

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangeable in His Goodness

God has always been and always will be infinitely good (Heb. *tob*, Gr. *agathos*); the Catechism teaches, ascribing thereby to him that perfection of the divine nature which prompts him to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures. If it is God's attribute of majestic holiness that emphasizes his *transcendence over* his creation, it is God's attribute of goodness that underscores his *condescendence towards* his creation. For just as the Catechism subsumes God's knowledge under the rubric of his wisdom, so also the Catechism intends this beautiful word as the general category within which God's love, grace, mercy, pity compassion, kindness, and other such expressions of his tender and fatherly character are to be placed. Among the Scriptures which testify to these characteristics are:

Exodus 33:19: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."
Note how God defines his goodness here in terms of sovereign mercy and compassion.

Psalm 73:1: "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." God's goodness here is saving goodness.

Psalms 103 and 104 in their entirety.

Psalm 106:1, 29; Psalm 145:7-9, 13, 15, 16. Ezekiel 33:11; Micah 7:18; Matthew 5:45, 48; Mark 10:18; Acts 14:17; Romans 8:28; 1 John 4:8.

These and the myriad other passages that speak of God's goodness to all – the just and the unjust (designated by theologians as his "common grace"), and his love for the world which moved him to give even his own Son for it (John 3:16), his tender and rich mercies which prompt him to relieve with the succour of a mother and of a father human misery and distress (Eph. 2:4; 2 Cor. 1:3-4), and his grace – that unmerited favour of God which moves him to extend forgiveness to the undeserving guilty sinner (designated by theologians as his "special grace") – all affirm in their own way the infinite goodness of God. And even when he does what many of his rational creatures would contend is the ultimate misdeed of condemning the unjust man to hell, he is not being bad to him. He is simply being retributively just. It is simply impossible for him to be bad or to take pleasure in the horrible end of the unrighteous.

Robert L Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, pp. 199-201
Commentary on Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 4, 'What is God?'

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge

1 January 2017

Sermon: "The goodness of the Lord and the future # 1" (text: Psalm 34:8-10)

Scripture: Psalm 34:1-22; 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Sermon Notes

Introduction: The question for pastor's in our presbytery is "how do we best prepare people for the uncertainty of the years ahead?" One essential truth which must be known is that God is good.

Believing that God is good is essential to our Christian faith; yet we are in constant danger of losing our grip on this truth. Unconverted, we do not believe it, and must be born again to enter God's kingdom; as believers we are under pressure from evil; so to stand in the faith we must be strong in the truth that God is good.

1. The Lord is good—a foundation fact of Christian faith

To strengthen our faith as believers and to encourage any who do not yet believe in God to trust him as truly good we turn to a January selection of psalms beginning with psalm 34, especially verses 8-10.

Dictionaries define 'good' (adjective) as 1. morally excellent; virtuous; righteous; pious: 2. satisfactory in quality, quantity, or degree. 3. of high quality; excellent. 4. right; proper; fit. 5. well-behaved. 6. kind, beneficent, or friendly. 7. honourable or worthy; in good standing. But Jesus said that on God is good (Mk 10:17-18).

The things we call 'good' are only relatively good; God alone is really good. His goodness includes all the dictionary definition of good and more; he is good in himself and in the goodness or kindness of his acts (Ps 119:68). It is God's nature to be kind, generous and benevolent, to take pleasure in blessing others (Acts 14:16-17).

God's goodness is more that we expect. Moses asked the Lord to show him his glory; the Lord said he would make his goodness pass before him; he proclaimed his goodness: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Ex 34:6-7)

But God's goodness is compatible with his just and holy punishment of sin: 'but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' (v. 8).

Today many claim to embrace atheism because of evil; some are shaken in their faith in God when evil happens to them or their loved ones; we cannot explain evil fully, but Jesus' coming and evil death is the supreme display of God's goodness to us sinners who deserve his just condemnation (Titus 3:3-7).

2. The Lord is good—a proven fact of Christian experience

David, having experienced the goodness of God, invites all people everywhere 'Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!' (Ps. 34:8). David had fled for refuge from Saul among the Philistines—but the king's servants had turned Achish the king against him (1 Sam 21:11).

David was afraid of Achish and pretended to be insane, so that Achish sent him away in safety. David gave the credit for his escape not to his prowess as an actor but to the Lord who in his great goodness heard his prayer and delivered and saved him (vs. 4, 6-7).

David's first invitation is to those who do not know that the Lord is good; this is the gospel call to those who do not know the Lord as David knew him as good to try him for themselves, and to take refuge in him as David did. It comes with the promise of blessing, of finding him as good as David had found him to be.

The gospel is the good news of 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour'; by this gospel he saves sinners from sin and death and hell, 'not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.'

Unbelievers will not taste and see that the Lord is good; they will not take refuge in him; they will not believe the Bible; they want God to be accountable to them and to their values; they are horrified by the destruction of the Canaanites while ignoring the sins that led to God's judgment and his patience beforehand.

Using the mystery of evil to embrace atheism is foolish and futile, refusing to take refuge in him, to taste and see that he is good, lead to eternal destruction. The way of safety is to flee to the Lord, not from him (Ps 2:10-12).

God has provided Jesus his Son as the only safe place from his wrath; he came as light (Jn 3:19) but people preferred darkness and crucified him, fulfilling God's plan that he should bear God's judgment against our evil by his death (Heb 2:14-17). So believe God's word of truth and come to him as the Rock of Ages, cleft for sinners.

How can we know that 'Oh taste and see' is a gospel call to sinners to find refuge in Jesus? Because this is how Peter understood it (1 Pet 2:1-3); 'if you are a real Christian, then put away evil'.

This is David's teaching in this psalm. In verses 9-10 he speaks to those who know the Lord: 'Oh fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack.' Christian friend, if you want to experience the goodness of the Lord in 2017 be one of David's pupils! Be one of his children (vs. 13-14).

For the best God has for you this year meditate upon the blessings of being righteous (vs. 15-22) and practise doing what is right before the Lord. Be convinced that God is good; may we know we are blessed because we have taken refuge in Jesus and that even if our way should be through many troubles and even heart-break that God is still good, and to be encouraged in his promises to the righteous.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect upon the following saying: "If God is God, he is not good, if God is good, he is not God." This is an unbelieving response to evil; how could it be answered from the Bible so as to explain the gospel?
2. Read and reflect upon Exodus 33:7-34:7. How does the Lord's proclamation of his goodness help in reconciling God's goodness with events recorded in the Bible such as Noah's flood (Gen 6:5-7) and the destruction of the Canaanites? (Gen 15:16).
3. Read the background to Psalm 34 in 1 Samuel 21:10-15; what does David tell us in the psalm that is not in the history? Reflect on David's use of this experience to issue a gospel call (v. 8, cf. 1 Pet 2:1-3). Does your experience of salvation give you a burning desire to tell the gospel? If not, why not?
4. Why does David teach 'the fear of the Lord'? (vs. 12-14). List from verses 15-22 the promises David gives us to encourage us to do what is right ('righteousness' or 'righteous') and all the threats he gives us to discourage us from doing evil; how do these promises help us believe that God is good even in trouble?