

Thoughts From Other Minds:

The moral attributes of God are generally regarded as the most glorious of the divine perfections. Not that one attribute of God is in itself more perfect and glorious than another, but relatively to man the moral perfections of God shine with a splendour all their own. They are generally discussed under three heads: (1) the goodness of God; (2) the holiness of God; and (3) the righteousness of God.

1. **THE GOODNESS OF GOD.** This is generally treated as a generic conception, including several varieties, which are distinguished according to their objects. The goodness of God should not be confused with His kindness, which is a more restricted concept. We speak of something as good, when it answers in all parts to the ideal. Hence in our ascription of goodness to God the fundamental idea is that He is in every way all that He as God should be, and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word "God". He is good in the metaphysical sense of the word, absolute perfection and perfect bliss in Himself. It is in this sense that Jesus said to the young ruler: "None is good save one, even God," Mark 10:18. But since God is good in Himself, He is also good for His creatures, and may therefore be called the *fons omnium bonorum*. He is the fountain of all good, and is so represented in a variety of ways throughout the Bible. The poet sings: "For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light," Ps.36:9. All the good things which the creatures enjoy in the present and expect in the future, flow to them out of this inexhaustible fountain. And not only that, but God is also the *summum bonum*, the highest good, for all His creatures, though in different degrees and according to the measure in which they answer to the purpose of their existence. In the present connection we naturally stress the ethical goodness of God and the different aspects of it, as these are determined by the nature of its objects.

a. *The goodness of God towards His creatures in general.* This may be defined as *that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures*. It is the affection which the Creator feels towards His sentient creatures as such. The Psalmist sings of it in the well known words: "Jehovah is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works. . . . The eyes of all wait for thee; and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing," Ps. 145:9, 15, 16. This benevolent interest of God is revealed in His care for the creature's welfare, and is suited to the nature and the circumstances of the creature. It naturally varies in degree according to the capacity of the objects to receive it. And while it is not restricted to believers, they only manifest a proper appreciation of its blessings, desire to use them in the service of their God, and thus enjoy them in a richer and fuller measure. The Bible refers to this goodness of God in many passages, such as Ps.36:6; 104:21; Matt. 5:45; 6:26; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:17.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 70-71
(continued next Lord's Day)

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge

8 January 2017

Sermon: "The goodness of the Lord and the future # 2" (text: Psalm 106)

Scripture: Psalm 106

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Last Lord's Day as preparation for an uncertain future we began a series of studies in the great truth that God is good from the psalms. Evil can make it hard to believe—but we believe because the Bible teaches that God is good, and because the gospel of salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus proves it.

The gospel comes to us 'Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!' Knowing that God is good starts with tasting his goodness through faith in Jesus to receive from him forgiveness of sins and adoption into his family and his loving care of us as his saints (Ps. 34:9-10).

Sadly, sometimes God's people behave like unbelievers and rebel against him; then there is trouble for us from God. In Psalm 106 God's people confess their sins against him 'we have sinned ...' (v. 6) and pray that God would do good to them again 'save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles ...' (v. 7).

1. God's goodness trusted

If we sin, God will discipline us, but he is still good; the psalmist begins with a call to his praise and thanksgiving and a celebration of his 'love' (NIV—ESV 'steadfast love'; NKJV 'mercy'); this 'love' includes mercy when the object is in a pitiful state ... acts as well as the attribute ... 'lovingkindness' is archaic but close.

The NKJV continues the ancient use of 'mercy', which is good if it is the mercy shown by the good Samaritan to the man taken by robbers; he had compassion on him and showed him mercy, binding up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine and taking care of him; showing what it means to 'love your neighbour as yourself.'

The psalmist's interest in the Lord's 'mercy' is very personal (note the change from 'those' to 'he' in verse 3, NKJV); those who keep judgment, he who does righteousness are blessed—but the people he was about to pray for had not kept justice, had not done righteousness, and were not blessed, and were in need of 'mercy'.

However, they were his people; he shared in the sins that brought God's judgment on them; he does not pray 'they have sinned', but 'we have sinned' (v. 6). It is easy when God in times like ours, when God is not blessing us as we would wish to blame others, their sins; but for change we must see our sin, our need of salvation.

The NIV and the ESV appear to assume that he prays for a share in the national salvation prayed for (v. 47); but the NKJV is closer to the original, which is more personal; sin was the root of the scattering; the Lord had scattered them in judgment; salvation must begin with salvation from sin, and with us personally.

In both church and nation we are reaping a harvest from sin. We see the same scattering of the people of God in our day; so many of our covenant children, baptised and brought up in the church, are scattered in the world—and so we have sinned; we have not passed our faith on to our children and grandchildren.

Before we try to change church or nation we must begin where the psalmist begins—with ourselves, and with our own sins. Are we real Christians, converted, born again of the Spirit? Do we have that living faith in Jesus that bears the fruit of glad obedience to him and love for other Christians? Do we live for Christ or ...?

2. God's goodness remembered

The way from sin and its consequences back to blessing is always through confession of the sins that robbed us of the blessing, to come to him for mercy; sin has made us 'sin deniers'; like our first parents, we blame others rather than accept responsibility for our own wrongdoing.

The first evidence of a work of grace in our hearts is when we join the prodigal son, to say 'I have sinned'; or the tax collector, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner'. It's easy to look for outside reasons for the state of the church, but while Sunday sport and shopping expose the problem, the cause is unconverted unbelieving hearts.

While the parable of the Sower teaches that God's word does not always produce faith unto eternal life, the scattering of our day must have causes other than the uneven germination of the gospel seed. 1. unbelief, a failure to passionately and earnestly believe the gospel; 2. a failure to adorn the gospel with good works; 3. a failure to teach the faith to our children as per the scriptures (e.g. Deut 6:4-7).

The damage was done by sinning; the repair must begin with frank and full confession of sin to God (v. 6); there is hope in the goodness and mercy of God, for the long middle section of the psalm; it's a tale of the severity and goodness of God in which ultimately his mercy wins out over his severity (vs. 44-46).

3. God's goodness prayed for

The psalmist, having remembered God's great goodness 'according to the multitude of his mercies' to his sinning people in the past prays for a fresh experience of these mercies for his generation; the Lord had scattered them on account of their sins; he now prays that they would be saved and gathered from the nations (v. 47).

Then he praises the Lord in the assurance of faith that he will certainly answer this prayer—and this assurance is well grounded; the scattered people of God will be gathered in through the death of Jesus (Jn 11:51-52).

What about our congregation? We are to respond to God's word with faith and obedience; the results are in his hands; 1. are we 'in' through faith in Jesus, or not? 2. will we confess and depart from the sins of the past, to put Christ first? 3. will we confess our dependence upon God as the psalmist did in prayer? (2 Chron 7: 14).

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37); reflect upon its meaning for a right understanding of 'mercy' (v. 37) and 'love' to our neighbour (anyone in need whom we are able to help).
2. Compare and contrast Psalm 106:3-5 in different English versions (NKJV follows the Hebrew more literally than other modern versions). What 'salvation' does the psalmist have in view, and why?
3. How does the psalmist's prayer (v. 4) rebuke our tendency to focus on the faults of others and to blame them when instead of blessing the Lord scatters?
4. What 'scattering' of the people of God do we see in our day, and why? Where must we begin in bringing about a change to this scattering?
5. How does a right understanding of the long historical portion of Psalm 106 point us to God's goodness and mercy? (esp. vs. 44-46).
6. Read and reflect upon John 11:51-52; how does this justify the psalmist's assurance of faith that his prayer (v. 47) will be answered (v. 48)? God is sovereign in blessing—but what is our responsibility?