

Goodness Leading to Repentance

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“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” Romans 2:4

It is very common for men to lay the blame of their sinful condition upon God; to say that they are just as God made them. This kind of talk is increasing, and the logical result is the denial of any future punishment for sin. But that such a position is directly contrary to Bible teaching, it needs only this verse to disprove. God cannot deny himself, and therefore he cannot work at cross-purposes. He cannot at one time deliberately set about to undo that which he has once done. That he has deliberately set about the salvation of men, the entire Bible attests. He manifested his hatred for sin, and his desire to rescue men from it, by giving his Son to die. This was the supreme manifestation of his goodness to lead men to repentance. All this effort to save men from sin is utterly inconsistent with the theory that God is any way responsible for sin.

The apostle tells us plainly that “just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Romans 5:12. The terrible depth of sin into which man fell, and the first act of God’s goodness to lead him from it, are brought to view in Genesis 3:15, where these words of the Lord to the serpent—Satan—are recorded: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed.” The fact that God had to put enmity between man and Satan shows that in the fall all of man’s natural enmity to Satan had been obliterated.

God made man in his own image, both physically and spiritually; but when man yielded to the tempter, he deliberately rejected God, and became, body and soul, the servant of Satan. In that condition all his desires would have been for evil, and, like Satan and his angels, he would have had not the shadow of a desire to do right. Of course a simple offer of salvation from sin could not have been any benefit to a man in such a condition. “*Why is there* in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, since *he has* no heart *for it?*” Proverbs 17:16. Or, of what use to offer freedom from sin to a man incapable of appreciating goodness? Therefore as the first act in the great plan of salvation, God put into the heart of man an enmity against Satan. It was purely an act of divine love. And since this enmity has been a part of the inheritance of every one of Adam’s race, it follows that not a man has lived in earth, no matter how wicked, who was not just to the extent that he ever had a thought of goodness, a subject of the grace of God.

It is this enmity implanted in the heart of men by God, upon which the Spirit works when it strives with men. It is this seed which the Spirit waters into fruitfulness, in those who will yield to its influence. Thus the Spirit of God, through His goodness, is leading all men toward repentance. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the

knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4. But all men will not be saved. Thousands say to the Spirit: “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you;” and still other thousands refuse to give it any recognition. (Acts 24:25)

It is in this sense that God “is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” 1 Timothy 4:10. His love is bestowed alike upon all; to all he comes as a Saviour; but only those will be saved who will accept salvation. It is thus; also, that Christ is “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” John 1:9. Every man that has come into the world has had some rays of divine light shining into his heart, —enough to have led him into the glorious liberty of the children of God, if he had followed it; and for that light he was indebted to the grace of God in Christ.

The goodness of God is thus set forth by the apostle Paul: “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:1-7

And that this goodness is manifested to men in sin, in order to deliver them from it, is shown also by these words to Titus: “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:3-7

But where shall we stop, if we attempt to recount the goodness of God, which is manifested to lead men to repentance, since the whole Bible, like the whole earth, “is full of his goodness.” Let us sum the whole matter up in one or two passages of Scripture. The first shall be Hebrews 12:1-3: —

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and

discouraged in your souls.”

What was the joy that was set before Christ? It seems as though the question is fully answered in Philippians 2:6, 7, which says that although Christ was in the form of God, he “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.” The idea is, that he counted it not a prize, or a thing to be grasped or held to, to be equal with God; but he emptied himself. The thought, then, in brief, is this: —

Christ was equal with God, the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person. He was God. Before him all the hosts of angels, whom he had created (Colossians 1:16) bowed in adoration. His glory was the glory of the Father. John 17:5. Not a thing was there to mar the perfect peace of heaven, and nothing more could have been conceived to add to the perfect enjoyment of all its inhabitants. But when Christ looked upon the world of men “dead in trespasses and sins,” treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, all this glory seemed to fade away. He did not count it as a thing at all to be desired, so long as men were perishing before His eyes without help. And so He divested himself of all His glory, and submitted to degradation and death, in glory, and submitted to degradation and death, in order that He might win a still greater joy.

Yes, even the joy of heaven could be increased, and that by removing the Joy of Heaven to earth, that earth’s misery might be turned to joy. Who can estimate the depth of love that could count the immeasurable bliss of heaven as nothing compared with the joy of bringing, through reproach, ignominy and death, fallen men to share it with Him? And this is the goodness of God toward men. Ought it not to lead them to repentance? Yea, verily; and such will be its effect upon everyone who will but steadfastly look at it. Oh that men would indeed look to Jesus, not once nor twice, but continually! Of such a look could it with truth be said, “There’s life in a look.”

And there is life. What power there is in the thought of God’s love in Christ, to lift up the soul of the dependent, and to strengthen the weak. Human words cannot give any just conception of this great love, which has healing in it, for the mind cannot grasp it.

“For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man’s mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.”

What, then, “shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “*For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Romans 8:35-