

God's Goodness

Personal Study

Supplementary Materials: Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999); David J. Fant, Jr., *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 1964; reprint, 2002).

Early in this chapter on God's goodness, Tozer poses a very provocative statement: "Christianity at any given time is strong or weak depending on her concept of God" (p. [41](#)). Tozer goes on to suggest that the Christianity of his era was weak because of an unworthy view of God. That was nearly fifty years ago, but is there any evidence that our popular concept of God has improved?

Tozer also refers disparagingly to "cowboy religion," by which he most likely meant the tendency of Christians to imitate the latest Hollywood fads, which at that time included westerns and country ballads (see, for example, the essay quoted in David Fant's biography of Tozer, pages 143–144). What do you think is the modern equivalent of "cowboy religion"?

The solution to a shallow concept of God, Tozer says, is to "magnify the LORD" ([Psalm 34:3](#)). The word *magnify*, in this sense, means to see God bigger, to change our concept of Him to something closer to reality—although we need to recognize that the infinite God can never be fully comprehended by our finite and fallen minds.

All this is presented to set the stage for a more realistic view of God's goodness.

What “Good” Means

Tozer probably began by expressing concern for our concept of God because *goodness* is the first of the attributes he discusses that we can possess as well—which immediately puts us in danger of seeing God in human terms. It’s easier to properly understand an attribute of God such as infinitude, which is possessed solely by Him alone. But those attributes such as God’s goodness, which can be part of the redeemed human personality (sometimes called the “moral attributes” by theologians), can be misunderstood. We can easily slip into thinking of human goodness, which cannot begin to describe God’s goodness.

That is why Tozer explains how the different attributes of God interact with each other. For example, God is infinite. Therefore, if He is good, He is *infinitely* good. If He is immutable (He never changes), then He is *immutably* good. So while we possess (in a redeemed person, at least) the ability to be good, we must not confuse that with the infinite, unchanging goodness of God.

A true understanding of God’s goodness disproves deism, which Tozer defines as the concept of God as “an absentee engineer running His world by remote control” (p. [44](#)). But the goodness of God is such that He cannot be indifferent about His creation. Isn’t it great to know that God is actively involved in the universe as an expression of His goodness?

Our Reason for Living

The answer to every question, Tozer contends, is “God out of His goodness willed it” (p. [46](#)). It is the reason why we were created, why God did not destroy Adam and Eve when they fell and why God sent His only Son to die on the cross for our sins. The operative word here is *grace*—God’s undeserved favor, showered on us for no other reason than that He is good.

It is also why God answers our prayers. It is probably a great blow to the theology of some people to hear Tozer declare, “Nobody ever got anything from God on the grounds that he deserved it” (p. [47](#)). The interesting thing, however, is that it puts us all on the same plane. There are no great saints whose prayers God answers because of their merit. They are no more deserving than any of the rest of us. We are all eligible for God’s grace. Why? Because He is good!

Tozer sounds a similar note in his book *Christ the Eternal Son*:

Let us remember this: Everything God does is by grace, for no man, no creature, no being deserves anything. Salvation is by grace, the Creation is by grace—all that God does is by grace and every human being has received of His fullness.

This boundless grace must operate wherever that which is not God appeals to that which is God; wherever the voice of the creature crosses the vast gulf to the ears of the Creator. . . .

All that you have is out of His grace. Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, is the open channel through which God moves to provide all the benefits He gives to saints and sinners.

And what about the years, the rest of your existence?

You cannot believe that you have earned it.

You cannot believe that it has something to do with whether you are good or bad.

Confess that it is out of His grace, for the entire universe is the beneficiary of God's grace and goodness.

Goodness and Severity

What about those who reject His goodness? We can do this because we have free will—or, as Tozer calls it, “provisional sovereignty” (p. 48). We have a small measure of authority (small in comparison to God's absolute authority) over our lives, to choose whether to serve God or ourselves, whether to go to heaven or hell.

Even here, however, God in His goodness has provided for us. Tozer quotes again from Lady Julian: “God of His goodness has ordained means to help us, full, fair and many; the chief being that which He took upon Him, the nature of man” (p. 49). The ability of God to sympathize and empathize with us is found in [Hebrews 2:17–18](#) and [4:15–16](#). His provision for our redemption has the effect of (in Julian's words) “turning all our blame into endless worship” (p. 51).

We Can Boldly Approach Him

God's goodness means we can be bold—almost arrogant, Tozer says—in our prayers to God. And Tozer emphasizes again that it has nothing to do with his own merit before God. “I’m not a good man... I can’t go to God and say, ‘God, I didn’t do what that fellow did.’ I’ve done everything—either in actuality or in thought—that could be done” (p. [51](#)). And he loves God all the more, because “he who is forgiven much loves much” (see [Luke 7:47](#)).

God’s Kindness

Tozer reminds us that “Jesus is God. And Jesus is the kindest man ever to live on this earth” (p. [52](#)). This is why we cannot view human kindness and hope to get an idea of what God’s kindness is like. All human examples pale in comparison. Like the father who accepted his wayward child home in the parable of the prodigal son, God is not revolted by our wretchedness. He sees us as perfect even though we are not—out of His goodness.

God Wants to Please Us

Jesus came to end all human tears. He wants us to take pleasure in Him. Tozer’s advice—which he repeats a second time for emphasis—is, “Let’s put away all doubts and trust Him” (p. [56](#)).

It’s funny how our doubts about God’s goodness seem to center on ourselves—“How could God be good to me, as bad as I am?” Some would say we are suffering from low self-esteem and we need to pump ourselves up until we think we *deserve* His goodness! But instead of magnifying ourselves—trying to believe the lie that we are bigger than we really are—we should magnify God. We should strive to see Him as big as He is, as good as He is—so good that He loves us even in our wretchedness. Think of all the effort God has gone through—and continues to go through—to take us out of our wretchedness and prepare us to be with Him in heaven. This is why Tozer’s wrap-up to this chapter, though a very startling thought, rings true: “Did you ever stop to think that God is going to be as pleased to have you with Him in heaven as you are to be there?” (p. [56](#)). Praise God for His goodness!

LESSON PLAN—Group Study

AIM: To help my students understand the immensity of God’s goodness to us, especially in His gift of salvation.

Introduction

1. Open with prayer.
2. Have the group discuss this statement by Tozer: “Christianity at any given time is strong or weak depending upon her concept of God.”
3. Ask the group what Tozer meant by “cowboy religion.” Is there a modern equivalent to that?

What “Good” Means

Have someone read the seven Scripture passages at the beginning of the chapter ([Psalm 119:68](#); [Isaiah 63:7](#); [Psalm 139:17](#); [Deuteronomy 30:9](#); [Psalm 36:7](#); [Psalm 34:8](#); [Matthew 7:11](#)). Ask, “How does God’s goodness differ from our own?”

Our Reason for Living

Have the class list some of the things we—as believers, but also as beings created by God—have because of God’s goodness and grace. Save this list for the closing, when you will spend time as a group thanking God for His goodness.

Goodness and Severity

Have someone read [Hebrews 2:17–18](#) and [4:15–16](#). Discuss what blessings have come to us as a result of the Son of God taking on human nature.

We Can Boldly Approach Him

Discuss what Tozer means by being bold in our prayers to God. How does it relate to his later confession of his sinfulness?

God’s Kindness

Read from the book the first paragraph under this heading (pp. [52–53](#)). Ask, “How should the knowledge of the greatness of God’s kindness affect the way we live?”

Discuss Tozer's repeated statement, "Let's put away all doubts and trust Him"
What is Tozer asking us to trust God about?

Closing

1. Spend some time as a group praising God for His goodness.
2. Close in prayer.