

# No good thing withheld

The LORD will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed *is* the man who trusts in You! **Ps 84:11-12**

Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! *There is* no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.  
**Ps 34:9-10**

## Introduction

One of the difficulties in the Christian life is to separate, and understand the difference, between the divine perspective and the human experience. This often causes many problems and not a few heresies.

Many books could be written on the theological analysis of this problem; the difference between time and eternity being but one aspect. But the real issue is how to live in the material world and in spiritual warfare, in the divine perspective: 'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth' (Col 3:1-2). How do we centre upon God's way and not our ways?

Well, there are several answers. The first is that we live by faith and not by sight. Many people have no clue about what this really means. Then there is the matter of putting on the new man and putting off the old; sadly I believe that few believers really understand this as well.

The real key is not to think like the world. We must be radically different in our approach to things that arise.

The subject matter of this paper is a case in point. Believers are promised that God will not withhold any good thing from his children. But what does that mean?

This is where heretics step in. So often whole church and belief systems are built on the premise that this promise is viewed in an entirely fleshly and worldly manner. Thus leaders tell gullible people that God wants them to be happy all the time and sadness is a failure. Others tell weak people that God wants them to be healed all the time and sickness is a lack of faith. Yet others teach needy people that God wants them to be rich and prosperous all the time and poverty is a failure to claim the promise.

All these teachings are lies. They are based on a failure to understand the will of God and the divine, eternal perspective.

Now God can heal people when he chooses to; but it is not an automatic right of salvation now and it is not a current application of redemption.<sup>1</sup> God can make some people rich when it suits his purposes but that is not the lot of all Christians. Indeed, the overwhelming testimony of Scripture and history is that most of the church is poor. God blesses people

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<sup>1</sup> Automatic physical healing is not an application of the atonement today but is part of receiving a new spiritual body on the Last Day. If physical healing was for us in the atonement now, no Christian would die.

and gives them undeserved happiness; yet he also gives people sickness, fatigue, bereavement, suffering, persecution and many more difficulties.

One of the explanations is the delayed consummation of salvation. God gives salvation to his elect people in time but the full benefit of that salvation is reserved for the glory when Christians are given a new spiritual body and dwell on a new restored earth. However, there are other factors.

In this paper I want to try to explain what it means that God only gives all good things to his people. I want to investigate the divine perspective and not the human one.

## The divine attribute of goodness

You *are* good, and do good. Ps 119:68

Now I have explained this in several other papers<sup>2</sup> and will only give a superficial explanation here.

### What is 'good'?

Most people do not know what goodness means. The Oxford English Dictionary definition is huge, spanning 3½ A4 pages. We can sum the adjective up as follows: high quality, acceptable, excellent, fine, virtuous, right, healthy, kind, wholesome, valid and effective.<sup>3</sup>

Goodness is not the same as being nice. A soldier with a gangrenous leg needs his leg removed. This is a good thing as it saves his life, but it is not nice. Boiling lobsters alive is called a good meal, but this is hardly virtuous. A military defence against enemy bombers may be described as good when it results in many pilots burning to death and crashing to the ground.

### God's goodness

What many people mean by 'good' is really: caring, kind, loving or understanding. Such vague descriptions in modern parlance are insufficiently precise when describing the attributes of God. Far better to use Biblical terms such as righteous, holy or just, rather than nice, kind or caring.<sup>4</sup>

God is good in everything he does. The quality of every attribute is good, or perfection. God's justice is good because it is pure, impartial and righteous; but those who will be sentenced to hell may not describe it as good. God's election is good because it is perfect and full of mercy and grace; yet God's goodness applied to the reprobate is justice, wrath and condemnation.

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<sup>2</sup> Such as: 'Is God good to all men?', 'Is it Biblical to Claim or Chant, "God is good; all the time"?'

<sup>3</sup> There are several categories that comprise our modern understanding of 'good'. The adjective can mean: 1) to be desired or approved of. 2) Having the qualities required for a particular role. 3) Possessing or displaying moral virtue. 4) Giving pleasure or joy. 5) Thorough. 6) Used in conjunction with the name of God. The noun means: 1) that which is morally right; righteousness. 2) Benefit or advantage to someone or something. 3) (goods) merchandise or possessions.

<sup>4</sup> The Bible does tell us that God is good in one place, and only one place: Truly God *is* good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart Ps 73:1 (there are also pronouns that imply God is good; e.g. Ps 119:68). Towards the wicked he is a punisher; to the elect God is good. The Hebrew word *towb* has a wide range of meanings, based upon the words excellent, right, fine, pleasant. It emphasises rightness or excellence. In several places we are told that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8, 100:5, 135:3, 145:9; Jer 33:11; Lam 3:25; Nah 1:7). Most of these are applying the Lord's goodness to his elect people.

The essence of God's goodness is that in everything God does he does what is absolutely perfectly suited to the occasion. It is good because it is the perfectly right thing to do. A good thing that God does may seem pleasant to some but harsh to others; no matter; it is always good; it is always the perfect response. God cannot do anything bad or ineffective.

## God's goodness applied to saints that the world sees as negative

The Scriptures declare that God is good to his people; that is beyond any doubt. Yet there are multitudes of occasions where God's providential control of a person leads him into intense sufferings, sickness, difficulties and even death. Yet these are all aspects of God's goodness. This is where we must view providence from the divine perspective.

### Abraham

Abram (Abraham) was God's man from the time of his calling out in Ur of the Chaldees. Everything that happened subsequently to Abraham was part of God's training for him and formed part of God's goodness, but this was not always a pleasant matter.

- God's calling (Acts 7:2-4) meant that Abraham had to leave a pleasant and prosperous living in Ur with all of the conveniences of a large, technologically advanced city-state. Note recent discoveries of clay cuneiform tablets showing sophisticated trigonometry tables from that area. This was an advanced civilisation. Abraham left and spent the rest of his life in tents in a foreign land.
- Dwelling initially at Haran, Abraham's father died which released him to further God's command.
- Abraham's second calling (Gen 12:1-2) took him to completely unknown territory; he literally did not know where he was going (Heb 11:8).
- In Moreh he received further great promises of God, centred upon being the father of the coming Messiah (Gen 12).
- In a famine he went into Egypt and got himself into trouble with the Hyksos Pharaoh by deception (Gen 12:18).
- He gave the best pasture lands of the plain to his nephew Lot (who had not been specifically called). After this he moved around the land, settling in Bethel, the Negeb, Mamre, Gerar, Beersheba, and Hebron.
- Chedorlaomer (king of Elam)<sup>5</sup> and four other kings invaded the country, which had been under tribute, and kidnapped Lot. Abraham assembled his fighting men and, with allies, defeated Chedorlaomer.
- In impatience for the promised heir, and due to the bad advice of his wife, Abraham sired a son from his concubine, Sarai's former maid. This was the origin of one of Israel's great enemies (Arabs) and also led to rancour at home (Gen 16:1-6).
- Through deception, Abraham got into trouble again with Abimelech, king of the Philistines at Gerar (Gen 20).
- God calls Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a test of faith; though this is prevented at the last minute.
- After the death of Sarah, Abraham marries Keturah and has six sons known as 'children of the east' (Judg 6:3) and later as Saracens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Elam was an ancient state in SW Iran, established in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Susa was one of its chief cities.

<sup>6</sup> A nomad of the Syrian and Arabian Desert at the time of the Roman Empire; later to become Muslims.

So, despite God's promises of blessing Abraham suffered: famine, loss, war, no home, no house, no citizenship on earth, foolish mistakes, rancour at home, and many other problems.

### Joseph

God is shown to have been in perfect control of Joseph's life and all that God put him through was good. Indeed, we are specifically told this, 'as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good [*towb*]', (Gen 50:20).

How did God apply his goodness to Joseph? We can itemise his doings like this:

- Joseph was loved by his father above his brothers (Gen 37:3) so that they resented him (Gen 37:4).
- God unusually enlightened the young Joseph so that his brothers were jealous and hated him (Gen 37:11).
- His brothers plotted to kill him and threw him into a pit 60 miles from home but Reuben intervened; so the brothers sold him cheaply into slavery to Ishmaelites (Gen 37:28). [They sold him for 20 shekels of silver instead of the usual 30.]
- Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt to Potiphar (Gen 37:36).
- As a result of refusing the advances of Potiphar's wife, he was slandered and thrown into a prison for at least two years (Gen 39:20, 41:1).
- The chief butler, helped by Joseph, forgot to repay him (Gen 40:14, 23).

Only after much unjustified suffering, lasting many years, was Joseph made the vizier of Egypt.

It is pointless to add more examples of this sort, such as Job or David. The fact is that God's promise of goodness never meant an easy life or a lack of suffering. Indeed, it often meant having much more suffering than other mortals.

### Church history

To the Biblical characters we could add the great saints of history, most of whom endured terrific suffering. Those that did not suffer badly knew great difficulties and stresses.

Regarding individuals we could mention: Stephen, Perpetua, Polycarp, all the apostles, Irenaeus, Gottschalk, Bishop Latimer, Tyndale, Wishart, Bunyan, Lady Jane Gray, Hooper, David Brainerd, Murray M'Cheyne, Judson and thousands more. These were either persecuted, imprisoned, murdered, sick or suffered great hardships, with many dying young

Regarding widespread suffering we could mention the ten Roman Imperial persecutions, the persecutions under Arians, Goths and Vandals, the great massacres of saints in Persia and Palestine by Muslims, the North East of England by Vikings, the Middle East massacres caused by Jews, Scotland in the 'killing times', the Marian persecution, the Thirty Years War, the Waldensians, the victims of the Inquisition, the massacre of French Huguenots, the victims of the Soviet genocide, and many more. Many millions of Christians have been murdered. In Soviet Russia alone there were tens of millions killed by Jews in the Cheka and administration.

We could mention the 1 million European Christian women taken into sex-slavery by Muslim raiders and armies or the millions of young Christian boys taken into slavery to be groomed for use in Muslim armies and administration. This is not counting the hundreds of thousands of Christian girls, boys and women sold as slaves today.

It is very rare in church history that a great saint had a peaceful, calm, prosperous life. Even in modern history Christians suffered badly; today the church is persecuted more than ever before. Even white middle-class, British people, like Spurgeon, knew relentless suffering (which is why he died young at 58).<sup>7</sup> In fact, most of the great saints died young, such as Gottschalk (64), Calvin (55), Luther (63), Zwingli (47), Cranmer (67), Tyndale (42), Jerome of Prague (45), Jan Hus (42), Whitefield (56), Brainerd (29), M'Cheyne (30), Robert Morrison (52), all the apostles bar John, Stephen, Thornwell (50), and many more.<sup>8</sup>

## Why is God's providence so often difficult?

*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. Ps 119:71*

In short, it is due to the war we have with our old nature, which is committed to sinfulness.<sup>9</sup> The worst thing for us is to have an easy, prosperous, positive, calm, easy-going life. It is when we are suffering that we cling most dearly to God.

The essence of faith is to depend upon God. Faithfulness is a life of dependence upon God. Faith apprehends the promises of God because we urgently need them. When we are living in luxury with no stress we default to our base nature and do not depend upon God. A prosperous material life is not good for us.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. Ps 119:67

Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity. Ps 94:12-13

For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Heb 12:10-13

## The key issue - future glorification and ministry

What many Christians fail to understand is God's goal for us. It has nothing to do with this life on earth today but is all about our life in the eternal glory.

God is preparing a ministry for every elect person that will be fulfilled on the restored new earth in collaboration with Jesus. The earth will be the meeting place of heaven and the material world and will be the basis of God's future work in the universe. In this work he has elected exactly the right number of people to be in the right place with the right character and gifting to do his eternal will.

Salvation is not just a rescue from this current evil world of sin but a preparation for the future ministry in the restored earth that will be full of glory.

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<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon suffered from terrible depression and overwork, which caused several illnesses. He was relentlessly ridiculed. Finally, the downgrade of his denomination led to terrible slanders and attacks and his attempts to correct it caused great anxiety. He died young in France trying to recuperate from his ailments.

<sup>8</sup> By the way, the idea that everyone in history before modern times died young is nonsense. Go and check out some cemeteries. Many great people of history died in their 80s, 90s and even over 100 years old. Michelangelo Buonarroti lived to 89 for example.

<sup>9</sup> The old man continues in corruption, Eph 4:22, 'put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts'.

This means that all the vicissitudes of life today are preparation for the future. What is going on is the development of character in the elect. Blessings on earth are nothing in comparison with our tasks in the glory. God is not concerned with giving us a good time on earth today but on honing our personality by giving us difficulties to overcome.

This makes sense of those believers whose lives have been nothing but suffering and pain. If this world were all they had to judge life by it would be meaningless. But this life is a vapour that passes; grass that is here today and burned tomorrow. What is eternal is our life in Christ as his servants for eternity. The way we deal with our sufferings and joys here is what determines what we will do in the glory.

Therefore, God's goodness to us includes all the trials, afflictions, sufferings and persecutions that make us perfectly fitted for the life to come. Our ministry in the glory will be perfect because God, in his good plan, put us through the necessary training in this life to make us what he wants us to be.

The explanation of our hard times will not be revealed in this world, but in the next.

A vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.  
2 Tim 2:21

## The spheres of God's goodness to his people

Because God's goodness to his elect is perfect, every aspect of salvation is full of goodness. The summary of this goodness is stated in our opening verse; the Lord gives 'grace and glory'. God's goodness to his saints is first seen in the grace of salvation (expressed in calling, atonement, regeneration, justification, adoption and sanctification) followed by glory.

### Goodness from eternity

God's goodness to us was first revealed in his eternal calling and choosing of us in Christ in eternity. Before the world was made we were chosen to be in Christ to be his body, to be the servant of God and minister of glory.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. Eph 1:4-6

### Goodness of redemption applied today

God's goodness to us was then applied in time so that we were called, regenerated, redeemed, justified, adopted and sanctified. That is, having chosen us for salvation out of all humanity, he then gave us that salvation in practical terms in time. This was the application of the redemption of Christ by the Holy Spirit to bring us into the body of Christ.

God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
1 Cor 1:9

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.  
Rm 8:29-30

### **Goodness of temporal providence**

God's goodness was then continued in us to give needful grace in need, to sanctify us progressively and finally and to preserve us to the end of this life.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **Heb 4:16**

Those who are being sanctified. **Heb 2:11**

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **1 Thess 5:23**

### **Goodness of future glory**

God's goodness to his elect is finalised and consummated in the new world after the Day of Judgment. In this restored world believers dwell in bliss in paradise where there are no tears and no suffering, only joy and fulfilment in Christ.

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. **Rev 7:15-17**

'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new'. **Rev 21:3-5**

## **Conclusion**

What I am concerned with is trying to get believers to see things from the divine perspective. If you do not do this you will be disappointed and your faith threatened when things go wrong. Be prepared for the evil day by understanding God's goodness.

God means good for you; he promises this in many places. The fact that you are going through a terrible time of suffering is part of the good plan that God has devised for your benefit. Understand this and live in faith.

God's goodness is seen in all the good things he gives us for our future glorification, though this may seem as bad things from the worldly viewpoint. He also withholds the good things in the world that would be bad for our faith. God's actions are not like man's.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. **Jer 29:11**

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