

Good

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own Will he brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:16-18)

I'd like to begin today with a personal testimony!

Some few years ago, over a period of about two years, as a father, I had one of the most precious opportunities that a Dad could ever enjoy with his son. I had "time" with him. "Time", and lots of it.

Being retired, I have a very flexible schedule, so I am free to spend time. And my son, being a school teacher, was at home most often in the evenings.

But for him, there was also a very special set of events that had taken place in the then recent months of his life, that also provided some "free time" for our "chats". He had, in those previous months, experienced a heartrending incident of divorce from his wife of five year.

With that as the setting, he and I began a habit that some people, perhaps most people, would call a "bad" habit. But for the two of us, it was so very, very "good". We began to meet on our back patios, most every evening, for about an hour and a half and we would smoke a cigar together.

When I say, we met on our back patios, I don't mean together. We actually lived about a hundred miles apart. So, each evening, I would sit down on my back patio and he on his, and we would talk on the phone as we smoked our cigars.

Why smoke a cigar, especially with all of its purported health risks? Well, I'm not altogether sure. But I do know that it helped make for a very special experience in both of our lives. The cigars served as a special medium of connection, that bound us together as we smoked and talked.

Folks, there is a special bond of comradery that is developed in moments like those. It takes about an hour and a half to smoke a cigar, which means that we had about an hour and a half of focused “relational time”, precious, uninterrupted “face to face” “time”, time and conversation.

For some of the beginning months of our “back patio chats”, the topic was often about how my son should respond to the sudden loss of his marriage. During the closing days of their marriage, his wife had revealed to the marriage counselor that she was not a Christian, and wanted nothing to do with Christianity.

But my son was a Christian, and it was his earnest desire to have a Godly response to his dilemma. And especially, to know the truths that God teaches in the scriptures about marriage and divorce.

And yes, we also did lots of self-examinations, “what went wrong”, “who was at fault”? And thankfully, those examinations were not for the purpose of placing blame, but rather more-so to help make sure that such things would not happen again.

We talked a lot about how a husband was supposed to love his wife, using such scripture verses as those in Ephesians 5. Words that command . . .

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

And also,

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

It was at some moment within those long conversations that my son and I began to address the question about the “goodness of God”, and about what His “goodness” can look like in all the many circumstances of life.

Through “faith” we know that God is absolutely “sovereign”, both in all things and over all things. And through “faith” we know that God is “Providential” in all the matters of our existence, meaning that He is intentional in every “work of His Hand”, and that He is personally and intimately involved in every occurrence taking place on the earth, and again, especially in every occurrence that takes place in our own personal lives.

And that God is always “good” in every part of every one of His involvements with us. As we’re told in today’s text, His “gifts”, all those things He provides for us, both materially and spiritually, are “good and they are perfect”.

And these scriptures are utterly filled with the evidence of God’s “goodness”. As in Psalm 119 verse 68 where the Psalmist tells us concerning God, “You are good, and you do good”, all these scriptures affirm and reaffirm, over and over again to us that the very essence of God’s character is “goodness”, and that He is ever and always “good”. And as these verses of our text tell us, He never varies or changes. He is always “good”!

And one of the most favored verses of Christians everywhere that gives needed comfort and reassurance to so many people every day is in Romans 8,

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. (Romans 8:28)

And please, please may we not pass quickly over any of these words as we read them and quote them, especially the word “causes”. Remember what we just said about God. He is “Sovereign” and He is “Providential”, meaning that it is the most powerful Hand in all existence that is “at work” as He “causes” all those things to work together for our “good”!

And please, also understand that this verse does not imply that God simply comes in during the worst of our crisis, or at the end, and gives us a “Hand” with our problem. No! No! Not at all. This verse speaks instead of an ongoing and continuing “work of God’s Hand”, meaning that He was intimately involved long before the crisis ever came into being, and that He is intimately involved in every minute detail of every part of all that is taking place.

In other words, God is not just the “cleanup crew”, coming in to fix something we have made a mess out of. No! He was intimately involved through every step, beginning with the first step.

And again, it is through “faith” that we know that in every intimate involvement of our circumstance, God truly is “good”.

But unfortunately, for your and my meager ability to comprehend the “whole picture” of a matter taking place, God’s “goodness” does not always look and feel so “good”.

And as my son and I concluded through many discussions, and do still continue to discuss, God’s more omniscient meaning of the word “good” is so very often “not” the definition that you and I give to it. Folks, as we well know, on any given day, in any given circumstance, “good” can have very different faces.

To see some of those different faces of “good”, we have only to read through the Book of Job, and to observe the travail of his soul as God’s “goodness” rained down pain and suffering upon him from every quarter. Beginning with the loss of his seven sons and three daughters, and along with them, all their families.

Then to add to that, Job also lost all his wealth, and then his health. And then came attacks and criticisms from his closest of friends, even his wife. With all that was taking place, the “goodness” of God was veiled beyond all recognition.

And unfortunately for you and me, such is also often the case for us. With Job, you and I have the first two chapters of that Book to inform us of what was taking place behind the scenes with God and with satan and with Job. But Job didn’t have those chapters to read and to help him to understand all that was taking place. And so, Job suffered in ignorance. Thankfully, at the end, God did explain it all to Job, and Job understood. And Job was rewarded for his faithfulness.

But again, even with us knowing from these scriptures about “suffering” and the necessity for it, we still are not able to fathom how God’s “goodness” can look the way that it does and can cause so much pain and suffering in our bodies and souls, and yet, still be “good”.

And the result is the matter that God addresses here in verse 6 of this chapter, where He warns us saying,

⁶ . . . ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (James 1:6)

When suffering and trials come, especially with the magnitude that it can come, we fail at the one thing God warns us about. We “doubt”. We “doubt”!

But thankfully, even “doubt” can be a useful instrument in the Hands of a loving God. Because “doubt”, as wrong as it can be, is also useful to “drive us” to “faith”. Because it seems that without the involvement of “doubt”, “faith” does not have reason to “rise up”, or to “grow”.

By that I mean, if we are sure and confident about a matter, we don’t need to “hope”. And remember, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen”!

And that is one of the ways that God can “work all thing together for our good”. He can see our “doubts” and then “cause” “faith” to rise up within us to overcome that doubt. God is truly amazing, isn’t He!

And a realization that you and I must “grab hold of” has to do with the whole scope of all that God is doing, all over the earth, every day. Folks, God’s plan is so much “bigger” than just you or just me. He has a whole big world to manage and to bless. And as important as we might think ourselves to be are, we really are only one part of His overall plan. He is working in every person’s life, every moment, all over the earth, at the same time.

And that which is taking place with you also probably involves someone else, often several people. And that which is “good” for you, might not be so “good” for that other person. And often, one person will need to suffer for the benefit of the other.

And yes, that is when most everyone cries foul, and complains about why they have to suffer so that someone else might gain.

But may we remind ourselves, that is exactly what happened with the Lord Jesus. And this is where real reality checks in. Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't whine and protest about having to suffer for you.

And such sufferings can be as simple and as seemingly inconsequential as changes in the weather. Rain is "good" for my grass during those "dog days of summer". But, for the farmer, late summer rains are not so "good" for the soybean and cotton crops.

But most often though, suffering is not so inconsequential. Suffering is often very serious, especially in such matters as life and death. It is on those occasions that the definition of "good" is really brought into question.

In Psalm 90, God decreed that

¹⁰ The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
(Psalm 90:10)

As some of you know, I am now in those "extended years", being nearly 75. Some of you are also in "overtime". And the question is, "is it a "good" thing, or a "bad" thing that God has put limits on your and my years here on the earth?"

I've often thought about the foreordained seasons of the natural world, Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Is it "good" that "natural seasons" only last for about 90 days. Wouldn't it be "good" if it were always "Spring", or as some might want, always "Summer".

God, in His great wisdom and foresight, has not just looked at the world down through the future and decided that people and all the natural things should have a certain "end". God actually created it to be so, even from the beginning, before even the foundations of the earth.

There is only One truly Eternal Being and that is God Himself, no beginning and no end. But all of the rest of created nature, and especially mankind, has a very calculated “season of life” and then an “end”.

As I prepared these words, I was sitting in my sun-room, looking out at the wonders of the season of Spring, the trees in my yard sprouting new leaves, and soon will sprout the fruits assigned to them, plums and figs and flowers.

And the thought comes to me that if the season always remained Spring, the trees and plants would always be growing new life, leaves and fruits. But without summer, there will never be a time of maturity for the fruits and no harvest. And the same would be true for farms and orchards.

And so, it is, with you and me. We have a beginning in this life and we have a natural aging process, which will end with our death, some younger than the 80 years, a few older, but for each of us, our “season” must end.

But again, the question is, “is our limited number of years on this earth, a “good” thing, or a “bad” thing? Is God “good” or is He “unfair” or “bad” for having decreed limits to our lifetime?”

I must tell you folks, I personally am “tired”. And I am getting more tired every day. I may continue for a few more years, but at some point, I need to “rest”. Thankfully, Jesus has gone on ahead to prepare a place for me to “rest”. And I do so much look forward to the wonderful accommodations He has prepared for me and my loved ones. And that is so very “good” of Him to do that!

As to the many “back patio” deliberations that my son and I have had about the “goodness of God”, the events that have taken place since those days have proven out that God truly is “good”, so very, very “good”.

God has been gracious to my son and has brought him a delightful “new bride”, one who loves the Lord Jesus and wants to live out Her Christian days with my son, and also with their soon-to-arrive little baby girl. Praise the Lord! God truly is “good”! And everything He does is “good” and absolutely “perfect”.

As for all of us here today, you and me . . . will we truly “enjoy” all the many forms of God’s “goodness”, all of the time? Most likely not! Because the suffering we will endure will never be enjoyable for us. But, by faith, we really can rest in the assurance that everything that God bring to us truly is “good”, and we can praise His Name for it.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
(James 1:17)

Praise be to God! Let’s pray!