

# Infinitely, Eternally and Unchangeably Good

## Psalm 107

This is the second-to-last sermon in a series on Shorter Catechism Q&A 4, “What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” Previous sermons: “God Is a Spirit”; “God Is Infinite”; “God Is Eternal”; “God Is Unchangeable”; “The God Who Is”; “Infinitely Wise”; “God Omnipotent”; “God Is Holy”; “God’s Justice.” Today’s sermon is “Infinitely, Eternally and Unchangeably Good.” Our topic will be the goodness of God. The God of the Bible—Yahweh, the God who *is*—is good. This is a rich theme in the Psalms, the church’s inspired songbook:

Psalm 34:8 – “O taste and see that the LORD is *good* (טוֹב): blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Psalm 73:1 – “Truly God is *good* (טוֹב) to Israel.”

Psalm 100:5 – “For the LORD is *good* (טוֹב); his mercy (חַסְדֵּךְ) is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”

Psalm 106:1 – “Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is *good* (טוֹב): for his mercy (חַסְדֵּךְ) endureth for ever.”

Psalm 118:1 – “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is *good* (טוֹב): because his mercy (חַסְדֵּךְ) endureth for ever.” Later, the Psalm closes with the same words: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is *good* (טוֹב): for his mercy (חַסְדֵּךְ) endureth for ever” (v. 29).

Psalm 135:3 – “Praise the LORD; for the LORD is *good* (טוֹב): sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.”

Psalm 136:1 – “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is *good* (טוֹב): for his mercy (חַסְדֵּךְ) endureth for ever.”

Psalm 145:9 – “The LORD is *good* (טוֹב) to all: and his tender mercies (רַחֲמֵימֶיךָ) are over all his works.”

This is the clear teaching of the Psalms. Let’s consider three points, first,

### 1. The meaning of the word “good”

The common word for *good* in Hebrew is טוֹב (*tōv*). In the very first chapter of the Bible we learn the basic meaning of this word: טוֹב is the word used in the repeated refrain “God saw that it was good. . . . God saw that it was good. . . . God saw that it was good” (six times in all). Like the swelling of a musical symphony, the motif grows in intensity each time it is repeated. On the sixth day comes the climax: “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was *very good* (טוֹב מְאֹד).” Seven times in Genesis 1 the Creator God examined his handiwork and saw—judicially determined—that it was good. When God finished the work of creation, he judged it to be “very good.” There was no flaw, no imperfection, no disease, no decay, no conflict. The world was at peace. There was only goodness—perfect existential goodness reflecting the moral goodness of the Creator. The

creation reveals that God is טוב—good. The word טוב is still commonly used in modern Hebrew; a teacher might say to an elementary student who has completed a lesson: טוב מאד—“very good”; or he might say to a person on the street יום טוב—“good day.”

A word often used in tandem with טוב *good* is רַחֲמִים mercy, lovingkindness, “steadfast love” (ESV). We see the two words together in Psalm 107, our text for exposition and application this morning. Here is a rich treasure-trove of teaching on the goodness of God. The Psalmist takes up the theme of God’s goodness: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is *good* (טוב)! For His mercy (רַחֲמִים) endures forever.” In verse 9 we hear it again: “He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness (טוב).”

No fewer than four times we have the repeated refrain, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness (רַחֲמִים), and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). Here is a prayer for the enlargement of the church, that God’s Spirit would work in the hearts of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and bring them to a living faith. Here, brothers and sisters, is a prayer we can pray on behalf of those around us who don’t know Christ: “Oh, that our dear lost friends and family would come to know the goodness of our God and Father!” People cannot fully know that without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

## **2. Brief exposition of Psalm 107**

A quick look at the contents of Psalm 107 reveals that in converting his elect and bringing them into his church, God:

- redeems his people (v. 2)
- gathers his people (vv. 3–4)
- feeds his people (v. 5)
- humbles and saves his people (vv. 10–13)
- enlightens and delivers his people (vv. 14–16)
- heals his people (v. 20)
- enfolds his people into his church (v. 32a)
- commits his people to the oversight of godly elders (32b)

To “redeem” is to reclaim a person who is enslaved; to purchase the freedom of a person who has fallen into slavery for debt. “The borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). Under the Old Testament, when a person could not pay his debts, he could become the bondservant of his creditor, working for him to pay off what he owed. God created man to prosper and be free, but humans need to learn responsibility—need to learn to work and save and use money wisely. When man sins, he becomes the slave of sin and of the devil. In 2 Timothy the apostle prays that God might bring people to repentance and the acknowledging of the truth, “that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken *captive* by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26). When God mercifully delivers a sinner

from enslavement to the devil he can learn to sing with the Psalmist, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” Oh, how glorious is the freedom purchased by Christ! Truly, as Jesus taught, “if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

God wants his people to learn to live within their means, to be thankful for his provision, and to experience contentment. But many are caught on the treadmill of debt, never quite catching up, believing the devil’s lie that they cannot be truly happy unless they have more. And when Christ, by his Spirit, delivers a sinner from the bondage of sin, he or she is brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. My dear hearer, are you at this moment a slave of sin, taken captive by the devil to do his will, or have you been delivered by Christ? If Christ is truly your Lord, then you will experience the freedom of the redeemed. You can sing the song of the redeemed: “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so!” You can testify to the redeeming love of the Lord.

Not only does Christ redeem a man, he also gathers his people into his church. Our Psalm speaks of those who were gathered out of heathen lands—from the east and west, north and the south. They had wandered in the wilderness and had found no city to dwell in. Now, they are divinely brought into the city, the church of Jesus Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem. They experience the fellowship of his people. And the city the Psalmist speaks of is not like some cities in America where lawlessness reigns, where it’s not safe to walk the streets, where thugs assault law-abiding citizens and get away with it, where “smash and grab” mobs brazenly force their way into upscale stores and carry off merchandise, and avoid prosecution. No! The city of Christ is well-run. Christ himself is Lord, gifting his appointed undershepherds to care for his sheep, who live in safety and “go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). Many people in our day are understandably leery of living in cities, but the church of Jesus Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, is a place of safety for those who once were taken captive by the devil.

Not only does Christ gather his people into his church, he also feeds them. Whereas before we were “hungry and thirsty,” and our soul fainted in us (v. 5), now, hearing his gospel preached and his word expounded and applied every Lord’s day, our souls are fed with manna from heaven. The Spirit, whose purpose is to glorify Christ, enables us to understand and profit from the Word. Truly, as the Spirit teaches us in this Psalm, “He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness” (v. 9).

Christ also humbles and saves his people. We who “sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons,” who formerly “rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High,” who experienced the hard labor of the devil, who “fell down, and there was none to help,” were enabled by the Spirit to cry out to the Lord in the midst of our troubles. Our testimony is

that God saved us out of our distresses, brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces (vv. 13–14). Is this your testimony, or are you still caught in the chains of sin?

Not only is there the language of deliverance, there is also the language of healing. In verse 20 the Psalmist testifies, “He sent His word and *healed* them, and delivered them from their destructions.” Sin separates, and it also destroys. Man, who was made to have a relationship with God and with his fellow man, becomes alienated both from God and man because of sin. At a “celebration of life” memorial service yesterday I talked with a man whose wife walked out on him years ago. He is a Christian, and walks with the Lord, but the hurt of that betrayal is still with him. Those who have been betrayed by a friend or spouse can be assured that there is healing and deliverance in Christ. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. He gives true and lasting deliverance and reconciliation. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye *reconciled* to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). When we are reconciled to God we experience healing and restoration. Our troubles do not magically disappear, but God comforts us in our afflictions and assures us that there will be complete restoration one day. There will be no tears in heaven, but only fulness of joy in the presence of the Lamb.

The church’s joy in the presence of Christ is expressed in verse 32. Take a look at this verse with me: “Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the company of the elders.” Earlier, the Psalm had depicted the church as a city—a haven. Now, the inspired Psalmist speaks of “the assembly of the people” and “the company of the elders.” These are pregnant phrases. The word translated “assembly” (עֲדָתָא) occurs 123 times. In the KJV it is translated “congregation” 86 times, “assembly” 17 times, “company” 17 times. It is also translated “convocation.” The basic meaning of the New Testament word for church (ἐκκλησία) is *called-out assembly*. Out of the mass of humanity God calls out a people for himself—his elect. At his chosen time he gives them the gift of faith; he enables them to see clearly for the first time—to know that they are sinners bound for destruction, with no hope of eternal life. But God has sent his Son to take on our humanity, live a perfect life, and go to the cross as a sacrifice of atonement. He died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Regenerated and enlightened by the Holy Spirit we are enabled to call upon Christ for our salvation. By faith we are brought in to the assembly of the people of God. We become part of the invisible church made up of the saints of every age. We are also invited into the visible church upon baptism and profession of our faith. God does not leave us alone, solitary and unattended. He enfolds us into his church, his flock, of which he is the Shepherd. We experience belonging! We are members of his body, of which he himself is the head. As his members we learn that each member is important.

“The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”<sup>1</sup> We are safe, enfolded into Christ’s church.

Also in verse 32 we learn that Christ has committed his people to the oversight of godly elders. The Psalmist exhorts us to “praise Him in the company of the elders.” The church in both testaments is ruled by godly elders called by the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. God does not call us to live under the tyranny of men. Christ alone is the King and Head of his church. He is the King, and we are his loyal subjects. Christ’s Word reigns supreme in his church. The church has authority to preach and teach whatever is taught in the Word, and has no authority to preach or teach what is *not* taught in the Word—no authority to make up doctrines or rules. The Word teaches, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). The principle here is the same as that in Ephesians 6:1, “Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*.” Divine authority is ultimate; human authority is derivative. Whatever God says, we must obey without question. When God told Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering,” Abraham’s responsibility was to obey, and this he did. Even though what he called Abraham to do involved the shedding of innocent blood, which is contrary to his explicit word, Abraham obeyed, and as he was about to plunge the knife into his son, the Angel of the LORD called out, “Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” So when God speaks through his word, our responsibility as his servants is to obey. But human authority is derivative. The elders—undershepherds—rule in the church by the authority of the Chief Shepherd. The church is a kingdom, not a democracy. Christ is King, and our ultimate loyalty must always be to him.

There is a lot more in Psalm 107; I have only given the highlights. But remember, God, *redeems* his people, *gathers* his people, *feeds* his people, *humbles* and *saves* his people, *enlightens* and *delivers* his people, *heals* his people, *enfolds* his people into his church, and *commits* his people to the oversight of godly elders. *The bottom line: all these things that he does on behalf of his people are evidence that he is good—infinately, eternally and unchangeably good.* No higher force compels him to do this. The fact that he continues to do this—continues to gather his elect people into the living body of the church—reveals the goodness of God. He doesn’t leave his people to shrivel up and die; he incorporates them into his living body, the church. He is a *good* God; he cares for his people. Child of God,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12:21

are you part of Christ's church? Have you professed faith in Christ and voluntarily put yourself under the authority and discipline of the elders?

### 3. Objections

We have proven that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is good. That is the teaching of Scripture. We have seen it from the Old Testament. It is also taught in the New. In Romans 2:4 the apostle asks, "do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the *goodness* of God leads you to repentance?" Yes, the New Testament teaches the goodness of God; it is the uniform teaching of Holy Scripture. God is good!

But some question this. We live in a fallen world. Not everyone obeys God. And because of remaining sin, the saints' obedience in this life is imperfect. Perfection awaits the new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. In this life we experience afflictions, disappointments, troubles, calamities, setbacks, miscarriages, birth defects, betrayal. How should we think about these things?

Recall the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism as it considers Romans 8:28, "And we know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The Catechism asks, "What do you believe when you say, 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth'? That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father for the sake of Christ his Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, *and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this vale of tears*. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father."

Yes, even in the midst of afflictions, judgments, tyranny and injustice the Christian can have confidence that whatever adversity God in his infinitely wise plan sends upon us, he will turn it to our good—no exceptions! No matter how much the enemies of Christ may rage against us, God will turn it to our good. The Psalmist said, "It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."<sup>2</sup> The born-again person will agree with this, the reprobate will never agree.

Just yesterday we heard the news that Israel and Hamas are at war. Innocent people on both sides are being killed—including children. We received a report that "things have gone rapidly downhill. No movement is permitted at all. We're praying that this ends quickly and doesn't escalate further." War is ugly. It is not part of God's perfect plan. How reassuring to know that our God is in control. "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth

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<sup>2</sup> Ps. 119:71

the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”<sup>3</sup> We wait for the day when “the wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”<sup>4</sup>

God is on the throne. He permits evil, but he overrules it for his own purposes. God is God; there is no higher standard to which God can be held. May we say with Job, “the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

People die every day. Some go to heaven, some go to hell. Sometimes one of our loved ones may die without giving evidence of loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, of gathering together with God’s people to sing his praises. Perhaps we prayed long and hard that God would draw our loved one to himself, and he never seemed to answer that prayer. But we know God is good. “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”<sup>5</sup>

Yes, the Lord is good even in sending loved ones to hell. If we say, “I can never love a God like that,” then our thinking is not biblical. God never sends a good person to hell. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

Beloved congregation, our God is *good*. His goodness is displayed preeminently in the death of his Son for our sins. The Person who is supremely good died for sinners like you and me. Let us look to him in faith. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ps. 46:9

<sup>4</sup> Isa. 11:6

<sup>5</sup> Prov. 16:4