Section: Doctrine of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q13. Is God good?**

Yes. God is truly, perfectly good.

# Scripture is authoritative.

I want to start tonight by talking about Scripture. At Disciples Church we hold to a very high view of Scripture.

We echo Jesus’s words in John 10:35 when He claims that “…Scripture cannot be broken.”

That being the case, we have but one option if we claim to be Christians: ***we hold that the Scriptures are authoritative and incapable of error.***

The 1689 LBCF says: *The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.*

Why do I start here on a study of God’s goodness? I think it’s imperative before we jump into this topic that we root ourselves in the right foundation of the Holy Bible. If we have a view of Scripture that isn’t authoritative, or if we have a view of Scripture that holds to a less than perfectly inspired authorship, then we don’t have a Holy Bible; we just have words.

You must see that for Scripture to be set-apart, distinct, fully truth – then it follows that it is the very words of God. And what do we know about God? Does God error in His judgements? Does God error in anything? No, He does not.

***The goodness of God can be difficult because the doctrinal truth can fly in the face of what we, as errant and sinful people, see with our own lives.***

You may think that a study on God’s goodness is a simple affair but let me remind you of something. As I sit writing this, there has recently been a massive hurricane that hit Florida, a looming threat of nuclear conflict with Russia, ever increasing inflation and a recent pandemic that shut down a good portion of the world. When we think on the goodness of God, especially as Christians who uphold God’s sovereignty, we have to think through the difficult realities in our world.

Again, the 1689 LBCF says of God’s decree, ***“From all eternity God decreed everything that occurs, without reference to anything outside himself. He did this by the perfectly wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably. Yet God did this in such a way that he is neither the author of sin nor has fellowship with any in their sin.”***

You see, I want to make a rudimentary claim tonight: God is good, and He ordains evil. God is good, and He pours out wrath on those in Hell. God is good, and He ordained sin to enter the world. God works all things according to the counsel of His will…His good and holy will.

A simple casual reading of the book of Job will solidify that God is sovereign over abundance and poverty alike, over life and death, over prosperity and difficulty.

So, as we get into the details of the study, keep this in the forefront of your mind: No matter how our personal circumstances have colored how we see the world, those experiences are subjective, and they must be shaped by what God’s Holy Word says.

Although it is natural (as fallen humans) to bring our own feelings and presuppositions to Scripture and demand that God fit in our box, we must strive to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. And we must allow Scripture to interpret us and our circumstances. We must not allow our sinful, broken, and incomplete perspective to interpret Scripture or compete with Scripture.

So – with that disclaimer, let’s dig in.

***Q13. Is God good?*** *Yes. God is truly, perfectly good.*

# Is God Good?

In many ways I could teach this very briefly. Is God good? Yes, He is. Why? Because the Bible says so, a lot. Herman Bavinck wrote in the early 1900’s that “Holy Scripture is a hymn of praise to the goodness of the Lord.” Even when Scripture doesn’t directly say God is good, it infers that who He is, is inherently good.

For instance, our God is almighty, the Alpha and Omega, a miracle worker, the Creator of all things created, infinite, all powerful, all knowing, ever-present, unchanging, covenantal, an everlasting Father, mighty to save, the Prince of Peace, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, Wonderful Counselor, all sufficient, etc…

*I could go on, but the point I want to make is that all of God’s character is good. It is good that God is almighty because if God is not almighty, then Satan may very well win this war.*

*Or, it is good that God is the “the Light of the World” in the God-man of Jesus, because if our God is not salvific and merciful in nature, then we have no hope.*

*Or, it is good that God is infinite, for we understand that He always has been, for If God started at some point, then who or what was before Him? Would He not cease to be God if God started at some point in history?*

According to A.W. Pink, “God is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature’s good is an added quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature’s good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him.”

Bavinck again, says “as the supreme good, God is also the overflowing fountain of all goods. No good exists in any creature except that which comes from and through him. He is the efficient, exemplary, and final cause of all good, however diverse it may be in creatures. All natural, moral, and spiritual good finds its source in him.”

Augustine frequently described God as “the supreme good.”

Good is broadly defined as: Complete or sufficiently perfect in its kind; having the qualities best adapted to its design and use; opposed to bad, imperfect, corrupted, impaired.

It follows that God is complete and sufficiently perfect in His own right. He is the standard by which all things are measured. He is the mighty “I AM!”

In the Word of Truth Catechism, the definition for The Goodness of God is: All that God is and does is perfectly good, and He alone is the final standard of good. There is such an absolute perfection in God’s nature and being that nothing is lacking or defective in Him, and nothing can be added to make Him better.

My aim tonight is to look at the scripture support passages that are listed below the catechism question and answer. I want to survey them and understand what it is that they are teaching us about the goodness of God.

# Scripture support passage 1: His attributes are good and due all human praise.

Turn with me to Psalm 106:1.

**Psalm 106:1** Praise the LORD. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

I want to unpack this verse backwards as I believe this will help us better understand its meaning. Let’s start by looking at “for his steadfast love endures forever;” this is the antecedent. Or to be precise, this is the attribute of God. It is His attribute of love describe in an immutable way.

Next, we see that *because* God’s infinite love endures forever, He is good. This is the consequent. Another way to say this is, because of who God is in His essence *He is inherently good*. You could structure this clause with any attribute of God. For instance, because God is “mighty to save,” He is good. Or because God is “wrathful” or “just,” He is good. Or because God is “merciful to sinners,” He is good. *Because God is perfect in all of His acts and character, He is infinitely good in all things.*

Lastly, we see that because God is good, this demands a response, and this response is characterized as “worship.” We see this when the Psalmist boldly proclaims, “Praise the LORD. Oh give thanks to the LORD.”

Inherent in God is His goodness; He is the source for all good because He is originally good and forever good.

# Scripture support passage 2: God’s goodness in His grace for believers.

Let’s look at another Psalm to reinforce this:

Turn with me to **Psalm 31:19**

“Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!”

Here we see a slightly different take on the goodness of God. In my last lesson, I spoke of the unique relationship that Christians have with God in that we are uniquely gifted to receive God’s glory and appreciate it in ways that non-believers cannot. This is true with certain aspects of the goodness of God as well. The Psalmist (David) is talking about the effects of God’s divine blessings for His servants. David is extolling the grace that God has bestowed on him as one of God’s chosen ones.

Look to verse 21-24: Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. 22 I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help. 23 Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. 24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!

Who can say that as a Christian you’ve experienced no such relief or blessing from God in times of distress?

Sometimes the greatest aspect of walking through intense trial is the very real presence of God in our lives! Sometimes we feel *more* distant from God when we’re not suffering.

What is the revelation of God’s goodness in this context? God’s preservation of David. Because God has done this thing (whatever it is), it is inherently good and due the praise of men.

Think of that clearly for a moment. God is unique in that He can perform any act by the counsel of His will and *that* act is good because all goodness emanates from Him. God is *essentially* good, therefore whatever He does is *automatically* good.

# Scripture support passage 3: No one is truly good and perfect except God. The wrath of God and the goodness of God.

Look back to our catechism answer, it says ‘God is truly, perfectly good’. To look at this statement from a different point of view, we see that it also means that no one is perfectly or truly good, except God.

In Romans 3, Paul quotes Psalm 14 to establish our position as unrighteous. Here’s what it says: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good,
not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.”
“The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
“Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

It should be clear; we have no claim on good!

Our throat is an open grave. This phrase is a reference to our deception, falsehoods, and false teaching by our deceptive words that we use to fool others.

John Calvin says of this portion of Scripture, “They (sinners) are in every way full of wickedness; for if they speak fair, they deceive and blend poison with their flatteries; but if they draw forth what they have in their hearts, bitterness and cursing stream out.”

Our unsaved nature is hell bound.

We must consider this difficult question: If all that God does is good, then is God’s wrath good? Is God’s active reigning over hell good?

The Puritan Jonathan Edwards spoke of God’s wrath in his infamous sermon, “Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God.”

I want you to really listen to these next words. I want you to really think on and understand our sin and the unprovoked anger of God.

Edwards says, “The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood…The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked.

His wrath towards you burns like a fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince. And yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment.”

I think we in comfortable America are so accustomed to not talking about the wrath of God that this quote can be offensively gut wrenching. But let’s do business with it for a moment. If we understand that God is originally good, or purely good in His core, then that means every action, ordination or decree from the Godhead is good. His love is good; that’s obvious. **But His displeasure, wrath, anger, and justice – those things are good too.** And if we really do business with the Edwards quote, then we understand that we truly don’t deserve His grace. **We truly understand that our sin is terrifyingly grotesque to a pure, good God. What we deserve is punishment.**

It is important to note that God’s wrath, anger, and justice as defined by fallen humans are but mere shadows of what these attributes truly are from the vantage of Holy God. To help with this meditation, theologian John Stott says: “God’s wrath against sin does not mean…that he is likely to fly off the handle at the most trivial provocation, still less that he loses his temper for no apparent reason at all. For there is nothing capricious or arbitrary about the holy God. Nor is he ever irascible (short-tempered), malicious, spiteful or vindictive. His anger is neither mysterious nor irrational. It is never unpredictable but always predictable, because it is provoked by evil and by evil alone.”

This very much leads us into the next Scripture support passage:

**James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

In the prior verse (Jas 1:12), James states that “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

What James is trying to convey is that while God does use means such as circumstances in our lives to test us, He does not tempt us. This distinction between testing and temping is very important. It reveals to us the goodness of God.

We see this reality in Psalm 26:2: “Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

That testing is something for our good as James testifies in 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the **testing** of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

This is also evident in James 1 verse 12. It is important to note that God is not in the business of enticing us to sin; rather temptation is due to our inward desires.

Look to verse 14, where James continues his thought. He says, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by ***his own desire***.” James rightly condemns the idea that God is *NOT* to be blamed for sin.

James is right to point this out because it is fallen human nature to blame our issues on another person, even God.

Genesis 3:9-13 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Indeed, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed Satan for their respective sin. Do you not also blame your spouse for your bad day? In this way or other ways, are you in the sinner’s business of blaming others for your errors and circumstances?

The Bible is undoubtedly clear that we are responsible for our sin, and He is sovereign over our lives. This is truly a paradox to our limited human view, and we will hear more about this in our God’s sovereignty lesson coming up, but we land where scripture lands.

***We affirm our utter destitution in sin, we must refuse to blame God for our sin, we must uphold ascribing ultimate sovereignty to Him, and we proclaim that in all of this, He is good.***

We see this clearly in Acts 2:22-23

Peter says, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. But, Jesus was crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God is sovereign over all and man is responsible for his sin.

The deeper and more complicated question is, “Why didn’t God ordain the world remain without sin?”

Obviously, He could have, but He chose not to; rather, based on His goodness and own will, He ordained it for His glory and the maturing of His elect.

Turn to Romans 9 22-23, Paul says, “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.”

You see, God ordains that sin would enter into this world in order for His son to be the propitiation for our sin. **This display of wrath and grace is meant to display the most glory to God.**

Sin is no afterthought to God, because without sin there is no incarnate Jesus, and without Jesus incarnate there is no salvation, and no glorious display of God’s mercy, power, and wrath.

God shows the world His wrath and power through the punishment of sin. God likewise shows the world his grace and mercy through Jesus Christ’s perfect atoning sacrifice for unworthy sinners.

He works this way for His own preeminent glory. His glory is good. HE is GOOD!

# Scripture support passage 4 God’s goodness towards all in creation.

Let’s look at our final Scripture support passage:

**Acts 14:17 “**Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

The context here is that Paul had just healed a cripple in Lystra. The idolatrous gentile crowd immediately ascribed the work of Paul to that of a Greek god. This greatly distressed Paul and Barnabas. In response, Paul attempted to share with them the truth that God had “allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.” He added to this a remark used to show the Gentiles that God had shown them who He was in *general revelation* andin *common mercy.* God had treated them better than they deserved.

Remember that general revelation is what God reveals to us through the creation. It can testify to us that God exists and condemn us, but it cannot impart to us the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that, we need Special Revelation.

God did show the Gentiles His goodness by blessing them with rain, fruitfulness, satisfaction from food and happiness. This is a testament to the sheer mercy of our Lord; He is so good that even to those who continually spit in His face, He allows them to live a life of partial contentment and happiness.

**Conclusion, Encouragement & Application**

We saw tonight that God’s goodness is essential to His being. It is not an added quality. He is good. And because of His inherent goodness, all that He does is good.

But my friends, we cannot speak of the goodness of God without understanding that the gospel is the greatest show of good that God can possibly give us!

William Keach said in this paraphrased quote:

The greatest demonstration of God’s love and goodness is that He required from all of us sinners the eternally rigorous demands of the law. Yet, God was pleased to set aside our debt and find payment from another. In order to bring about redemption and pardon of man, God parted with his own dear Son, who laid down His life, to atone, and to make reconciliation between Himself and sinners,

The greatest demonstration of the love and goodness of God to sinners is that glorious gospel.

Because the gospel is the greatest demonstration of God’s good – it should follow that this truth, the truth that God is good, should be a source of great encouragement for us.

**Psalm 34:8** says **“**Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

According to John Calvin, “There is nothing on the part of God to prevent the godly, to whom he particularly speaks in this place, from arriving at the knowledge of his goodness by actual experience.”

For those who are saved, the goodness of God is like a warm blanket to our soul. We can fearlessly stand at every juncture in life and *be blessed.*

If we have bread today, we are blessed. If we have no bread tomorrow, we are still blessed. **Romans 8:28** says, “28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

The goodness of God for Christians is intended to catapult us into God’s blessing and worship of Him. The apostle Paul clearly understood that *because* he took refuge in the Lord, he was able to attain the blessing of rejoicing *even* in the midst of suffering. Because we trust in Christ, we can go through anything and find God’s goodness extended to us. In this we are to reflect God’s goodness; We are to be light in the darkness.

**A Word on Suffering.**

Truth be told, I have struggled greatly with the reality that God could have ordained none of this suffering, but due to His divine, perfect and good will, He chose that it come to pass.

I have struggled through the doctrine of the goodness of God. I have struggled to write of God’s goodness when I’ve made the hard decision to follow the Lord and not the desires of the flesh.

I’ve been devastated by the Holy Spirit’s penetrating conviction in my life, reduced to tears because God had utterly disrupted my idolatry.

I have persisted in grievous sin and shaken my fist at God when I received the due penalty of my actions. I have also shaken my fist at God when I’ve suffered for reasons outside of my control. I have doubted His goodness more often than I care to admit, how fickle my heart is.

As I have come to know some of you, I know your stories. I know that your lives are not neatly packaged, I know that often those in the church are the greatest of sinners and the greatest benefactors of God’s lavish grace.

You see, beyond the façade of ‘I’m fine’ is the reality that life is hard. We all know it and we all struggle with it. We all get burdened by living and persisting in a sinful world. We all are burdened by our own sinful passions that we just can’t seem to fully control – no matter how hard we try.

Some of us are burdened by depression, not from sin but from the fallen nature of our own flesh. The corruption of the flesh.

Some of us have worn the soles on our shoes thin because we’ve been trudging through the valley of the shadow of death for months, year, decades.

Some of us are burdened by caring for others who struggle with circumstances that push us beyond what we thought we could handle.

Some of us are burdened by, experiencing, witnessing, or caring for those who experience the reality of harsh mental illness.

Some of us are burdened by the loss of loved ones.

There is no shortage on our suffering.

We are real people who have real experiences and real tears. We are a people grieving. But, friends, we cannot stop at the reality of suffering. We do NOT suffer in vain. The centerpiece of the Christian faith is the great suffering of Christ. We enter into suffering with Him, that we may be glorified with him.

We look to Christ! The aim of suffering is to bring us to the precipice of grace, to see the vast depths of God’s goodness, His goodness in Christ and His goodness in Christ for you. To look into His depth of mercy and to fall headlong into His arms, to know that He’s got you, no matter what. To know that nothing we do will remove His love from us.

Friends, if you are caught in a transgression – flee to the cross. If you are burdened by sin, flee to the cross. If you are burdened by suffering. No matter what – go to the cross. Look to Him.

The gospel is real to us. The forgiveness of our sins is not just a motto we adopt; it’s literally life. Christ IS Life!

I share this because to work through these kinds of struggles and questions is to glorify and honor God. If we merely throw up our hands and walk away from God, this sort of doubt is doubt that leads unto destruction.

As a redeemed people who are saved because of Jesus, who experience intimate love from God, we need to be willing and active in bending that love and care out to others in the midst of real struggle. We must not mute people who have earnest struggles; we must take care of them and journey with them.

1st Thessalonians 5:14 says, “… We urge you, brothers (Church), admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

And so, if you have struggled with this, we at Disciples Church wish to bless you by helping you, by being patient with you, and by encouraging you.

Obviously, I cannot impart heart knowledge to you; for much of the time what we know (up here) must be appropriately driven into our hearts by prayer, more time in the living Word, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

But let me share this with you: In my struggle through the difficult questions of God’s goodness and my own respective struggles, I’ve learned this: *We have no mediator if we have no suffering. We have no relationship with God. We have no Jesus who propitiates our sin. We have no beautiful living Savior who sits at the right hand of God.*

*God is right and good to ordain that sin enter this world, as His plan for our redemption from the sin brings us into fellowship with Him!*

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I want to close by reading a hymn tonight. This is a song that we sometimes sing.

It was written by William Cowper who had no aversion to struggle. Before salvation, he suffered from extreme forms of depression, he attempted suicide multiple times, and he was institutionalized for insanity.

He said once, “Conviction of sin took place (in me), especially of (sin that I had) just committed; the ~~meanness~~ (terribleness) of it, as well as its atrocity, were ~~exhibited~~ (shown) to me in colours so inconceivably strong that I despised myself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed.”

He came to believe that he was doomed to suffer the wrath of Hell on such an intense level that he was eventually committed to St. Albans Insane Asylum. But because of God’s goodness and plan, he would meet an Evangelical doctor by the name of Nathaniel Cotton, who would work with Cowper.

“He (Nathaniel Cotton) loved Cowper and held out hope to him repeatedly in spite of his insistence that he was damned and beyond hope. Six months into his stay Cowper found a Bible lying (not by accident) on a bench in the garden.” (John Piper)

Cowper explains what happed next:

“Having found a Bible on the bench in the garden, I opened upon the 11th of St. John, where Lazarus is raised from the dead; and saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men, in our Saviour's conduct, that I almost shed tears upon the relation; little thinking that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself. I sighed, and said, ‘Oh, that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer, that I had not forfeited all his favours.’ Thus was my heart softened.”

Though he would continue his battle in the soul, He would go on to embrace all of God’s goodness and love for him.

I find it fitting to close with a picture of a man of this stature. Why? Because in our modern social media era, we like to create pictures of life that are frankly, false and deceiving.

But this is a great and wonderful man of God who struggled and struggled hard. He fought and wrote about it so that those in our generation would see the goodness of God’s amazing grace.

I finish with the first verse of Cowper’s hymn, “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood:”

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.
The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.

God is good. This great God never sins, never makes mistakes. And out of His goodness, He ordained the Redeemer. He sent Jesus to live the perfect life we cannot live, to die in the place of His people, to shed His blood, and to rise again to claim victory for us. When we struggle we can remember that The Good God determined in Himself to redeem us. We can rest in this good God, this good redeemer. All that God is and does is perfectly good, and He alone is the final standard of good. There is such an absolute perfection in God’s nature and being that nothing is lacking or defective in Him, and nothing can be added to make Him better.

Psalm 106:1 Praise the LORD. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

Let’s pray.