing comes from him, is an expression of his goodness.

In Matthew 5:43-48, the Lord Jesus is talking to those folks who gather around him at the Sermon on the Mount and he says, "It is written, love your neighbor, hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies. If you want to be children of your Father, love your enemies. If you want to be like your dad, love your enemies because God loves his enemies," is the clear implication. "He causes it to rain on the just and the unjust." So he goes on to say, "Don't merely love those who love you, love those who hate you. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

That's what he's saying here in James 1:17. God does good. So his common grace is seen in that he gives good things to all people. Secondly, his common grace is seen in that he speaks to all men about himself. He makes himself known to all people. Psalm 19:1-2, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament speaks forth his praise. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they declare knowledge." That is, the heavens are regularly testifying about God. They're saying that there must be a Father of lights behind these lights. They couldn't just happen. Romans 1:19-24 makes clear that the Lord makes clear in the heart of every single human being that he is. They see it in the created order. They see his invisible attributes, his eternal power through what has been made and they know it in their own hearts. So God is speaking. Do you see that? This is good. God is speaking to all people. He is declaring himself to all people.

I read earlier from Acts 14:17, remember when Paul says, "He didn't leave himself without witness but he has given you the seasons and he is feeding you and giving you

pleasure." You see, that's his witness. God is witnessing to all of you. Gentiles, he's always been witnessing because that's the kind of God he is and there is enough knowledge in the creation that you ought to know that you ought to stop sinning and look for salvation. There is not enough to get saved but there is enough to convict the heart that you need salvation. And Paul says, actually in another sermon in Acts in chapter 17, he says that he's essentially saying the same kind of thing that God has made himself known and he says that we might grope for him and find him. God wants to be found. He's not hiding himself. You see, the reason people don't find God is they don't want to find God. That's the message of Scripture. He has not done anything deficient. He has spoken generously, profusely; his heart testifying continually by the gifts he gives by the words that he expresses.

His common grace is seen in what he gives and he speaks to all men about himself in natural relation but he also invites all men through special revelation. Now, not all people have received special revelation but he authorizes the Gospel to go forth to every creature. We are to preach the Gospel to every single person that we can. We are not to try to discern if they are of the elect or not. We are to preach the Gospel to them. We are to proclaim Jesus Christ, that we are all sinners who need to be saved, that we are under the wrath of God, but that God has sent his Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh, he lived a perfect life perfectly righteous and then he offered himself as an atoning sacrifice at Calvary to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, and the message is, "I proclaim Jesus Christ to you and I command you to repent and believe." That's what God is doing, God is commanding men all over the world to repent and believe.

It's important for us to understand that the offer of the Gospel is genuine. Here again, algebraic approximations mess us up. I think when you take all Scripture together, when the Gospel is preached, he is genuinely offering salvation to everyone that hears the message. Now, I understand that the doctrine of unconditional election and particular redemption means that Christ accomplished salvation for those who would believe, but it does not mean that Jesus' death is not sufficient for all. In fact, that's the way that Reformed theologians, I think, parses it correctly. The death of Christ is sufficient for all. The blood of Christ is sufficient for all but efficient for the elect. And we make the Gospel offer to everyone and there is no reason that they should not believe save their own wicked unbelief. It's not that God has done anything wrong. So when we preach the Gospel to someone we love and they don't come to Christ and we labor over them and they die without Christ, as hard as that is, as heartbreaking as that is, we must not allow for a moment the blame in our hearts to be upon God. "If only he had done more. If only you had chosen them." Scripture doesn't allow us to go there. Scripture says the wickedness of all of our hearts is that none of us would choose him but God is innocent, God is pure, God is good.

You see, our indignation is all misplaced. It's misplaced. We should be indignant at our own evil unbelieving hearts and what God does, he does always, he's doing good, even to the unbeliever. Though he exercises wrath, how does his wrath even get exercised? Romans 1 gives us a window into the wrath of God. I mentioned earlier that Romans 1 is where you find out that all men are without excuse in verses 19 to 23. In verses 24 to 28,

we see how the wrath of God is revealed. In verse 18 he said, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," and the way the wrath of God is revealed is that God keeps giving them over. People who are idolaters, who turn away from the reality of who God is and worship idols, it says in verse 24, "God gave them over to impure desires, so they burned in their lust for sexual sin, and then God gave them over," verse 26, "to unnatural desires so that men lusting for men, women for women, doing that which is against nature." That's God giving them over. Verse 28, because they continued in that path, God gave them over to a depraved mind. What the picture is, is that God's wrath is his judicial abandonment; that God's grace, he restrains the sinner from doing what's in his wicked heart. All of us if we were unrestrained would go after evil with unbridled tenacity. God restrains evil and when he expresses his wrath, he releases the person to what they want to do. He doesn't push them, he releases them. Do you see the difference?

So that's how he exercises his wrath. Even think about how we are told the way the sovereignty of God and the goodness of God and the wrath of God all come together so that God is never doing evil. He is never tempting someone. Let me give you an example and we see this in the life of we were talking about Moses earlier, Moses' ministry. When he goes to Egypt, the Lord tells him before he gets there, "I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart and he's not going to let you go." And then we see that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and sometimes it says, there are like seven or eight, maybe it is 10 or 11 times, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, back and forth in Exodus. But the first one was the Lord is going to harden his heart, "I'm telling you, I'm going to harden his heart so that Egypt will know that I am the Lord." By hardening his heart, God showed his glory. If Pharaoh just said right away, "Sure, take them," they wouldn't have seen his glory.

Now, did God push Pharaoh away? Scripture interprets Scripture. Let's look at this in more of a biblical precise way. How did God harden Pharaoh's heart? What God did was good to Pharaoh every moment that Moses was there. Do you know what God did to Pharaoh? God showed his glory to Pharaoh. God showed that he is the true and living God. God said to Pharaoh, "You worship frogs, I'll show you frogs. You worship the sun, I'm the one who controls the sun. You worship flies, I'll show you flies." God said, "I am the true and living God," and by continually manifesting his glory, he allowed Pharaoh to do what was in Pharaoh's wicked heart which was to run from that glory and to harden himself against it and his heart became harder because light revealed and rejected always results in greater darkness. But you see that God did nothing wrong. God showed his glory. The indignation of Scripture is on Pharaoh. How could you see that glory and not fall in worship? Now we know because of the nature of sin but that's not God's problem, that's our problem. He has done that which is good.

So even in his wrath, he is revealing his goodness. I mean, it's right for him to punish sin. It's right and good for him to do that. There is no deficiency in God. This is one of the other important things that this relates to, is that it's important for us and this is something that we see happening, I think, in recent years. I've been pastoring for almost 24 years and in that time I have seen a great change in the landscape and most of it is just

tremendously wonderful because Reformed theology, for me when I came to pastor this church in 1993, I didn't run into anybody that was Reformed. I mean, just nobody. Well, I did have one guy. About a mile from here there is a Presbyterian pastor I went to seminary with and he came a year and a half into my ministry, Alan Johnson, at Old Peachtree Presbyterian church, and we prayed together and have for the last 23 years. He was my one Reformed friend. Go to meetings of pastors and it was tough. One of the wonderful things is that now people have a higher view of the sovereignty of God and I'm running into more and more guys who have a good biblical theology. But one of the dangers is from some of the young people, is that the enthusiasm at the sovereign grace of God can somehow become something that you use to beat other people with, and then the Calvinist becomes proud which it should be an oxymoron. How can you be a Calvinist and be proud of that? Think about that. Who are you? How smart are you? If you're saved, you're saved because you know God gave you a new heart, God chose you before the foundation of the world. You had nothing to do with it so where comes the pride? But sometimes there can be this misunderstanding and there can be this overemphasis on the sovereignty of God, not that the sovereignty of God is absolutely perfect, it is complete, there is nothing he is not sovereign over but it doesn't mean he's not loving.

I want to read to you, and one of the ways you see that is in the distinction between double predestination which is, I think, an error, and the doctrine of predestination which is true, and reprobation. What do I mean? Double predestination would teach that God predestines those who will believe, he predestines them before eternity to eternal life. That's right. He sets out everything in their lives and he lays out the boundaries and he makes it so that at the right time you come to faith. You're born again. Like Paul said, "When God was pleased to reveal his Son in me, he did." It was God that was pleased. It wasn't that Paul was pleased to believe on Jesus. No, God was pleased to reveal his Son in him. That part is right. The problem is the other side of it, to believe that God predestines to hell unbelievers in the same way he predestines believers to heaven; to see an equivalence between the two. The Bible doesn't teach that. The Bible teaches the doctrine of reprobation. That is, that God predestines the elect, yes, and orders everything in their life and he is sovereign over everything in the life of the unbeliever but what's happening is he's passing over the unbeliever. He's just not loving them with the same intensity he loves the believer, but as we saw, he loves them with sufficiency. Glorious love.

In fact, the doctrine of reprobation, Grudem writes this, "Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation, the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons in sorrow, deciding not to save them and to punish them for their sins and thereby to manifest his justice. The sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons in sorrow, deciding not to save them and to punish them for their sins and thereby to manifest his justice." That's reprobation and the sorrow is biblical. That's the thing we can't understand. Our algebraic equations don't fit. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that, "God is not willing for any to perish but for all men to come to the knowledge of the truth." There is a sense in which God desires all people to be saved. That's what he says. I read a sermon by Spurgeon on that, who was a great Calvinist, and he said many

Calvinists like to say that "all" doesn't mean "all" in 1 Timothy 2:4, and Spurgeon says if he didn't mean "all," why did he say "all"? It's the heart of God in which the offer of the Gospel is genuine. Believe on Jesus and be saved. The blood is sufficient. Of course, he knows they won't believe but it doesn't mean the offer is not genuine and so for us when we offer Christ, we can offer him genuinely to everyone. The indignation ought to be on the heart of the sinner.

Now, it's true then the last thing that we see, we said that God's love for all men, he loves all men without exception but he does love with distinction, and this is the wonder of election. I'll say a couple of words here to wrap up. The wonder of his electing grace is that he loves us even over and above and beyond. It's not that he loves them and you focus on how little he loves them. No, the focus is on how much he loves the elect. That's the way to see it. Even though he says in places he emphasizes his wrath and his justice, yes, and those passages, preach that. And he says things like, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." He says that, yes. He means that, yes. But he also says if you want to follow Jesus, you need to hate your mother, your father, your wife, your brother and your sister. Do you see that? You must love Jesus so much more that your love for those in your life seems as hate in comparison. So he says, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated, I love Esau. I love Esau with enough love to give him good things and to give him the truth about me and to preach the Gospel to him, but I don't love him as much as I love you. I love you so much more." That's the glory of who God is and what God has done.

Now, the important thing is that there is no deficiency in God's goodness. He is good. He is so good and wonderful and so then for us as Christians, he's saying no matter what happens in your life, never doubt his goodness. He will never be deficient in his love and his kindness to his own, and when you know that you belong to Jesus, you know that he's never going to do anything but good things for you, and you also know that if you want to belong to Jesus, it's his nature to want you to come to him so keep seeking him because of who he is. Don't look so much at your own unbelief or your own doubts, look at his goodness and keep pursuing him with your eyes upon him. It's the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. It's the goodness of God that leads us to life. We serve a Savior who is more than glorious. We serve a God who is more than wonderful, more wonderful than we could ever have imagined, and it's our delight to love him and one day it's going to be our delight to see him face-to-face. May God hasten that day.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we praise and honor you. We know that you are good and your word tells us that; in our moments of clarity, there is no doubt. Everything you do is good and right and when we doubt your goodness, if we would just look at the cross and we see you dying for our sins, your Son dying for our sins in our place, you Father, not withholding, not sparing him, but freely giving him up for us all, how will you not together with him freely give us all things? Make us people who delight in your goodness, trust in your goodness, and out of the joy of receiving your goodness, express that same goodness in love and generosity to those around us. Make us like you. Make us able to love our

*enemies. Make us able to show the glory of your beauty and your kindness and your love.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*