

## The Goodness of God

### Class Outline (Lecture Notes)

Visit the book table; sign up for books; sign class information list, including e-mail, if desired.

A question has been raised about books for high school age. I may suggest a couple of books, and ask for feedback if anyone is willing to try them.

The topic for the class – The Goodness of God.

Scriptural Introduction. Pick a few significant verses and review them before going into the Calvin:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 34:6** And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 52:1** ... The goodness of God endures continually.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hosea 3:5** Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Matthew 19:17** .... No one is good but One, that is, God. ... "

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:32** Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 10:38** "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 2:1** Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, *in order* that we should walk in them.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Philippians 1:6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Philippians 2:13** ... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Thessalonians 1:11** Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 13:20** Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **3 John 1:11** Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

Excerpts from the Institutes on the Goodness of God. (The page numbers correspond to the McNeill edition; the section numeration should be the same in all translations).

1.1.1 Read the entire section.

1.2.1 p 40-41

[Calvin] Moreover, although our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honor to him, it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him. This I take to mean that not only does he sustain this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause. Thus we may learn to await and seek all these things from him, and thankfully to ascribe them, once, received, to him ... For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him – they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.

[Teacher] This conviction of Calvin, that until men know God in his goodness they will never yield him service or give themselves fully to him, has profound implications for ourselves, as we live the Christian life, and has profound implications for our Christian testimony and for our evangelism. The goodness of God is a central article of faith, and a central article of witness to God. The fact that our thoughts underplay this attribute of God tends to indicate that our Christianity bears a “legal” tinge. In Scripture, legalism of any type (and there are many types) is fatal to all true and real Christian experience, joy, and testimony.

1.14.22 p 182

[Calvin] To conclude once for all, whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us at the same time bear in mind that the dispensation of all those things which he has made is in his own hand and power and that we are indeed his children, whom he has received into his faithful protection to nourish and educate. We are therefore to await the fullness of all good things from him alone and to trust completely that he will never leave us destitute of what we need for salvation, and to hang our hopes on none but him! We are therefore, also, to petition him for whatever we desire; and we are to recognize as a blessing from him, and thankfully to acknowledge, every benefit that falls to our share. So, invited by the great sweetness of his beneficence and goodness, let us study to love and serve him with all our heart.

2.7.5 p 354

[Augustine] says: “Love so follows knowledge that no one can love God perfectly who does not first fully know his goodness.”

3.2.16 p 562

[Calvin] Briefly, he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation. ... And everywhere [the apostle] so teaches as to intimate that we cannot otherwise well comprehend the goodness of God unless we gather from it the fruit of great assurance.

3.2.41 p 589

[Calvin] But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return? For truly, that abundant sweetness which God has stored up for those who fear him cannot be known without at the same time powerfully moving us. And once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself.

[Teacher] One of the things Calvin has to teach us is love for God. The experience of the Institutes has exposed the lack of such depth of love for God in my own heart. May this study provoke a craving in all our hearts for what Calvin is teaching.

3.4.10 p 634

[Calvin, speaking of confession of sins to God] To whom should we confess? Surely to him, that is, if we fall down before him with troubled and humbled heart; if wholeheartedly accusing and condemning ourselves before him, we seek to be acquitted by his goodness and mercy.

3.4.25 p 651

[Calvin] When the Lord proclaims through Isaiah: “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my sake, and I will not remember your sins” [Isa. 43:25], does he not openly declare that the cause and foundation of forgiveness are to be sought in his goodness alone?

3.11.16 p 746

[Calvin, comparing law righteousness with faith righteousness] But Scripture, when it speaks of faith righteousness, leads us to something far different; namely, to turn aside from the contemplation of our own works and look solely upon God’s mercy and Christ’s perfection. Indeed, it presents this order of justification: to begin with, God deigns to embrace the sinner with his pure and freely given goodness, finding nothing in him except his miserable condition to prompt Him to mercy, since he sees man utterly void and bare of good works; and so he seeks in himself the reason to benefit man. Then God touches the sinner with a sense of his goodness in order that he, despairing of his own works, may ground the whole of his salvation in God’s mercy. [Calvin goes on to teach how the goodness of God has provided the righteousness of Christ to interceded for our sins. But note: It is the goodness and mercy of God that has moved God to not spare His own Son, for our salvation. Not the other way around.]

3.14.17 p 784

[Calvin] Thus also in the first chapter of Ephesians he teaches that we are received into grace by God out of sheer mercy, that this comes about by Christ’s intercession and is apprehended by faith, and that all things exist to the end that the glory of divine goodness may fully shine forth.

3.17.4 p 806-7

[Calvin] God’s sole reason to receive man unto himself is that he sees him utterly lost if left to himself, but because he does not will him to be lost, he exercises his mercy in freeing him. Now we see how it is that this acceptance has nothing to do with man’s righteousness but is pure proof of divine goodness toward miserable sinners, utterly unworthy of so great a benefit.

3.20.11 p 863

[Calvin] But for the saints the occasion that best stimulates them to call upon God is when, distressed by their own need, they are troubled by the greatest unrest, and are almost driven out of their senses, until faith opportunely comes to their relief. For among such tribulations God’s goodness so shines upon them that even when they groan with weariness under the weight of present ills, and also are troubled and tormented by the fear of greater ones, yet, relying upon his goodness, they are relieved of the difficulty of bearing them, and are solaced and hope for escape and deliverance.

### Theological Conclusions

All God’s Attributes are perfect and he possesses, exercises and fills each attribute 100%. But, there is an order of precedence to his attributes. Certain attributes stand at the head. Other attributes serve.

The goodness of God being at the head of God’s attributes, for Calvin, implies

- 1) The central focus of the knowledge of God is not his power, might, or sovereignty – his absolute right to do whatever he wishes – even though he does have absolute sovereign rights over all his

creation. His power, might, and sovereignty are used to expose and glorify his goodness. Does this change the way we preach the gospel, or understand the doctrines of election and predestination? (Yes).

- 2) The central focus is not his justice, even though he is absolutely and completely just in all his dealings. Because He is good, He withheld not his own Son, because his justice required an atonement for sin.

Luther said, when God gave not only temporal blessings but also gave us his Son: “He has poured out upon us both temporal and eternal goods and with them his own being; and he has poured himself out with everything he is and does for us who were sinners, undeserving enemies, and servants of the devil. He can neither do any more than this for us nor give us anything else.”

So we see that this doctrine of the Goodness of God is a total Reformation doctrine, and something we need to recover in our own personal theologies.

Having explored the Goodness of God, and having drawn the above conclusions, how does our practical behavior change?

- 1) A better understanding of God’s good intentions and kindness toward us in Christ: More faith in his goodness. More fear of offending him with our sins. Less sinning.
- 2) A different manner in our prayers: More faith that God will answer our prayers. More praying. More answers.
- 3) A different manner of the Christian life: Manifesting the goodness and love of God in our personal dealings, motivated because our experience of the goodness of God is so good.
- 4) A different manner of evangelism: The Goodness of God sets the scene for the call for repentance toward God and faith in Christ the Savior. There is no repentance without knowledge of the goodness of God opening the door to it.

Remember Luther’s experience: The demand for repentance and perfection without seeing the “way out” (the goodness of God in Christ) causes hatred of God. Luther was only delivered into joyful repentance and exuberant Christian life when he saw the “way out” that the goodness of God provided justification as a gift, only to be received.