

On day one God created days. The first step in doing so was the creation of light. God made light so He could make days, but just after making the light, before He separates light and dark to make days and nights, there is a pause in the narrative.

God made the light, and then the work of creation suddenly stops, and the narrator gives this comment: **and God saw that the light was good.** (v.4)

Why is that comment there? Would anyone assume any differently? What value is there to that little comment?

It is of tremendous value. The truth behind it shapes the entire Christian worldview.

Good vs. Bad

It seems to me one of the most universal and fundamental instincts of human beings is to try to choose the good and reject the bad.

How to do that is something you learn, but the drive itself to do it seems to me to be instinctive.

When Isaiah wanted to refer to something in the near future, in Isa.8:4 he said it would happen **Before** (his new son knew) **how to say 'My father' or 'My mother'** (Hebrew: "AVI" and "AMI")

In another place he put it this way: **before the boy knows enough to reject the bad and choose the good, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.** (Isa.7:16)

Beginning to choose the good and reject the bad is as basic a human function as learning how to speak.

From the time we first begin to develop rational thought, the basis of our thinking is an effort to figure out what is good and what is bad.

As we become aware of our own existence, the first thing we do is attempt to orient ourselves in relationship to the real world. To do that we have to learn where we fall on each continuum of orientation.

We learn up and down, hot and cold, fast and slow, big and little, loud and soft, etc. And the most important of these is good and bad.

We choose the good from the bad at every level in life. When you go to Country Buffet, you look at all the food and try to figure out what would be best.

When you buy something at Wal Mart, you try to pick out what would best fit your needs & price range.

It's the same with selecting a house, or a job or how you're going to spend your Saturday afternoon.

All of life is an effort to choose the good and reject the bad.

The difference in people's choices is governed by what they consider to be good and what they consider to be bad.

For most people, the ultimate standard for what is good is pleasure, (albeit with varying levels of sophistication).

- Some are very crass and seek whatever sensation feels best at the moment.
- Others are a little more long sighted and are willing to experience some pain or discomfort for a greater pleasure. A man may be willing to sacrifice something he wants to make his wife happy, so he might enjoy the greater pleasure of a peaceful marriage relationship.
- Some may even live an ascetic lifestyle and inflict pain on themselves and deny themselves every *physical* pleasure so they can experience the greater pleasure of religious fulfillment.

But one way or the other, most people have the pursuit of pleasure as the standard for what is good.

In our culture we have the bizarre situation of postmodernism where people claim there is no such thing as good and bad, yet if you watch their lives you will see that every minute of every day they make choices of some things over other things – which is in total opposition to the philosophy they claim to believe.

Deep down, everyone has some idea of what he thinks is the standard of good, and makes his choices in life based on that.

So you can see why it's so vitally important that our concept of what is good be correct.

That's why Ro.16:19 says **I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.**

1Th.5:21-22

Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22Avoid every kind of evil.

If all of us spend our lives gravitating toward what we consider to be the good, it's absolutely crucial that we know what the standard of good is.

Scripture is constantly calling us to discern the true good, and to be devoted to pursuing it.

Ro.12:9

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

3Jn.11

do not imitate what is evil but what is good.

Tit.3:14

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good,

Tit 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

In fact, that is the very reason why Jesus came from heaven and died on the cross:

Tit.2:14

He gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Your character is determined by your level of knowledge of the true good, and your attitude toward it. That's why Tit.1:8 says an elder in the church must be **one who loves the good**

TT 2 Ti.3

2Ti.3:3 describes the horrible times in the last days that are coming in which people will not be **lovers of the good.**

Then he spells out what that will look like, and why it's so bad. When you think the standard of good is pleasure, you have the beginning of the end of society.

2 Tim.3:1-5

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- 5having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

When high on your list of what constitutes good is yourself and money, and you love pleasure more than you love God, the result is that you elevate yourself over everyone else (boasting & pride), which results in you becoming

- disobedient to authorities (since they infringe on your pleasure),
- ungrateful (since you think you deserve everything anyway)
- unholy (Since holiness in a sinful world is painful)
- without love (because love is concerned with the well-being of others above yourself, and that interferes with pleasure)
- unforgiving (because forgiveness requires you absorb the pain and loss)
- slanderous, without self-control & brutal (because that's the response of the flesh against people who infringe on your pleasure)

Once people think of pleasure as the measure of what is good, that will cause the unraveling of society itself.

TT MT.19

The Lord wants us to love the true good, and to do that we need to think deeply about what goodness is.

There is an intriguing verse in Mt.19:16-17

a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

We read a couple verses later that this man believed he had kept all the commands in a satisfactory way from birth, and yet he still felt that he had not yet achieved enough good to merit entrance into the kingdom of God.

The man asks a two-part question perhaps without realizing it. First he's asking what the true good is, and secondly how to get eternal life.

So Jesus begins by addressing the first part of his question.

If you are going to get to heaven by doing good, you have to know what good is.

17 "Why do you ask me about the good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good.

"Why do you even need to ask that? If the standard for good is God, then the good is whatever God's will is."

This guy thinks there has to be some standard other than God's will.

... If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

...20" All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

"I've done the God's will thing. I'm looking for something else."

People have been puzzled about why Matthew's report of this story is so different from Mark's and Luke's.

In Matthew the man asks: "Teacher, what good thing must I do..." and Mark and Luke have him asking "Good teacher, what must I do..."

In Matthew Jesus' response is "Why do you ask me about what is good?"

In Mark and Luke Jesus says, "Why do you call me good?"

This is not a problem, because the normal way of reporting a conversation was to explain the gist of it without providing exact quotes. We assume most conversations were normal conversations, which would mean much more was said than is reported. If you had heard the entire conversation, you would see how all three reports are accurate, even though they emphasize different things selectively leave other things out.

This man thought Jesus was a man who had figured out how to be good enough to deserve heaven, and the man thought if he could just obtain that information, he could do the same thing.

But there is one thing that is the same in all three reports. In all three, this account comes immediately after a discussion of the kind of people who possess the kingdom of God – people with humble, childlike faith.

Then right after that up walks this man who believes he has kept God's law from childhood, and that he can do some deed good enough to obtain heaven.

So there is no question what the purpose of this account is. It's to give an example of the kind of person who will not enter the kingdom.

Here is a man who is very conscientious about doing good, and yet he stands as the example of the kind of person who will not enter the kingdom of Heaven.

A misunderstanding of what the true good is can be enough to keep a person out of heaven.

(To understand the Gospel you at least have to know that the standard of good is so high it's not humanly attainable.)

So let's think through the meaning of what constitutes true goodness.

And to do that, there is no better place to start than Gn.1:4, where God sets the standard for goodness by making something and saying, "It is good."

Why not just "It was good"? The phrase **And God saw that it was good...**

- gives a picture of God enjoying it
- gives it more of a sense of an ultimate standard (more impact than if just the narrator says it).

The Hebrew word is TOV.

Definition

טוֹב - Qal 1. good, pleasant, delightful, 1. agreeable to the senses: a. to the sight, beautiful. 2. giving pleasure, happiness, prosperity, and so pleasing, 3. excellent of its kind: 4. valuable a 5. appropriate, becoming 9. kind, 10. (ethical), right: moral good;

Think about some of your favorite things in life. What is it that you like about those things? What makes a sunset better than a flashlight? What makes a Thanksgiving meal better than a frozen burrito?

Look at the sheet I handed out:

Sawdust → pile of wood → tree

watch parts → \$5 watch → Rolex

random noise → Jr. high band → London Philharmonic

heap in junkyard → Festiva → Mercedes

collection of thread → K-Mart clothes → wedding dress

pot of paints → amateur drawing → Rembrandt

The things on the right are better. What makes them better?

We all know whether something belongs on the right side or left – if I gave you these words all mixed up and asked you to put each in the correct column, I'm sure we would all agree on which one went where.

So there is some standard that we all know, but what is it? What is the quality that makes something belong farther to the right?

That idea is summed up in the Hebrew word TOV.

WHAT MAKES SOMETHING TOV? What is the standard of good? Beauty?

The atheist has no answer. The evolutionist has no answer. But we do have an answer.

Seven times during the creation account we hear God declare "**It is TOV.**"

That is not just a passing observation. God was not making incidental comments during the creation. He didn't make the sky and say, "It is blue." Or water and say, "It is wet" or the Sun and say, "It is hot."

But over and over, "It is TOV." That's because the whole point of the creation was to bring about TOV. That's the reason to create something. The purpose of creativity is to inject TOV into something – to make something good.

The creation was already good with respect to God the moment he made it, but now he is making it TOV with respect to human beings.

THE MOMENT GOD DECLARED THE CREATION GOOD, THE ULTIMATE STANDARD OF GOODNESS WAS SET FOR MANKIND.

If the beauty and order of this world was made, then, the standard of beauty must be the Maker. So the objective standard of beauty is that excellence that we see in creation which reflects God.

Therefore whatever reflects God in any way is the truly good.
TOV is the way God made things. It is the fingerprint of God.
TOV is beauty and goodness in the highest sense. It is excellence.

TOV is what you like about everything you like. That which you think is wonderful – the reason you regard it as wonderful is because of the degree of TOV that is in that thing.

Jas.1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above (How many good things don't come from God?)

God is the source of all good (since the definition of good is that which comes from God).
So everything that is good is good because it is a reflection of God in some way.

There is a certain kind of power line pole that is only made in Tracy's home town – Red Wing, MN. Any time we are driving around with her dad, if we ever pass one of those polls he will always comment, "That was made in Red Wing."

That's the way it is for us when we see beauty, order, structure, complexity, excellence – the things that put something farther over to the right on the chart.

Any time you see beauty and goodness, you know where it came from. And when you recognize TOV as having come from God, and reflecting God, that is worship.

If you see some flowers and say, "Those are beautiful, I like that," there is no real meaning in that.

But if you see them and think, "Those are beautiful – that's what God is like – lovely, complex, beautiful" then that is worship.

If we evaluate everything based on the standard of how much we enjoy it, we are making our pleasure the ultimate standard of good. What we should do instead is evaluate everything based on how much intrinsic excellence and goodness it has – regardless of how much we like it.

That's not to say there is anything wrong with enjoying beauty. It's just that if our standard of measuring how good something is is our own enjoyment of it, we are right back to pleasure as the standard for good.

There are plenty of things that are good, but that don't bring me pleasure by themselves. But once I realize the intrinsic goodness of them, I enjoy them because I realize they reflect the goodness of God.

There are some kinds of music that don't bring me any pleasure initially, but that exhibit great skill and excellence. When I find myself focusing on that, and on the fact that that is a reflection of the goodness of God, now I'm beginning to worship, and I do enjoy that.

TOV is an important reality to God. God has always been very concerned with goodness. Everything he made, he made beautiful - nothing ugly.

You can see how important it is to Him just by reading His Word. The word TOV occurs 614 times in the OT. ("pray" 84 times, love 219 times, sin 297 times, Lord 355 times)

I looked up all 55 of the occurrences in Gn. to find a definition.

We can summarize by saying that which is TOV is:

1. Excellent in and of itself
2. Beautiful to the observer
3. Beneficial

So the term "TOV" carries the idea of quality & excellence, aesthetic beauty, and being beneficial

1. That which is excellent in and of itself.

- **high quality (few flaws or impurities)** -

Gn.2:12 the gold there is good

18:7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf

27:9 "Go now to the flock and bring me two choice

young goats

41:5 Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing

It's the difference between a \$5 watch and a Rolex

When you go in the direction of better and better quality, after you have gone that direction for infinity, then you have reached the level of God's excellence.

So all excellence points us in the direction of God.

The best of a category

It is often translated "best."

45:18 I will give you the best of the land of Egypt

45:20 the best of all the land of Egypt is yours."

45:23 ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt

God is the best of any category. There is nothing wrong with God.

He is perfectly efficient, infinitely complex (yet he is one), He is perfect in love and in wrath, he is tender when it is best to be tender, and he is tender in a perfect way. He is angry when it's best to be angry, and he expresses that anger in a perfect way.

He is the source of excellence. So when you see excellence, and instead of just enjoying it, you recognize it as reflecting God, that is worship.

Also inherent in the concept of TOV is beauty.

2. That which is beautiful to the observer – includes all the things that goes into aesthetics – symmetry, color, proportions, balance, etc.

beautiful to the eyes - 26:7 Rebekah, for she is beautiful (lit. "a TOV sight").

irresistable and inviting Gn.49:14 Used of a donkey that sees a TOV resting place, can't resist, lays down and then can't get back up under his load. Attractive, appealing.

Something is TOV that has great complexity working together with great simplicity.

You look at a great piece of artwork, and it is beautiful. You don't know why, it's just a striking picture. Very simple. But that is achieved through the genius of the complexity of brushstrokes, lighting, perspective, background, shading, contrast, proportion, etc.

If you have ever wondered what the Christian perspective on art is, the biblical theology of art is rooted in Genesis one.

Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. If the beholder thinks some ugly thing is beautiful, that doesn't make it beautiful – he's just wrong.

Beauty is not just a matter of taste. It's not just a matter of opinion. There *is* an objective standard.

Taste and personal preference applies within the realm of that which is objectively beautiful, but it's not my preference that makes something beautiful.

Something is beautiful if it is TOV – if it is well ordered and structured and reflects something of the way God created things.

Think of all the beauty your eyes have seen - all that didn't come from an ugly God.

Ps.27:4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD

Beauty is important to God, because God is beautiful.

So everything he made, he made beautiful - nothing ugly (ugliness is the distortion of the good)

That's why God included chapter after chapter in the book of Exodus on the exact requirements of the Tabernacle.

He wanted it to be beautiful.

Everything was overlaid with gold.

Ex.37:1-7 Bezael made the ark of acacia wood-- [2] He overlaid it with pure GOLD, both inside and out, and made a GOLD molding around it. [3] He cast four GOLD rings for it and fastened them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. [4] Then he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with GOLD. [5] And he inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it. 6 He made the atonement cover of pure GOLD--two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. 7 Then he made two cherubim out of hammered GOLD at the ends of the cover.

It goes on and on like that. The word, "gold" appears over 100 times in Ex.

Everything had to be beautiful and excellent - only the best quality, best materials - skilled craftsmen (The word "skill" appears only 59X in the whole Bible and almost half of those are in Ex.)

Ex.28:3-8

Tell all the SKILLED men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron,...6 "Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen--the work of a SKILLED craftsman. [7] It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. 8 Its SKILLFULLY woven waistband is to be like it...

The Temple was to be even more beautiful. David gave instructions to Solomon:

1Chrn.22:14-16 "I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. [15] You have many workmen: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as men skilled in every kind of work [16] in gold and silver, bronze and iron--craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you."

1 Chrn.15:22 Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was SKILLFUL at it.

1CH 25:6 All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. [7] Along with their relatives--all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD--they numbered 288

2 Chrn.34:12 The Levites--all who were skilled in playing musical instruments-- [13] had charge of the laborers

They had outstanding special music every day in the Temple. And this is what God wants of us too.

Ps.33:3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

This is why we have a beautiful place of worship. It is why we have special music and

sometimes a choir and flowers.

God is glorified by excellence (since that is one of his attributes), and so we ought to have people who are the most skilled doing each of the ministries in the church.

But to the unbeliever, there is no meaning to the concept of beauty other than that which is pleasing to the eyes, which is totally subjective. And the only meaning beauty has then is tied to whatever feeling of pleasure it produces.

If that were the true standard, then art wouldn't be very important. But if the standard of beauty is that which reflects God, then good art has tremendous importance.

If anyone should be leading the way in the area of the arts it should be the church. We are the only ones who understand its meaning, and we are the ones who know the One Whom it is supposed to reflect, and so we are uniquely equipped for the arts.

A secular musician might be able to come in here and appreciate the music at a simplistic level, but most of the beauty will be lost on him.

I was thinking of this last week when we sang "Open the Eyes of My Heart" and the men were singing "Holy Holy Holy" while the women were singing the verse.

My soul was lifted to profound worship as I was listening to you all sing that. As I thought about the fact that all the men were forcefully proclaiming the holiness of God, and above that could be heard the lovely, beautiful female voices calling on God to open our eyes to His glory.

I was thinking about the engineering God programmed into the genetic code of men and women so they would have such different voices that blend so beautifully together.

A secular musician might listen to all that and make an evaluation about pitch and balance and rhythm, and miss 99% of the beauty of it.

There are brilliant secular musicians who have listened to chorus #34 of Mendelssohn's "Elijah" ("Behold God the Lord") and have been amazed at the musical genius.

But what they are appreciating is only part of the story. A Christian who is trained in classical music appreciates not only the mechanical genius of the arrangement of notes, but also understands that in that piece he uses music to depict the mighty wind that tore apart the mountains, then the earthquake – you can feel it in the music.

Then the fire and heat. But God was not in any of that. Then comes the still, small voice of God. The music is masterfully brought down into a calm, beautiful, soft melody that helps the worshipping heart grasp the meaning of an important truth about what God is like.

Bach sought to express the profound, inscrutable mystery of the Trinity with his trio sonatas. They have a melody going in the right hand, another melody in the left hand, and a third in the pedal line. They all sound at once, each retains its own, unique identity, but also fitting together perfectly as one, unified piece – each one a harmony for the others.

Musicians through the years have marveled at the level of musical excellence of these works.

But that's the kind of thing you get when you have someone who understands the glory of God.

Some have thought that an instrumental piece – playing classical music with no lyrics – is not really worship. And it's not, unless the worshippers understand this principle. That kind of thing can easily degenerate into mere entertainment. But to the skilled worshipper, listening to one of Bach's trio sonatas can lift your soul right into heaven.

It's a strange situation we have in our day where most of the people who are in the arts are godless people who don't understand the standard of beauty.

That's like having all the blind people in charge of the painting or the tone deaf people in charge of the music or children in charge of brain surgery.

They're just not equipped for it.

When you combine postmodernism (the idea that there are no objective standards) with the arts, what you end up with is the same as an orchestra that doesn't believe in the concept of pitch or rhythm, or a scientist who doesn't buy into the laws of physics.

Look at modern art, or listen to some of the modern composers, and compare that with the works of men who were seeking to express the glory of God with their art – like Handel's Messiah, and you will see the difference.

It's like comparing a house built by a master builder with one built by someone who doesn't believe in measuring or who thinks structural integrity is an outdated concept.

That's why today we have the train wreck of modern art.

It's the church who should be producing the art, because we are the ones who know God, and God is the standard of beauty.

We are the ones with not only the understanding of beauty and goodness, but we are also the ones with the highest motive to create beauty.

The third dimension to this concept of TOV is the idea that God created a world that is

3. Beneficial in practical, pragmatic terms.

In Gn.44:4 TOV is used to describe kindness – the way a good friend would treat you. And in Gn.15:15 TOV is used to describe that which is fulfilling or satisfying.

The world in v.1 was probably wonderful in many ways, but it wasn't beneficial for human beings. By making it TOV, God was making it a wonderful place for us.

So in the creation account God makes a big point of the fact that He created a TOV world. Why do you think He made that so emphatic?

It's to *show* us that He is good. Just telling us He was good wouldn't mean anything unless we had some experience with goodness. So He made a good world for us to live in, so we understand when we read in the Bible about His goodness.

Every moment of pleasure you have ever had – everything you like about whatever and whoever

you like – all that is designed to give you a taste of what God is like. He is like that to the infinite extreme.

So we can understand that when we see Him some day we will be overwhelmed at His beauty. We will find Him irresistible. We will enjoy His infinite kindness. We will forever marvel at His infinite complexity.

So God is good.

Everything about God is structured, not chaotic. He is exactly as He ought to be in every way. There is nothing wrong with Him.

He is excellent, highest quality, the best possible way He could be, beautiful, everything about Him is well arranged, structured, symmetrical, balanced, useful, beneficial, lovely, inviting...

Definition for God: He possesses every quality that is good to have, and he possesses it in a perfect an infinite way.

People get mad at God, because they don't understand that God is good.

So it's an important part of the Christian faith that we understand that the world is good. It's marred by sin and the curse, but the very fact we can identify areas that are not as they should be points us to the fact that there is an ultimate standard of good.

There is nothing inherently bad about the creation.

The idea that matter is good is somewhat unique to Christianity. Very often religious people want to say that matter is evil and spirit is good, which results in either asceticism (harsh treatment of the body) or hedonism (your body is hopelessly evil anyway, so you might as well indulge it however you want).

But Scripture teaches that matter is not evil. It's good. The creation was good, and the crowning pinnacle of creation was human beings.

The biblical world view is that human beings are the best created things in existence.

On the chart we looked at before, if you keep moving right, the thing in creation that is the farthest over is a human being.

The human body is the most wondrous, fantastic physical reality there is. There are some amazing things in nature, but nothing that comes anywhere close to the human body.

And then you begin to consider the wonder and complexity not only of our bodies, but in our spirits and souls and minds...

And the idea that days specifically are good was unique in the ANE. The people at that time believed time was cyclical rather than linear, so time is nothing but a prison of recurring struggle.

But God said, "No, days are TOV."

When God said **It is good** He was saying a lot.

When God made light (and the rest), and said, "It is TOV," he was saying,

That light is excellent, high quality, the best it can be, beautiful, well-arranged, symmetrical, balanced, useful, beneficial, IT IS EXACTLY AS IT OUGHT TO BE. There is nothing wrong with it.

I think the best summary of the meaning of the word TOV is this: TOV is the way things ought to be. (Gn.2:18)

It's the difference between when everything is in its place, and things operate as they should, and chaos.

There is an ideal picture for your life - a way things *ought* to go.

If things don't go that way, we say something is *wrong* - not right - not as it should be.

As long as we live in this cursed world, there is always some chaos that finds its way into our lives - and what we long for, and what we spend our lives working for is the Good - the way things ought to be.

Benediction:

Ps 100: Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. 2Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Review Question:

1. What does the word "good" (TOV) mean?

It refers to that which is excellent, structured, well-ordered, beautiful, useful, lovely, complex.