

Is God Good To All Men?

‘Of course he is,’ everyone may well say. But is this true? We have elsewhere proved that God does not love all men and does not give grace to all men; these are the root errors found in Amyraldism and of Arminianism. Amyraldism was once considered a rogue theological development in the 17th century and was combated by consistent Calvinist teachers just as much as Arminianism, but it is now accepted by most Reformed people and virtually all evangelicals. Associated with this implicit universalism in God’s decree is the idea that God is equally good to everyone, elect and reprobate; but to teach this is to suggest something destructive to God’s essential being. If consignment to hell cannot be considered as ‘good’ to modern people, then God changes from being good to reprobates now to being something else later. If scripture teaches that reprobates are under God’s condemnation and wrath from eternity, then how can God be good to them? The whole conception that God is good to all is flawed and needs proper analysis.

The theological perspective

What is meant by ‘good’ in relation to God?

‘Good’ is a very relative word that is given many different meanings by men. In ethical and theological terms it is defined variously as ‘useful’, ‘fit for purpose’, ‘that which is longed for’, ‘distinguished’ or ‘strong’. Different nations express it in different ways; Greeks associated it with beauty, Romans with status and Germans with productivity. On a modern mundane level, most men consider the noun and adjective to express ‘approval’, ‘something desired’, ‘pleasing’, ‘expressing moral virtue’ or ‘being fit for purpose’.

God’s goodness is a manifestation of his perfection – God is perfect (Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31; Ps 18:30; Matt 5:48); ‘goodness’ is rarely mentioned of God in absolute terms in scripture (Ps 100:5; Mk 10:18 / Lk 18:19). Perfection is more easily defined; God never does anything wrong, incomplete, inaccurate, unjust, unrighteous, unstable; his work is always finished, complete and perfect; nothing can be added to it to make it better; nothing can be taken away from it because it is forever (Eccles 3:14). God’s goodness must not be considered in human terms, but only in an absolute sense; his goodness is God’s absolute perfection.

God aims at nothing but himself since he is self-existent and infinite; he can only rest in himself. God attributes are centred upon his own perfections, not something outside himself. When he loves, it is with a view to himself; he cannot be satisfied with anything less than perfection, so the objects of his love are brought into union with him and perfected; thus he can love them. God loves himself in them (the elect). When God is good to the elect he blesses himself. God’s goodness manifests itself in different forms according to the objects of his goodness. His goodness to the elect is connected to other divine attributes, such as steadfast love, grace, favour, forgiveness and covenant faithfulness. God’s goodness to those he has chosen who are considered as sinners is called grace and this goodness is never shown to those who are not elect.

God’s goodness or perfection towards the reprobate is their full condemnation and punishment. Against sin, God’s perfection is revealed as justice, wrath and hate; but men would not consider this as ‘good’ or ‘something desired’. God cannot approve of that which is inconsistent with his divine nature, his perfection; this is why hell is eternal separation from God’s presence.

Since everything God does is infinite, eternal, changeless and wise, then any action or affection towards men must be eternal and immutable. Thus if God loves the elect, he loved them completely and perfectly in eternity past, never changes in that love, and loves

them into eternity future. [The concept of past and future in eternity is meaningless, but from our perspective it regards what is past and future to us.] Ephesians 1:4 confirms this. So, God's disposition towards the reprobate must also be eternal and changeless. We know that God says that he hates them (Ps 5:6, 11:5), we know that his wrath abides upon them (Jn 3:36) and that in the future they will be condemned to hell. Indeed, God explains to us that he fashioned them for this very purpose of wrath and justice (Prov 16:4).

To summarise: God's goodness is really his perfection. What God wills and decrees is always eternal, changeless and perfect. His goodness varies according to its objects; thus to the elect God goodness is seen as love, grace, mercy, and faithfulness. To the reprobate God's goodness is manifested as justice, wrath and condemnation. These things were settled in eternity since God is eternal and his decrees issued before time.

Does God do good to the reprobate?

To suggest that God does what humans call 'good' to reprobates today is in utter conflict with God's disposition toward them revealed in scripture. Consider the definitions of 'good'.

- Does God 'approve' of the reprobate? Certainly not; he judges them as wicked.
- Are the reprobate 'something desired', by God? No; he casts them out of his presence into hell.
- Are the reprobate 'pleasing' to God? By no means; he declares that he abhors them.
- Do the reprobate 'express moral virtue'? No; they transgress God's law and are unrighteous. No man can do good, not even one.
- Are the reprobate 'fit for purpose' as human beings meant to manifest God's glory? No; they utterly miss the mark (sin) and dishonour God's name.

There is no sense in which the reprobate could be recipients of God's infinite goodness because there is nothing in them on which the divine goodness could rest. So, from a theological perspective, it is impossible that God can do good (as humans understand it) to the reprobate. From the divine point of view, God's actions towards the reprobate are perfect and good, in the sense that they are morally hated, justly condemned, adequately punished and sentenced to an eternal hell. God's action towards the reprobate is good in that it perfectly accords with his divine plan and harmonises with his decrees and character.

What does scripture actually say?

Men shall speak of the might of your awesome acts, and I will declare your greatness. They shall utter the memory of your great goodness, and shall sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise you, O LORD, and your saints shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. (Ps 145: 6-20)

This is the only place where the Bible seems to imply that God is good to all, and clearly this must be qualified.

- Firstly, the immediate context of God being good to all does not regard men but creation in general; his tender mercies are over all his works, it does not say 'all men'.

- Those who speak of God's glory are the elect; the reprobate are not interested in God's glory.
- Since all God's works do not praise him (the reprobate hate God and his law), the reference to 'All Your works shall praise you' must mean the elect amongst men and also nature, which has no moral basis (trees always obey God). This is confirmed immediately by the addition of 'and your saints shall bless you'.
- The Lord is not gracious to the reprobate and does not grant them mercy; neither does the Lord uphold the reprobate or raise them up. This also confirms that there are two groups under consideration in this psalm.
- The word 'gracious' in v17 is not in the Hebrew, it is better translated as 'faithful'. This can only be applied to the elect.
- The Lord does not satisfy the desire of the wicked; the Lord is not near to the reprobate; the Lord does not save those who are not elect; indeed the psalm shows that these promises are only given to 'those who call upon him in truth'.
- Regarding the reprobate the psalm says that God will destroy the wicked.

So, the psalmist explains that God is good to his creation and particularly so to the elect. To these he gives certain promises here, such as saving them; but the reprobate are described at the end as not gaining these promises but are, rather, destroyed. There is no basis in this psalm for stating that God is good to reprobates. His goodness is to those who call upon him in truth. [Notice that the word 'love' does not appear in this psalm, unlike the faulty translation of the NIV.]

God is good only to his people

There are no Bible texts which state that God is good to the reprobate, but there are some that confirm God is good to the elect.

- Truly God *is* good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. (Ps 73:1)
- The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, to the soul *who* seeks Him. (Lam 3:25)
- My words do good to him who walks uprightly? (Mic 2:7)

As beloved of God and being found in Christ from eternity, the elect only receive good from God, even if it is dressed up in hard times.

God allows evil to affect men under his sovereign supervision

Claiming that God only does good to everyone, based upon a wrong interpretation of Ps 145, contradicts clear scriptures which state that God sovereignly wills evil against people all the time. Note:

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity [lit. 'evil']; I, the LORD, do all these *things*. (Isa 45:7)

Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass, *When* the Lord has not commanded *it? Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High That woe [lit. 'evil'] and well-being proceed? (Lam 3:37)

If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity [lit. 'evil'] in a city, will not the LORD have done *it?* (Amos 3:6)

Observe that all the evil things in this life, whether severe weather, war, suffering, or persecution, are under the sovereign control of God; if that were not so he could not be God. To deny that God oversees evil things is to deny God's essential being and reject that he is in control of history and men's destiny.

From a human perspective, to receive evil things at the hand of God means that we are not receiving good things. But this is due to our lack of wisdom and inability to see from the perspective of eternity. When God gives us tribulation, it is good for us; in fact it is perfect. If God brings persecution upon the church it is the best thing that could happen. If God tries us with afflictions, it is a wise provision to help us achieve God's purposes. [Those who continually pray for revival to solve church problems should consider this.]

Now the difference between the elect and the reprobate is that the elect have God's promise, as their Father, that all things taking place are under his control, for their good, and they can thank him for them. This is clear scripture teaching:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. (Rm 8:28)

For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. (2 Cor 4:15-16)

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:18)

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (Jm 1:2-3)

Thus all the 'bad' things in this life, as well as the 'good' things, are for our benefit and given us at the direction of God, the Lord of all. However, the reprobate have no such promise because they do not receive God's grace and are not loved by him. Their purpose is destruction in order to demonstrate the wrath, justice and holiness of God (Prov 16:4, Rm 9:17-23). The bad things which they experience are just deserts for their wilful sins, while the 'good' things that God allows them in providence (sun, rain etc.) merely confirm them in their rejection of God and decision to ignore his law.

Conclusion

It is important that the church stops speaking about God in human terms, with human limitations, and begins to affirm the scriptural truth about God. When preachers tell a room full of sinners that God loves them all – they lie about God and deny his attributes. The same is true with God's goodness; he is not good to all in the human sense of the word. In terms of his perfection God always does what is right to the object of his actions. To the elect God is always good and that goodness is displayed in love, faith, grace and so on. To the reprobate, those God chose in eternity to be the objects of justice and wrath, God's goodness is manifested in condemnation and hell for sin.

In absolute terms God is good to all since God is always perfect in his actions; but in human terms (and this is the normal meaning used by people today) God's behaviour to reprobates is not good but wrathful and condemnatory.

The wicked shall be turned into hell. (Ps 9:17)

The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind *shall be* the portion of their cup. For the LORD *is* righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright. (Ps 11:5-7)

Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned. (Ps 34:21-22)

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