

THE GOODNESS OF GOD



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Introduction

It is interesting when I view the different opinions about God in my favourite Christian forum site that the majority of views tend to concentrate on God being very exacting about keeping away from wilful sin and exacting some sort of punishment on those who do not come up to standard.

It seems that many good believers are unable to reconcile the way Jesus treated ordinary people with what they see as the wrathful actions of God in the Old Testament. They also have difficulty in reconciling the demands of the moral law in the Old Testament, and Paul's teaching that we are free from compliance with the Law through faith.

We have Christian denominations that teach strict observance to particular commandments, such as keeping the Saturday Sabbath, keeping separate from the world, refusing the Lord's Supper to those outside of their denomination, preaching sermons that threaten people with hell if they don't receive Christ the way they prescribe.

There are people who are very judgmental when they see faults and failings in others, and who sincerely believe that those who seem to be unable to observe the moral ideals they themselves observe, are "carnal" Christians who will probably miss the Rapture and have to go through the Tribulation.

There are others who are obsessed with end-time events and give a very dark and dismal interpretation of elements of the Book of Revelation in terms of what is going to happen to Christians if they don't comply with getting "the mark of the beast", and that there will be widespread deception and that many good Christians will fall by the wayside. We had a guest speaker once, an Anglican priest, who told us about what is going to happen to us in the future, that we are all going to be martyrs. As a young Christian I found that very depressing.

But is that what God is like? Is He a grumpy old man with a white beard, sitting on a throne, waiting to hit us over the head with a big stick every time we make a mistake? Is He a fellow dressed in a white coat, carrying a clipboard, taking note of our sins one by one, preparing to trot them all out in front of the assembled saints and angels at the Judgment?

Is there going to be a great "video" screen in front of us as the Judgment showing "This Is Your Life" for all and sundry to see, and then a decision weighed on the probabilities of success and failure whether we get admitted into heaven or not?

Is it really true what Jonathan Edwards, the 18th Century New England preacher said about us being suspended over hell by a thin cord, controlled by a God who is angry at us? It is true that his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" caused a major revival and brought multitudes to Christ. But were those conversions motivated by fear more than anything else? Or, if that sermon was specifically designed by the Holy Spirit for that particular time and environment, does that type of preaching apply to all recipients of the Gospel?

The question is whether the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ like a sheep dog barking at our heels, a farmer

with a cattle prod, poking us toward the penitent rail, or the middle-eastern shepherd who leads us like trusting sheep to Christ in order to receive Him, be converted, and receive the assurance of salvation?

Do Christian converts who come to Christ through fear stay with Him, or do they fall away when the fear subsides? When we encounter true converts to Christ who have remained in fellowship with Him over decades and who show no sign of backsliding through the often negative and challenging episodes of life, do we ask how come they are sticking with Him through thick and thin?

So, what is conviction of sin? Is it a fear and dread of hell, that if we don't receive Christ we will, one day, go slipping and sliding down into hell; or is it something else? We know it is certainly a clear consciousness that we are sinners and that the wages of sin is death, but then we see that the gift of God is eternal life.

Wait! This somehow doesn't describe an exacting God who is demanding sinless perfection before admitting us into His family, demanding total obedience to rules and laws, or else! An angry vengeful God does not offer gifts to people!

God's Attitude To Sinners

In order to answer these questions, we have to go to the Scripture and see what it actually says about God's attitude to sinners and how the Gospel is presented to mankind.

God's Great Love

The principal Scripture quoted when presenting the gospel to sinners is John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

What we discover through this verse is that God's motivation for bringing the Gospel to mankind is love. It was not just any kind of love. It was an intense, passionate love that motivated God to give His only Son to go to the Cross and be our substitute for sin so that we would not perish but have eternal life.

We start to realise that God is a good God Who wants us to have eternal life, so much so, that He gave up His greatest treasure in order to make that happen!

Let us go on to look at verse 17:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Reading this causes us to discover that God did not send Jesus with a big stick to belt people into believing in Him. He did not send Jesus into the world to condemn, but to save.

You will notice that He did not send Jesus into the world to show a graphic and scary picture of the hell that people would face if they didn't believe in Him. Moses, through the Law, was the one with the big stick, hitting the Jews if they did not keep every little jot and tittle of the Law.

God went to great lengths to show His love to us:

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

This tells us that God did not wait until people were able to get to the place where they could follow the moral Law up to the required standard. He sent Jesus to die on the Cross while we were yet sinners. Jesus did not come to save the righteous, but sinners (Luke 5:32). He said that the righteous did not need saving, but sinners did, desperately.

No One Is Righteous

The truth is that there is no one who is righteous:

“As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10).

Jesus did not come to save a select group of people, as some believe. He came to save all people. *“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all may come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).* His desire would be to save every sinner in the whole world if it were possible. He gives the invitation to all: *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord: “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).* Even in the Old Testament, God is giving the invitation. He is not saying, “Come to Me only when you have complied with the moral law”. He is saying, “Come to Me as you are and let’s have a discussion about it.” This is right in line with: *“If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

When we discover that God is a good God, we have confidence that if we come to Him He will *“in no wise*

cast us out” (John 6:37). Then we can accept His invitation: “Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

He Did Not Withhold Jesus From Us

The Scripture says: *“For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).*

Jesus was the best gift that God could have given us. He so loved us that He meant the greatest good for us when He sent Jesus to die for us. Out of every gift He could have given, He gave us the best in Jesus.

We see the goodness of Jesus in how He conducted Himself toward ordinary people. Let’s look at some examples:

Jesus Was Compassionate In His Personal Grief

When John the Baptist was killed, Jesus found out, and His first reaction was to go into an isolated place and privately sort things out in His mind about losing His cousin and fellow-minister. But when the people found out where He was going they followed Him; multitudes of them: *“When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns” (Matthew 14:13).* When He saw the crowds coming and interrupting His time

of grief, He could have said, “Look. I’m grieving. I’m not in a good place to minister to you right now.” But that is not what He did: *“When He stepped ashore and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick”* (v. 14). His compassion for the multitudes of sick people over-ruled His desire to be alone in His hour of grief.

The Person Who Has Seen Jesus Has Seen The Father

Jesus told one of His disciples: *“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* (John 14:9). Because Jesus demonstrates compassion for the sick, He shows that the Father is also a compassionate God. Jesus has come to do only the will of the Father: *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him Who sent me”* (John 6:38). So, being compassionate was not just His idea. It was what the Father wanted as well.

God’s Goodness And Compassion Shown To Moses

This is shown in: *“And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’”* (Exodus 33:19). This shows two things about God: (1) He is good; and (2) He is compassionate.

Jesus Has Compassion For Two Blind Men

“Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ He asked. ‘Lord’, they answered, ‘we want our sight.’ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him” (Matthew 20:30-34).

This is a very instructive passage to show the comparison between Jesus and the people when they encountered two blind men by the side of the road. They interrupted Jesus, shouting for His attention. Notice that the people rebuked them and basically told them to “shut up”! This is very much like many church members when someone in the service gets a little loud in their prayer for help, or walks forward, interrupting the flow of the service, to ask for prayer, taking hold of the person and telling them to sit down and stop making so much noise.

But Jesus did not take any notice of the people who resented the interruption. These two blind men were ‘nobodies’ to them, just like many church members who want to turn a blind eye to the disabled ones in the church. But these men were ‘somebodies’ to Jesus. He never ignores a cry for mercy.

“This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard and delivered him from all of his distress” (Psalm 34:6). The Contemporary English Bible rendering of the

verse reads this way: *“I was a nobody, but I prayed, and the LORD saved me from all my troubles.”*

So Jesus stopped and asked them what He could do for them. They told Him plainly that they wanted their sight. Jesus gave them exactly what they asked for and they received it immediately and became of His group of disciples. It was the compassion of Jesus that stopped Him when He heard their cries for mercy.

Compassion In The Church

I wonder how many churches have sick and disabled members attending every Sunday and no effort is being made to pray the prayer of faith over them so that they might be healed and made whole? Perhaps there is much sympathy for them in their suffering; but there is a great difference between sympathy and compassion. Sympathy is just feeling sorry for the suffering person. Compassion is being helpfully sorry and doing something to give relief to the sufferer. Jesus gives a good example of His compassion toward a sufferer:

“On another Sabbath, He entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched Him, to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse Him. But He knew their thoughts, and He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come and stand here.’ And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?’ And after looking around at them all He said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he did so, and his

hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6:6-11).

Here is a man who was disabled with a withered hand, who came Sabbath after Sabbath to the Synagogue. He was well-known and I guess many felt sorry for him. But they did not do anything to make life better for him. If he was a faithful Jewish worshipper, he would have known about the power of God, and perhaps His miracle-working power. However, knowing that did him no good, because no one in that synagogue had any idea of how to apply the miracle-working power of God to his hand so that it could be made whole like the other one.

That was until Jesus turned up. He saw, like all the others, the man with the withered hand; but His attitude and response were entirely different. He had compassion for the man and provided the link between God’s miracle-working power and the problem with the man’s hand right there. The hand was totally restored.

Compassionate synagogue leaders showing the goodness of God would have rejoiced that at last the man’s disability would be removed. Even though they may not have had the faith to pray for the miracle themselves, they would have recognised Jesus’ compassion and power and would have fully supported Him in His ministry of healing in their service. It is sad that they didn’t. They were more concerned about their strict Sabbath rule than the need for doing good on the Sabbath day.

Good synagogue leaders, having witnessed the miracle, would have rejoiced and praised God for His goodness. We will see presently, when Jesus raised a man from the dead, the response of the common towns-people was totally different. They lifted their

voices in praise to God that a mighty prophet had come among them. But this was not the response of these religious leaders. They were angry and discussed how they were going to get rid of Jesus.

This is a great lesson for us, and for any church leader who has sick and disabled members attending Sunday after Sunday. James has made provision for how church elders should approach those who are sick and disabled in their church services:

“If you are sick, ask the church leaders to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. If you have faith when you pray for sick people, they will get well. The Lord will heal them, and if they have sinned, He will forgive them.

If you have sinned, you should tell each other what you have done. Then you can pray for one another and be healed. The prayer of an innocent person is powerful, and it can help a lot” (James 5:14-16).

Compassionate church leaders will embrace this passage of Scripture and seek to put it into practice every time a member, or even an unsaved visitor, with a medical condition, comes across their path. They will stop the service, break into the planned programme to ensure that the prayer of faith is made for them, and they will encourage the congregation to fully support their prayer, knowing that: *“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).* If Jesus specified just two praying and agreeing together, then think of the willingness of God to extend His power to heal a sick person when a whole congregation of people agrees!

It is interesting that open confession of sin within a compassionate congregation is a very positive step toward being healed of sinful habit patterns and

addictions. Many will not have the courage to confess their sinful habit patterns in church because they know that they will be negatively judged. But church leaders and members showing a non-judgmental attitude and compassion toward those who trust their brothers and sisters with some embarrassing sin and to ask for the prayer of faith so that they can be forgiven, cleansed and released from the habit, will openly show the love, compassion, and goodness of God to those who need to know it for themselves.

Here is another example of compassion:

Jesus Has Compassion For A Grieving Mother

“As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then He went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother” (Luke 7:12-15).

Jesus saw the funeral procession and saw that the only male member of the household had died, leaving the mother, who was a widow, all alone. He has compassion on her and raised her son back to life. This had a very dynamic impact on the whole community who exclaimed *“A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help His people”* (Luke 7:16). This gave them a whole

new view and appreciation of the nature and character of God, because they saw Him in Jesus.

God Is A Good God

What these examples show us is that God is a good God, and He wants only good for us. This is what He thinks of us:

“For I know the thoughts that I think concerning you, said the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you the end that you wait for” (Jeremiah 29:11; Jubilee Bible).

We see that Jesus had compassion for sick people. He viewed sickness as evil and healed everyone who came to Him for healing. He never said, “This sickness is upon you to teach you something”. God never teaches us about Himself by putting something evil upon us. This is not to say that evil happens to us because of some silly decisions we make at times; but that is not God’s fault, nor of His plans for us.

He has compassion for sinners:

The Woman Caught In Adultery

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They were using

this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger.⁷ When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

'No one, sir,' she said.

'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin'" (John 7:53-8:11).

Here is an example of a woman caught in the act of adultery, and by Jewish Law she was subject to the death penalty. She could have been stoned and the Law, as written by Moses, would have been satisfied. But along with knowing that these teachers of the Law brought the woman to Him in order to catch Him out and make it appear that He would break the Law, or in keeping the Law fail to have the compassion He was noted for. Either way, they would have Him at their mercy to discredit Him. But He had compassion for the woman, and therefore challenged them that any who had not sinned should cast the first stone. When these teachers of the Law melted away, He was left with the woman. Jesus was the only Person Who had never sinned; therefore He did have the right to cast the first stone at her. But His compassion for her over-rode the principle of punishment for sin. In saying that He did not

condemn her; He basically forgave her with the understanding that she did not continue in that sin.

The fact that in many churches, people who fall into sin are severely punished and sometimes thrown out, shows that these churches fall short of genuinely representing Jesus. He has not come to punish sinners, but to save them. Good churches draw sinners to Christ to get them forgiven, cleansed and restored. These are the ones that show the compassion and goodness of Christ.¹

So, what is the most effective way to encourage a sinner or church member to repent?

The Goodness Of God Leads Us To Repentance

“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:1-4).

This is a very sobering Scripture, because it basically says that the measure that a person judges another, he or she will be judged by the same measure. This is

¹ This links with my comment attached to the reference in James 5 about confessing sin in a non-judgmental and compassionate church environment.

in keeping with what Jesus said in Matthew 7:2: *“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* But the opposite is also true: *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you”* (Matthew 6:14).

Therefore, to be a people who genuinely represent Jesus, we will be a compassionate, forgiving people. We will be compassionate toward sick people and do what we can to get them healed; and we will seek, in humility, grace and gentleness to restore sinning members of our church (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1). By doing it this way, we are showing that God is a good God and Jesus is a complete Saviour.

It is true that there will be a day in which God will judge the world, and He will pour out His wrath on the devil and his angels, and on all those who rejected His offer of salvation through Christ. But that day is not yet. We are not to make judges of ourselves before the time. We cannot see the hearts of people; only God. It is God Who knows who is going to receive Christ and who is going to ignore the great salvation that comes with believing in Christ:

“However God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness’” (2 Timothy 2:19).

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him;

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the

Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3-4).

God has shown His goodness in His own dealings with Moses and through the Old Testament (Psalm 119:68; Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 73:1; Psalm 145:9; Psalm 86:5; 1 Chronicles 16:34). As we have already seen, He has shown His goodness through Jesus, Who is the kindest Person we will ever meet.

No One Has Ever Stayed With God Through Fear

A person may, as part of the conviction of sin that comes upon him, feel afraid of what the sin in him is going to do to him if he continues in the way he is going. Conviction of sin is a “red alarm light” that something is wrong – that God is real, and the person is not right with Him. Fear, in the form of terror, paralyzes a person. They either fight or take flight. It was fear that caused Adam and Eve to hide from God after they ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:8).

If an airline pilot re-acts in terror on seeing a red alarm light on the instrument panel, he could panic and end up crashing the aircraft instead of remaining calm and using his training to ascertain the problem and do something about it. Conviction of sin can cause a negative re-action and cause the person or persons to eliminate what they see as the threat to them, as in the case with the crowd who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:54-60).

But when Paul came under conviction of sin on the Damascus Road in response to the appearance of the risen Christ, his first words were, *“What do You want*

me to do, Lord?” (Acts 9:6). Then the Lord told him what to do, and he did it. This is the appropriate response to conviction of sin. We find out what we need to do, like the crowd on the Day of Pentecost: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37); and the Philippian jailor: “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (Acts 16:29). There was an element of fear in each event, but they did not panic. They requested instructions about how to move forward in response to the conviction they felt in their hearts.

Jesus Neutralises Fear

When the disciples were having a difficult time on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus came to them walking on the water:

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid’ (Matthew 14:22-27).

There is no reason for fear when we are in the presence of Jesus. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David were not frightened when they found themselves in the presence of God. But at Mount Sinai, the people were afraid of the thunder and fire on the mountain, but then, they were not right with God and prone to rebellion and so limits were placed on them. This is why there was a large, heavy curtain in the Temple separating the people from the presence of God, and only the high priest could enter into it. But when Jesus died on the Cross, the curtain was split from the top to the bottom signifying that there were no restrictions on those who believe in and depend on Christ entering right into the presence of God. For them, *“You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”* (Psalm 16:11).

God Does Not Yell At People

Although there was thunder, lightning and fire for the rebellious people, when Moses came into God’s presence at the top of the mountain, God’s voice was quiet, calm and re-assuring. It was not like what has been portrayed in Hollywood movies. It was not loud and dictatorial. God spoke with Moses face-to-face, as a friend speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). When God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, He spoke at a normal conversational level after initially calling to him (Exodus 3:4).

The voice of the Lord that spoke to Elijah was a “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12), even though there was a mighty wind, fire and an earthquake; but the Lord was not in those dramatic displays. He was in the

still small voice. The Lord was being gentle and compassionate, because He was speaking to someone suffering depression. Elijah needed re-assurance, and a loud, dictatorial voice would not have given him that.

When Jesus spoke out of the bright light to Paul, there is no indication that Jesus yelled or spoke loudly to Paul. I believe it was a calm, yet assertive voice. Similarly, when God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, He was assertive at first, but then having got Job's attention, spoke in a normal conversational voice (Job 38).

When God Spoke To Me

When I first heard God's voice in my heart for the first time when I went out into the middle of a park seeking a personal encounter with Him, it was calm and re-assuring. It came as a very strong thought in my mind, something I had never experienced before like that. I knew it was God's voice because it strengthened me and made Him so real to me that if Jesus had stepped out from behind one of the trees in the park, I would not have been surprised; neither would I have been afraid.

I know that when John saw Jesus in all His glory he fell at His feet as if dead (Revelation 1:17). But then he was taken up into Heaven to have that experience. But after that initial re-action, there is every indication that John had a normal conversation with the risen, glorified Christ.

But for me, He would not have appeared that way to me. If He wanted to have a conversation to me in person, His condescension would allow Him to

appear in a form where I could walk and talk with Him. But I doubt that I will ever see Him like that while in this life. In my research I could not find any testimonies where anyone was visited by Jesus, other than those who had a near-death experience went to Heaven and saw Jesus there.

I did ask the Lord if I needed visions and personal visitations of angels, and He told me that because I had Him communicating directly to my spirit, I didn't need those other things. I asked Him why some received those things. He replied, *"Because they have not yet come to the place where I can speak directly to their spirit. Visions and angelic visitations are stepping stones to point people to Me so they can come to the place where they can hear My voice."*²

I find that as I have grown and matured in the Lord, I have discussions with Him over issues, and He speaks back to me by giving me the exact Scripture that clearly gives me what He is thinking. I have recently stood down from all my leadership activities in my church, and I am now left to just "Jesus and me". I talked to the Lord about that and immediately the Scripture came strongly to my mind: *"In My presence is fullness of joy."* I just knew that Jesus enjoys it when I just relax and fellowship with Him, not wanting anything from Him except knowing that He is there, and is not silent.

One time I asked the Lord what He thought was more important to Him in the activities I was doing in the church. He came back to me saying, *"Your prayers are more important to Me than anything else you can do. I revealed Myself to you in a way that you*

² Paul did have angels visit and encourage him, and he had a vision of a man from Macedonia requesting assistance. But then he was a specially called apostle with a unique ministry.

can talk freely with Me friend to Friend, and I gave you other “tools” to enhance and make your prayers powerful.” He then gave me three Scriptures:

“My eye is upon the righteous and My ears are open to your prayers” (Psalm 34:15).

“The effectual, fervent prayers of a righteous man avail much” (James 5:16).

“Let your gentleness be apparent to all. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present our requests to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7).

He also said something interesting to me: *“Now that We have got you out of that church, We can work on getting you back to the original prophetic vision I gave you.”* I have absolutely no idea how He is going to do that, but like Isaiah and Hezekiah when the city was surrounded by an invading army, prayed: *“O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12).*

I may not be under the same threat as they were, but my attitude is the same. God does not always tell us how He is going to do something. He tells us that He is going to do it (*“faithful is He Who calls you and also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24)*), but He leaves us to just trust Him to work out the details. This is in keeping with another important Scripture: *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday” (Psalm 37:4-6) .*

Why can we trust that the Lord has spoken to us in this way? How can we know that what He has promised will come to pass? We can because we know that God is a good God and He intends only good for us. Recently I started to have doubts about whether God has been speaking to me in the way I believed that He had. In the early hours of the morning one night, I woke up with “*Romans 4:21! Romans 4:21! Romans 4:21!*” very strongly in my mind. I had to turn on my light and look it up, because I didn’t know what Romans 4:21 was. When I looked it up in the Amplified Bible it read: “*being fully convinced that God had the power to do what He had promised.*” That left me in absolutely no doubt that what I have been hearing over the years has truly been the voice of God to me!

This is the goodness of God that He will take the time to give me the assurance that I need so that any doubts about His love and faithfulness to me were dispelled entirely. He could have let me struggle with my doubts, but He didn’t. He woke me up with a Scripture reference that I did not previously know, and when I read it, a settled peace came to me. I turned off my light, rolled over and went into a peaceful sleep. Here is a Scripture that God gave me as a young Christian and it has never left me: “*I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety*” (Psalm 4:8).

God Draws Us To Christ With Goodness

It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.

“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:4).

In our efforts to lead sinners to Christ, we need to reflect the love and kindness of God toward them. God does not intend for us to be perfect specimens of religious perfection. There are two types of sinner: (1) sinners under conviction who are softening toward God, and (2) sinners who are hardened in their rebellion against God. Both will re-act against a type of gospel that will show an angry God Who is out to punish them in hell for their sins.

The fact is that God does not want to punish any sinner by sending them to hell. He did not send Jesus for that purpose. Look again at John 3:17: *“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved.”* That’s why He sent Jesus, and that’s why Jesus chose to go through the agony of crucifixion and the greater trauma of having His own Father turn His back on Him. Why did Jesus take the whole wrath and anger of God against sin on Himself? To condemn us? No! To save us!

If more church people actually got the truth of this, more people who came into their churches would get genuinely saved!

Is the compassion of Jesus something that is an automatic part of his nature and mission, or is there some component of choice? Let's look at a scenario:

“While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when He saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 5:12-13).

Jesus is confronted by a man covered in leprosy. People were afraid of the disease and kept right away from those afflicted by it. The man gave Jesus the choice of whether He wanted to heal the man or not. Jesus immediately said, *“I will!”* He made the choice to heal the man. We have those in our churches these days who assert that it is not God's will to heal sick people today. They are totally wrong on two counts: (1) If Jesus was willing to heal a sick man in the First Century A.D., He is just as willing to heal the sick today, because He *“is the same yesterday, today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). Those who say that Jesus doesn't heal today are, in effect, saying that Jesus has changed his attitude from then until now. But they have no foundation in Scripture to assert that. (2) They lack the same compassion that Jesus had toward sick people. Because of that, they don't, in any way, represent Jesus. Therefore their cessationist assertion is not good.

Churches That Support The Healing Ministry Are Winning Souls To Christ

Churches that include the invitation for sick folk to come forward to receive prayer for healing, are those that are winning more sinners to Christ than those who are trying to present the Gospel without the invitation.

Healing and deliverance from demons was an integral part of the ministry of Jesus on earth. He healed sick folk because He had compassion for them, not to prove His deity. Those who assert that Jesus healed people just as a sign to show the Gospel is true have only part of the facts. The “sign” is only secondary, and the only time that Jesus spoke that way was when He used the healing to prove to John the Baptist that He was the Messiah. It was only for John’s benefit and was not intended to be a universal sign. His motivation to heal was out of His goodness and compassion toward people, and that has not changed from that day until this.

It is significant that many more divine healing events happen outside churches, in context with evangelism in inter-denominational conferences and street evangelism. As a result, more people come to Christ in these environments than in many of our churches. Why is this?

It is because those who preach the Gospel along with divine healing of the sick are showing more of the goodness of God. Sinners are drawn to Christ because they see God, not as a grumpy old man with a white beard and a stick to beat people into the

Kingdom, but as a loving God Who loves, cares and is full of compassion.

God is a good God, and He wants to give miracles to those who need them. Herod wanted the Lord to do some miracle in front of him, but he had the wrong motive for desiring it (Luke 23:8). Jesus is not into showing His miracle-working power to prove anything to skeptics. The Scripture says that “*God will supply all of our need, according to His riches in glory*” (Philippians 4:19), not our wants. If we need a miracle, He will supply one. If we just want miracles to “put our church on the map”, He will say, “No!”

But as we see in Acts, a miracle of healing caused thousands to turn to Christ (Acts 4:4). The miracles done through Peter in his healing of Aeneas and the raising of Dorcas from the dead resulted in whole communities turning to Christ (Acts 9:32-42). In our own time, the healing ministries of Maria Woodworth-Etter, Smith Wigglesworth, Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, William Branham resulted in thousands turning to Christ and remaining as permanent, long-term converts, some of whom have gone on to have powerful healing ministries themselves.

All these evangelists demonstrated that God is a good God and sinners were attracted to the God and the Jesus that they presented. Oral Roberts said, “God is a good God and the Devil is a bad Devil”. Kathryn Kuhlman said, ““His giving is spontaneous, something that He does out of his great heart.”

John D. Currid. Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, USA, makes the following quote:

“I was recently reading about a group of American pastors who decided to travel to London in the

1880's to hear and learn from some of the great English pastors of the day. On their first Sunday in London they went to hear a famous preacher who pastored a large church of 3,000-4,000 members. The Americans listened to his preaching, and as they left the church they marvelled and proclaimed, 'What a great preacher! What a great preacher!' The next Sunday the group decided to attend the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Central London to hear Charles Spurgeon preach. They listened to him, and as they left the church they marvelled again . . . but this time they proclaimed, 'What a great Saviour! Hallelujah! What a great Saviour!'"³

This shows the difference between preaching a good sermon about Jesus, and someone else demonstrating the goodness and compassion of Jesus toward sinners. It is not difficult to determine which preacher won the more stable converts to Christ!

What Does This Mean To Us?

We have seen that God is a good God. The whole nature and character of God is love (1 John 4:8). The great love of God is shown in Jesus weeping over Jerusalem: *"how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings"* (Matthew 23:37).

Sinner, you who don't yet know Christ as your Saviour, this is what Jesus wants to do for you. His arms are spread out wide toward you and He would want to gather you in, not as a demanding religious

³ <https://journal.rts.edu/article/reflections-teaching-career-great-savior/>

identity who would want to imprison you in a set of church rules, but as a good, loving, ‘mother hen’ who would gather in and protect her chicks. His goodness reaches out to you. How will you respond?

Are you weary and heavy-laden in the stresses of life, sick of the meaninglessness of your existence, not knowing if there is a good future for you? Then look to Christ who reflects the love of God to you, that even in your present sinful state, He is loving you, and has given Himself to die on the Cross to take your sins upon Himself, so that you can go free from the guilt, shame and punishment for them.

You are in a prison of sinful living and habit patterns. Up until now, the prison door has been shut, but now Christ, in His compassion for you, unlocks and throws open the door and invites you to come out of the cell and put your life in His hands. Why would He want to do this for you? Because He loves you and doesn’t want you to waste away and perish in that prison of sin and despair.

Don’t worry about how sinful you are. Christ will forgive, cleanse and change you into the person you should be. All you have to do is to accept His goodness, believe the Gospel, and turn to Him. This is His promise:

“To all who receive Him, to those who believe in His Name, He gives the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Just by accepting God’s goodness and saying “Yes” to Jesus, you become:

- A child of God
- Accepted into His family
- Jesus becomes your Brother
- He is not ashamed of you

- You become a totally new person
- You are completely forgiven and cleansed from all past sin
- You have a new hope for the future
- You will never be judged or punished for sin
- You will receive eternal life
- You will go to Heaven when you die and enter into an eternity of the joys that God has for you.

How can you refuse such a wonderful Saviour as this?

If you have been put off coming to Jesus because of the bad example set by some church members, I apologise. But the Jesus I know is not like them.

He is totally good, loving, accepting, and knows you since you were conceived, and the last thing He wants is for you to waste away and perish in your sins.

What about it? Do you want to say “Yes” to Jesus right now?

What are you waiting for?

This is how:

1. Accept that you are a hopeless sinner in a prison of sin with no escape without Christ unlocking the door for you.
2. Believe that Jesus died for you on the Cross to take the guilt and punishment for sin on Himself, and that He rose from the dead to give you eternal life.
3. Ask Jesus to come into your life to take charge as your Saviour and Lord.

4. Ask Him to do the work in you to totally transform you into the person He wants you to be.
5. Go and tell someone that you have received Christ as your Saviour and Lord. Why? Because *“If we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus, we will be saved”* (Romans 10:9).

If you have followed these points honestly and sincerely, you can know that you are saved, because the Scripture says that if you come to Christ, He will in no wise cast you out (John 6:37).

That takes care of your standing with Christ. You can now stand before God without any fear, shame, guilt or any sense of inferiority.

If you have followed these steps and have received Christ as your Saviour, you have gone through the narrow gate, and your journey toward Heaven has started. Always trust the goodness of God to lead you the right way. You will not always find the path smooth or easy, because God does not promise ‘a bed of roses’ for you. But you can depend on these promises:

“I was a young man and now I am old, and I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor His children begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). I received Christ as my Saviour in 1966 at the age of 19 years, and now I am old, I can say that this promise is totally true.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). There will be times in your life when you will feel that you will be walking through the darkest valley with no map or chart to guide you. It will feel that you are

walking one step at a time across a river and having to trust that there are stepping-stones there to stop you falling in. It is not that God has left you. It may be that He, in His love and goodness, is carrying you. He knows where the stepping-stones are, and He will get you safely across.

I would be misleading you if I told you that all your problems will be solved when you receive Christ. It may seem that your problems are just starting! Don't panic and start thinking that your conversion to Christ isn't real. The problems are there because your conversion is real. This is because you have just met your adversary, the devil, and he will do all he can to persuade you to give your Christian life up and return back under his control.

But you have the power and authority in Christ to say to him, "I am a child of God, and you cannot come anywhere near me. So, take your lies, get on your bike and go!" This is called resisting the devil and the Scripture says that when we resist the devil, he has to flee from us (James 4:7).

It would be good for you to find a loving group of Christians who demonstrate the goodness of God in the way I have described in this book. They will be the ones who will guide you into more of what God has for you, like the baptism with the Holy Spirit and His Supernatural Gifts. They will also be a group who will have compassion for the sick and suffering, and will offer regular ministry to bring the goodness of the Holy Spirit to use His healing power to make them well. These are practical ways a group will show the goodness of God and the love of Jesus to all who attend the church meetings.

They will show you the best Bible to buy so you can learn more about the goodness of God in His Word. And they will show you how to talk to God and

fellowship with Him, and learn how to recognise His voice when He speaks to you.

The future in Christ is yours. I made my decision as a young man and I am glad that I remembered my Creator then, because now I am old, life has not lost its meaning for me, and if you go on for Christ, you will get to where I am and you will know what I am talking about.

Here is the prayer that Jesus prayed for all those who would give their lives to Him:

“I pray...for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. ²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one— I in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

‘Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.

‘Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You^[e] known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them’” (John 27:20-16).

You can receive this prayer, because He is praying before the Throne of God for you right now!

