



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Goodness of God and the Existence of Evil”

[Prayer] Father, we turn with thanksgiving to Thee for the goodness which Thou hast showed us in Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for all of the other blessings that are ours. We acknowledge that they are all of Thy doing, that Thou hast taken the initiative in our salvation, and Thou hast brought us to Thyself. And to Thee is due the honor and the glory and the praise. And as we turn to the word again tonight, we pray that Thou wilt continue to enlighten us and instruct us in these matters that concern Thy nature and Thy being. And, Lord, may the Holy Spirit illumine us and bring us into the knowledge of Thyself, which is life eternal.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is, “The Goodness of God and the Existence of Evil.”

And in order to have a Scripture reading which bears on our topic, I'm going to ask you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 33, and I want you to listen as I begin reading at verse 12. You may remember that, after Moses had led the children of Israel out of Egypt, they went into the wilderness. And there God gave them instructions concerning the tabernacle. And while Moses was on the mount, the people under the leadership of

Aaron, turned again to the false gods. And you remember the sad story in Exodus chapter 32, of the making of the golden calf, a chapter which I think contains one piece of exquisite irony and humor, and it is the word of Aaron. For he says, in verse 24 of chapter 32:

“And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave it me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

And, I’ve always laughed at that because it seems as if Aaron, in explaining what happened, is really attributing the agency to the fire. It is responsible for this image which was an insult to the person of God. Then, in the next chapter, God threatens to withdraw his presence, and Moses remonstrates with him. We read in verse 12 of chapter 33,

“Then Moses said unto the LORD, ‘See, thou dost say to me, “Bring up this people!” But, thou, thyself, hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Moreover, thou hast said, “I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.” Now, therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in Thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is Thy people.

And He said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then he said to Him, “If Thy presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.

For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Thy sight, and Thy people? Is it not by Thy going with us, so that we, I and Thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?”

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.’

Then Moses said, ‘I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!’

And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.’

But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’

Then the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.’

Now the LORD said to Moses, ‘Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain.’

So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand.

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood before with him as he called upon the name of the LORD.

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth;

(You’ll notice he is merciful, gracious, long suffering, and loving, abounding in loving kindness and truth.) who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished,

visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren on to the third and fourth generations”

And Moses made haste and bowed low toward the earth in worship.

And he said, ‘If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and do though pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Thine own possession.’”

The Goodness of God and the Existence of Evil. The importance of theology can hardly be overestimated and yet, surprisingly, it is still attacked by liberals and conservatives. Now, just a few weeks ago in the chapel at Dallas Theological Seminary a young man came to speak. And in the course of his message in the midst of our chapel, he ridiculed theology and doctrine as over against the practical. His subject was: Can you make an A in Hebrew and flunk in the Ministry?

And, of course, the answer to that is, yes. It is possible to make an A in Hebrew and flunk in the ministry. But it surely is not the best thing to be sure to flunk Hebrew in order to be a success in the ministry. And as far as I can tell from listening to him, it was the classic example of a message in which, instead of trying to hit both sides of the truth, and thus have a balanced kind of message, it was totally one sided and left one person in the audience, at least, very, very cold. And that person was I.

Now, it is a startling thing, of course, that people in the 20th century, of all centuries when we are supposed to be so intelligent, are not interested in hearing the great doctrines of the word of God. In fact, we have been the recipients of absurd pedagogic theories, which are alike in their depreciation of the labor of learning facts. Now, we are often told that the worst form of teaching is the lecture method, and that we should never teach by the lecture method. That we should all get around and discuss the things that we are interested in and out of our discuss, then we will be much better able to come to the truth than by listening to someone lecture on it.

Not long ago, there was a noted educator who gave some advice to a company of college professors. And that is typical of a tendency in modern education. He said, “It was a great mistake to suppose that a college professor ought to teach; on the contrary, he ought simply to give the students an opportunity to learn.” Now, I have never really felt that that was true, that it is not the duty of a teacher to give his pupils an opportunity to learn. It is the duty of a teacher to teach.

Now, of course, he should in his teaching give his pupils an opportunity to learn. It is a travesty upon our pedagogical methods when we presume that when a man gives a lecture that all he is doing is setting forth a series of facts, a long string of facts, perhaps, which we are supposed to put down in our notes and go home and memorize. That is not the end of a lecture. The reason that I lecture to you is not that you might hear certain things, put them down in a notebook if you are bothering to do that, and go home and memorize them. That is not a substitute for independent thinking. What I would like to see every one of you become is an independent thinker in theology. But what I’m trying to say is simply this: That no one can be an independent thinker in theology who has not, first of all, learned the facts of theology. And it is by means of lectures that one gains the facts that then become the means to our learning theology.

It’s impossible to think with an empty mind. And, unfortunately, that is the kind of discussion that people often have. We gather around with empty minds and try to discuss a topic about which none of us really knows anything.

Now, the purpose of a lecture then is to store our minds with some facts by which we may then be able to wrestle with a topic. So I believe in teaching theology. And, I’m not here to simply give you an opportunity to learn. I want to teach you a few things, too.

A couple of days ago, I was sitting in the snack shop at the Dallas Seminary and one of our students, who is a senior, sat down, and we were discussing one of the doctrines of the Bible. And, in the course of the discussion, I was making a point over

this doctrine that evangelicals do not understand it, do not preach it, and therefore most of them are semi-Pelegian. I’ve said this a number of times with you, so you know what I was talking about. And I was specifically talking about the bondage of the will, trying to point out -- or to discuss with him, for he believed what I believed -- discuss with him the fact that our wills are in bondage because of the Fall.

And then when I finished giving my little spiel, to which he agreed, and the other young fellow with us seemed to agree, too, he then said something that really shocked me. Because, he said, “I have in my Bible class two young girls from Believers Chapel. And the other night, I mentioned this truth to them and they were totally surprised by it and did not understand the doctrine at all.”

Now, that upset me considerably and so I insisted that they must be either newcomers to the Chapel or they had slept through the messages. Because, if there was anything that been pointed out, it was the truth of the bondage of the human will. I guess, as I reflected on it afterwards, it illustrates the fact that there are no truths that you can overemphasize, providing you are preaching a well-rounded Gospel. And so it impressed upon me, also, the fact that it is of the greatest significance that we learn the truths of theology.

We have been studying the attributes. And when one studies the attributes, one studies the perfections of the divine being and the divine nature. It should be obvious to us that if God is as we have been setting him forth, to be wrong in these things, is to be wrong about God. If we are really to understand God we must understand these things that have to do with his nature and his being.

A couple weeks ago, I was reading in the *Standard Bearer*, which is a Calvinistic publication put out by the Protestant Reform Church. If anything, it’s a little more Calvinistic than I am. And I didn’t realize such was possible. But, I’m beginning to discover that, perhaps, they are. At any rate, in the course of the article -- The editorial, the lead editorial by the *Standard Bearer* two weeks ago...

The Editor, who is a professor in our Theological Seminary, was criticizing in the same Reform Church for errors in theology. And one of the errors of which he accused him, was the error of denial of the immutability of God. And this is what he quoted. And this is from the Professor that he was criticizing: “The very fact that God’s will must be done, does not mean, therefore, that we may not wrestle with prayer, as if, if it were possible, to change the mind of God. It has happened before that God changed his mind. We read the Old Testament, God changing his mind. The Old Testament says, of course, that God repented and that he did the other things. Well, it simply means that God changed his mind.”

I needn’t go on and read the rest of it, but it’s obvious, that that man does not understand the doctrine of the immutability of God. Oh, it does say that God repented. But we’ve discussed that. It does not mean that God changed his mind. He does not change his mind. He is all-wise. He does not say, “I made a mistake on that. I think I’ll try this approach to the problem.” So to be wrong about these things is to be wrong about God. And to be wrong about God means, that we are wrong about the most fundamental facts of life.

In this lecture, we are turning to the moral attributes of God. We have been looking at the communicable attributes and specifically, recently, the attributes that have to do with the divine will and the divine power; attributes that have to do with God’s sovereignty.

Now, tonight, we want to look at the first of the moral attributes: The Goodness of God. The moral attributes are made up of three primary ones: the doctrine of the goodness of God, second, the doctrine of the holiness of God, and third, the doctrine of the righteousness of God. And, I think our study will conclude with this.

Goodness comes first. There are some critics of the Bible who contend that God does not have any goodness. For example, the famous Hebrew scholar, in Wellhausen, responsible for many of the theories of the make up of the Book of Genesis, studied still

in some of our theological schools, Professor Wellhausen, and [indistinct] and Schmidt and others, said that “God of the most ancient Hebrews have no moral character. He was principally whose power and anger were released like a force of nature, without any apparent reason.”

The word of God is quite different, however. It does say that God does have a moral character, and that it is characterized by holiness, righteousness and goodness. And tonight our subject is the goodness of God and the existence of evil. And, Roman I, The nature of the divine goodness.

Among the ethical attributes of God, first place must be assigned: goodness. Socrates, whom I studied through reading Plato and Classical Greek when I was in college about two, three decades -- well, three or four decades ago. Used to say that goodness was, practically the same as our usefulness. And Greek ethics failed to go beyond it. Goodness means simply usefulness. That is good which is useful for us. The good thing is the eudemonic goal of that which everyone desires. Of course, that may vary. The Greek thought goodness was represented by beauty. The Romans thought that goodness was noble birth and riches. For the Americans, it is greenbacks alone. That is goodness. Money is goodness. Goodness is, therefore, in the human language, relative in these senses. Moral goodness, however, is something different.

Moral goodness is in and by itself and has an absolute value. In the Bible, goodness is the sum total of the divine perfections. And I’m going to ask you now, if you will, to turn with me to Mark chapter 10. And here, we have our Lord giving us some instruction in the nature of goodness. Mark chapter 10 in verse 18. One day, as our Lord was carrying on his ministry, a man ran up to him, a wealthy man, a rich young ruler, a man who had all the keys of life hanging at his girdle, so to speak. He knelt before the Lord Jesus, and said to him, “Teacher, Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

It should be evident to any good Calvinist that the man has asked the wrong question. It is not a question of “what should I do to inherit eternal life?” If we are seeking eternal life by something that we do, we shall never attain eternal life.

So he has gotten off on the wrong foot. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Apparently, he was thinking about some great deed, which he might be able to do, some unusual act, like putting one thousand dollars in the collection plate on Sunday morning. That surely qualifies a man for eternal life. Or, doing some other religious type of duty. Or perhaps some civic type of duty. He was looking for that kind of thing. Jesus replied to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

Now, we don’t have time to talk about what may appear to you to be an obvious instance in which Jesus denies that he is God. You know enough theology, now, through my lectures, I hope, to see that Jesus did not say, no one is good except the Father alone. He said, “No one is good except God alone.”

And you also have noticed that he the man said, “Good Master” when he addressed the Lord Jesus. And by the very fact that he called Jesus, “Master” it was evident that he did not understand who Jesus was. So he took an adjective that belonged to God, not to the Father alone, but to God: comprehensive of Father, Son, and Spirit. And he took and added it to a word, master, or teacher, which may apply to a man. And so Jesus was catching him up on that point. If he had said, ‘Oh, but sir, you are God.’ Then Jesus would have said, ‘I have not found so great faith, no, not in all of of Israel.’

So, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Now, that text I think stands in the Bible as testimony to the fact that God alone is good. Now, Paul says it negatively. He says: “There is none good, no not one.”

And so all goodness resides in God. Any goodness that man has is a derived goodness, then. It can only come from God. So don’t go around talking about so and so, he’s a good man. Well, you are adjusting your beliefs to human standards. There is no good man around who does not have goodness from God.

“The Goodness of God and the Existence of Evil” by S. Lewis Johnson
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So what does goodness mean? Capital A, Definition and terms.

The Old Testament terms for goodness, the Hebrew verb *yatab*. The Hebrew adjective: *towb*. The Hebrew noun, *tuwb*. You can see they all come from the same root.

Together with the New Testament words, stress God’s beneficent action towards men. Goodness is God’s beneficent action towards men. In the New Testament, the same idea is contained.

There are two words in the New Testament. One will refers to goodliness in form; and the other goodliness in inner excellence. And the second is, of course, the important word. So goodness then, refers to God’s beneficent action to men.

If we were to try to define it, we would say something like this: Goodness is that perfection which prompts God to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures. Goodness is that attribute, that perfection, which prompts him to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures.

There are two senses in which God is good. He is good absolutely; that is, absolute perfection in perfect bliss rests only in him. And then he is good relatively or actively. And by that we refer, of course, to the fact that he is the fountain and cause of all good that is found among men.

Turn with me to Psalm 145 in verse 9. In verse 8, David says: Psalm 145, page 893, in the New American Standard Bible, which I am reading through. I am on page 225 now. I’m reading ten pages a day, and I am going to finish this volume by about July the 1st. Then I’ll let you know what kind of volume it is. But that’s what I’m reading now, so that’s what I’m using. Verse 8, Psalm 145.

“The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in loving kindness.
The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.”

Now, notice there is the expression here of the relative goodness of God; His outward goodness; the goodness that he does toward men. He is the fountain and cause of all good, as well as, being in himself, totally good.

Let me make a few theological observations. Capital B. First of all, goodness is essential to God. Without it, he is not God. When Moses asked God to show him his glory. God said, I will show you my goodness. His goodness is his glory. His glory is his goodness. And then you’ll remember, when he showed Moses his glory and his goodness, the things that came out were his love, or loving kindness, his grace, his mercy, his long suffering. These are things that make up his goodness and make up his glory. So if these things are not present in God, he is not God. It is an essential, then, of God to be good.

Second, he is infinitely, eternally, and immutably good. Now, why is he infinitely and eternally and immutably good? Well, for the simple reason that he is an eternal, immutable, and infinite being, and so, all of his attributes partake of these important characters, as we have been talking about for a long time now.

And, third, God makes distinctions in the gift of goodness. Now, people don’t like to be told that. They like to think that God is good to everybody in the same way. But the Bible is thoroughly opposed to that. He is not good to everyone in the same way. Now, you, of course, would see this in the fact that he is not good to the animals in the same way that he is to men. Everybody knows that, but who cares about the animals.

Now, the Bible does state very plainly that he is good to the animals. As a matter of fact, it is he who gives the ravens their food. They don’t have anybody else to look for for their food, except to God, so the Psalmist says. So he is good to the animals. He is good to all men in a certain degree; in a certain sense.

For example, in Acts, chapter 14 and verse 17, we have here a statement by Paul with a reference to the goodness of God toward all men. We read, Acts, 14:17,

“And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

And so he is good to the animals and he is good to men, but not good to the men in the same way that he is good to the animals. Further, he is good to elect men, and he is good toward men in a way that he is not good toward all men. In Romans chapter 11 in verse 5, Paul says:

“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.”

There are some people who are elect, and there are some who are not elected. And that, in itself, indicates that God does make distinctions in his gifts. There are also non-elect angels, fallen angels. The Bible is very clear in speaking of them. 2 Peter chapter 2, verse 4 makes reference to them. Psalm 103, verse 20 makes reference to the good that God has done for angels even if they are fallen angels. They are angels that excel in strength; all the angels excel in strength. They can do things that even Roger Staubach cannot do. They are strong and invisible beings that have great powers. And then, the Bible speaks of elect angels, just as there are non-elect angels and non-elect men, so there are elect men and elect angels. 1 Timothy chapter 5 in verse 21, makes that statement. I'll read that to you because it's not often that anyone refers to it. 1 Timothy, chapter 5 and verse 21, Paul writes:

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels.”

So there are angels that are elect. So, to sum up then, this third theological observation, God does make distinctions in the gift of his goodness. His distinguishing goodness we might call it.

Roman II, the varieties of the divine goodness. Goodness is the general term, remember. That came out when Moses asked God, “Show me thy glory.” God said, “I will cause my goodness to pass before you.” And then, when his goodness passed before Moses, he defined it as being loving kindness, mercy, love, grace. So there are varieties within goodness. From goodness, generally, there proceed other specific attributes. That was also set forth for us in Psalm 145, verse 8 and verse 9, which we just read a moment ago. And the first of these, love of God.

Capital A, love stands in first place. It is so much a part of God that it is said, God is love. That is the first text that my son ever learned. Poor fellow, born in the family of a preacher. It’s a terrible thing to happen to anyone, you know, to be exposed to all of that. And, unfortunately, Dr. Barnhouse came down just after my son had been born and said, “Now what are you going to do about teaching your son the things of God?”

We said, “Well, we’re going to wait until he gets old enough for us to instruct him, I guess.” And he said, “You should start right now, while he’s in the crib and cannot even reply. You should start right now. What you do is, you get over the crib and you just start repeating Bible texts. And when he gets to the place where he can say something, that’s what he’ll be talking about.” [Laughter]

And sure enough, that’s what happened. So three times in the morning, three times at night, three times in the middle of the day, we would say over the crib, 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” 1 John, 4:8, “God is love.” He said, “By all means, show him the text down to get right at the important points.” 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”

It wasn’t long before my son would be playing over in the corner, instead of singing the latest commercial, he would say, 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” Not understanding

a bit of it, but still he had the words down. Well, that is one of the great characteristics of God. It’s so great that most people think of God as essentially love.

I wish I had time to give you a whole message on John 3:16 because I think that text has been woefully misunderstood. “For God so loved the world” And all we can think of is the millions and millions of people passing before view, and that’s all we can get from that text because we’ve never bothered, really, to investigate the real significance of John 3:16. But we’re not going to do it tonight, so you can escape.

Arabic 1, Definition and terms.

The Hebrew word for love, *’ahab*, may have for its object a person, in other words, in the Old Testament, the word love may be used for the love for a person or even for a thing. It is used for God’s love of Israel, “I’ve loved thee with an everlasting love,” but it is also used of Jacob’s love for that little dish that Esau used to like to put before him. I ran across that reading Genesis 27, just a few weeks ago.

The prophets, particularly, show forth God’s love under two figures. Conjugal love: the love of a husband for his wife. That is one of the great figures of the Bible to express symbolically the love of God for men. In Hosea chapter 11 is one of the great statements of it, and if you can find the Book of Hosea, why, turn over there for just a moment. And let me read just a few verses, beginning with the first verse of the eleventh chapter. Hosea chapter 11, and here we read:

“When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. (Verse 4) I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; And I bent down and fed them.”

Now, when he says, “I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,” he’s speaking about the love of a husband for a wife. And he describes his love by that figure.

Strange, mysterious, irrational character of the love of God; it cannot be explained, and so finally, in the 8th verse, he says:

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? (These were cities destroyed in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.) My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled. (And then, the decision comes) I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. (And I want to know the reason why? And he says,) For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, And I will not come in wrath.”

Conjugal love, the greatness of the love of God.

The second figure by which God expresses his love to men is the figure of paternal love; the love of a father, or maternal love, the love of a mother for children. And God uses these figures. Isaiah chapter 49 in verse 15 is one. Now, these words, both in the Old and New Testament, which express love then are designed to stress the depth of the affection that God has for men. In the New Testament, there are three words for love. Well, let me put it this way; in Greek, there are three words for love, primarily.

There is the word, *erao*, which means, ‘to love.’ But it means to love passionately. It is the kind of verb that we would use if we were describing sexual love. From it, we get the English word erotic. So erotic love is passionate, sexual love. That verb is not used in the Bible in the New Testament. It is not used as the love of God. It has been described as the love that desires to take.

Then there is the word, *philos*, from which we get Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, (Isn’t that a joke in 1972? [Laughter]) The City of Brotherly Love, *adelphos*, means brother, and *phileo*, to love. Now, to love in the *phileo* sense is to like someone because you have common interests and likes. So it’s the love of give and take. I give

and I take. And you give and you take. But the word that is prominent in the New Testament, and not prominent, by the way, in classical Greek -- because the classical Greek writers did not have the concept of love that the Bible has. The term in the New Testament, is the term, *agapao*. Now, that word means to love in the sense of to sovereignly set ones affections upon an object and to sacrifice for its benefit. So that to love in that sense is all give. And so we have one word that expresses take, one that expresses give and take, which is a legitimate word. It may refer to God’s love too, *phileo*, in which we have common interests, of our Lord, Jesus Christ, for example. Or, the love of *agapao*, the love of giving.

So what is love then? Well, love is the perfection of God by which he is eternally moved to self-communication. We saw, last time, that when God loves, he must love himself; because, he being perfect, must love perfectly and he must have a perfect object for his love. And there is no perfect object for his love, and so he must love himself. Now, self-love, in the case of God, is right and proper. When he loves us, it is only with a view to our being the instrumentality by which his love is expressed toward himself. So, in God’s case, love then is that perfection by which he is eternally moved to self-communication. People don’t like that, but you see, you’ve been wrong in your theology, if you’ve been thinking other things. And to be wrong in your theology is to be wrong about God.

Now, let me get some theological observations. Consider his love for the elect? There is no cause for his love out of God. As a matter of fact, if we were to look at men for a cause of love, we would have to say men ought to be loathed and not loved. It is not because of our good works that we are loved. Paul tells us in Titus, that it is not by works of righteousness that he has saved us. Paul says in Romans chapter 9, verses 11 and 12, the same thing. It is not by reason of our works that God loves us. He does not look down and see something good in you and good in me. And he illustrates that beautifully, by his reference to the twins. In Romans chapter 9, he says:

“For though the twins were not born, and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”

So before they had a chance to do any good or evil, but just in order that his purpose, according to election, might stand. Not because of works, but because of him who calls, it was said, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on the God who has mercy.

Don’t like that, do you? It’s difficult to understand. But I sure do rejoice in it myself. It does not depend on our faith, for when men believe the Bible says, they believe who have been ordained to faith. Acts chapter 13, verse 48.

God does not love men because they have faith. They have faith because he loved them. The faith is the evidence and the product of his love. It’s not the cause of his love. So don’t ever get up and say, God loves us because we have believed in him. No, my dear friend, you have believed in him because he has already loved you. And that love is the issue -- that faith is the issue of his love. You have to think differently when you think about God. But don’t be wrong about this because you’ll be wrong about God.

And, secondly, another observation before we pass on, his love is eternal. It is as eternal as his love for Jesus Christ. Isn’t that amazing, to think that God loves me with the same eternal love with which he loved the Son? Now, I confess, this is over my head. So I’m just going to pass on the text to you. It says in John chapter 17, verse 23 and 24, this: I in them -- Jesus, remember, is praying to the Father, he is praying concerning himself, concerning the elect. Strange statement he makes, he says he doesn’t even pray for the

world. He prays for those who shall believe on him. And then in the end of this great chapter, he says:

“I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfected in unity that the world may know that thou didst send me, and didst love them even as thou didst love me.” (Isn’t that amazing? That I should be loved as the Father has loved the Son. Wait, read the next verse, too.) “Father, I desire, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (He didn’t say that I desire that everybody be there, but he said that I desire that all that thou hast given me be with me where I am. He wouldn’t pray a foolish prayer, like the other, because that would not be answered.) “In order that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou didst love me before the foundation of the world.”

And he has loved us as he has loved the son before the foundation of the world. Now, that’s amazing. That is amazing. That is something to wonder about; to adore the person who has given us this great election and to give eternal thanksgiving for.

Capital B, The grace of God. If Scripture had revealed all of the attributes except this one, then it would have been of no value to us. For we need the grace of God, because we’re sinners.

Luther complained that as a result of the peoples’ system of works righteousness, that he had feared Jesus Christ more than he feared the devil. Now, Luther was known for overstatement, but I can think I understand why he said that. He grew up in a system in which he was told that if you do this and if you do this and if you don’t do that and if you don’t do this, then you might one day, ultimately, in the presence of God after a show up sojourn in Purgatory, find in the presence of God. Why, it’s no wonder that after growing up in that and living in that from morning until night that he should fear Christ more than the devil. But the grace of God is something different. And when he

said that he discovered the righteousness of God meant not God’s righteousness in hurling thunderbolts at us in judgment, but the righteousness that he gives through faith in Jesus Christ. He said, “Why heaven was opened like paradise to him.”

What is the grace of God? The Hebrew word means to show favor. It means to forgive, therefore, in certain contexts. Now, it is not the word for forgiveness, but because of the favor, forgiveness naturally follows.

Bavinck points out that its object is never creation in general; or heathendom, but only His people. Now, there is a sense in which some grace is shown to creation, but not the grace of which we’re speaking.

If we were to define grace, we would define it something like this, probably: God’s unmerited goodness to those who are by nature under condemnation. The grace of God -- God’s unmerited goodness to those who are by nature under condemnation. Not only to those who do not deserve it, but those who deserve the precise opposite. Augustine was the first to develop this doctrine of the grace of God. And, in spite of all of his errors, we are grateful to him for that fact.

Let me make a few theological observations about this before we pass on. What can we say about the grace of God? Well, of course, it is sovereign. He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. We read in Exodus chapter 33. He doesn’t look around and say, now, who wants to have mercy shown to them? He shows mercy to whom he will show mercy. He is absolutely sovereign in the expression of his mercy. Further, this grace is independent of human merit. If it’s of grace, it’s not of works. If it’s of works, it’s not of grace. But God says, our salvation is of grace.

We may speak of grace as being both common or general and special or particular. Now, we may speak about the fact that we have being. That’s a grace of God that we live; that we have breath; that we have food, that we have clothes; that we are the subjects of the providence of God. These are expressions of his common grace or his general grace.

But when we talk about special or particular grace, we’re talking about all of the great activities of God which lead to our salvation: election, redemption, justification, et cetera, all the way through to glorification.

It is electing grace, therefore, as Romans chapter 11, verses 5 and 6 puts it. It is redeeming grace, as many passages in the New Testament put it. Over and over again in the New Testament, the principle of our salvation is said to be “by grace.” When Peter stood up at the, so called, council of Jerusalem, and said, “But we believe” -- I want to give you brethren, the Apostles’ Creed. “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall be saved, even as they,” he was expressing the fact that salvation is by the principle of grace; God’s goodness, unmerited goodness, to those who by nature are under condemnation.

Jesus told a little parable about a man who was indebted to another man and how he frankly forgave him his debt. And that word is the word from which we get the word grace. And our Lord makes a certain application with regard to it. We don’t have time to deal with it.

The mercy of God, capital C. There are two words suggestive of mercy in the Old Testament. One of them is the word that means -- that is translated loving-kindness. And when you hear seminary students talking about “loyal” love, you will know that they learned that from a man who wrote a scholarly monograph on the Hebrew word, *cheched*, which is translated, ordinarily, loving-kindness, in which it was pointed out that word is a word for goodness in connection with God’s covenant which he made with Israel. And so loving-kindness is the term by which God’s love is related to his promises to us. So loyal love. That’s not a bad rendering of it. If you’ve ever listened to Dr. Waltke preach, he’ll say it in the message just as often as I will say the doctrine of election, he’ll say “loyal love.” And it’s the word, *cheched*, which means loving-kindness. It is Yahweh’s gratuitous initiative in our salvation.

The other word is the word, *racham*, which means bowels, actually, because the Hebrews thought of the bowels as the seat of sentiment. Now, we use expressions something like that, too, in our own language. You probably can think of some by which we express our deepest emotions by reference to our stomachs. Well, they spoke of the seat of the mercies as being the bowels.

When Joseph, for example, is in the presence of his brethren, and he’s overcome by affection for them and just as he is about to reveal himself to them, it says he is so overcome that he has to go out of the room. And the verb, the word, is a word that expresses the fact that his bowels were so turned that he had to leave. That’s the way they said it.

When the woman, whose son was going to be cut in half according to Samson’s decree, knowing that that son was her son, the text says that she, also, within her inmost being, was turned. And it was affection for the child that she knew was hers. And so she said, no, don’t do it. Give the whole child to the other person. And, Sampson, in his wisdom, knew that the child belonged to her because of the expression of mercy.

So, that’s the word for mercy. I won’t say anything about mercy, because we probably understand that fairly well. What is mercy? Well, it is God’s goodness to the miserable. Just as God’s grace is God’s goodness to the guilty, those who are under divine condemnation, so his mercy is his love -- his goodness to the miserable. And so grace looks at us as being guilty under the condemnation of God. Mercy looks at us as being in misery because of the effects of our sin and our guilt.

That’s why in the Bible we are called “vessels of mercy” prepared for God’s glory... Elect vessels of mercy, because we not only were guilty but we were miserable in our guilt.

Fourth, D, the long-suffering of God. The Hebrew expression for long-suffering is really, length of noses. The Greek is long-tempered. These are very vivid expressions. The Hebrew, long of both nostrils, now, that expression points to the fact that the nose

was regarded as a clue to one’s anger. We even say, he snorted in anger. Well, because our noses do show whether we are angry or not. They are long or contracted. Even the breath shows it and occasionally that’s used of being angry, not having long-suffering, short of breath.

Now, we have a very good expression in Texas. We say about a person who got mad, his nose was out of joint. Have you heard that? Well, if you haven’t, you’ve heard it now. And it’s a pretty good expression, too. I said that to him and his nose got out of joint. That is, he was mad and you could see it by the way his nose reacted.

So what is long-suffering? Well, it is his goodness by which he bears with the disobedient. Long-suffering. Let me make a couple of theological observations. It is exercised toward the ungodly. In Romans chapter 9 in verse 22, Paul talks about God’s long-suffering. He says in chapter 9, verse 22,

“What if God, although willing to demonstrate his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience (long-suffering) the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?”

So God’s long-suffering is exercised towards the ungodly. It was exercised toward Pharaoh. I was amazed when I was reading through Exodus, just recently again, at how often Moses went before Pharaoh, extracted some promise from Pharaoh, then Pharaoh changed his mind, and God, all the time dealing with this wicked, stubborn, disobedient, non-elect person, nevertheless, showed him all of this long-suffering in having Moses go back, interminably, to him it seemed. I wanted to say, get the thing over with. And when Pharaoh was drowned in the waters of the Red Sea, I thought, how fitting that he should find his end there. God has been too long-suffering.

Noah’s whole world is spoken of as an exhibition of the long-suffering of God. He waited in the days of Noah, 120 years. And he is long-suffering to the Gentiles, Paul

says, during the whole Old Testament period. In fact, in Romans chapter 3, verse 25, the term long-suffering is used for the whole of the Old Testament. It was the time of the long-suffering of God.

But it is also exercised towards the elect. Think of Paul, he was a pattern of long-suffering. Why was he a pattern? Why, he was a pattern because in it God was showing what he’s doing for Israel. And in this one Israelite, with whom he worked for years and years, Paul is shown to be a pattern of how God has been long-suffering with Israel, down through now, two thousand years, almost. Long-suffering with Israel, finally, all Israel shall be saved.

He is long-suffering even to the eleventh hour, as the thief on the cross will testify to us in heaven. He bore with that elect man until finally, just as he was dying, he said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And I almost feel that God most have said, whew. After all these years, he has finally come to faith.

Now, in the Book of 2 Peter, Peter says, chapter 3 in verse 9, he says,

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is long-suffering toward you, (That is you elect, he’s talking about. Not about all men.) not wishing for any to perish but for all (All of you) to come to repentance.”

He’s talking about the elect. He’s not talking about all men. It’s amazing how people can misread a passage. They don’t ever bother to look at the context. They don’t notice that this passage began with Peter say, they’re going to become mockers in the last days, and they’re going to talk about the second coming. They’re going to say, “Where’s the promise of his coming?” Everything’s been going along just as it has been since the time of the fathers.

And Peter’s answer is, “Wait a minute. You’ve forgotten one time in the past God intervened with a flood. And he’s going to intervene with a fire in the future. And

further, you don’t understand the philosophy of God’s long-suffering.” The philosophy of God’s long-suffering is simply this: He has his elect. And he is busily bringing his elect to the knowledge of the Lord. And he is going to be long-suffering to you who believe not willing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should have time for repentance so that every single sheep shall be brought into the fold. That’s what the text says. That’s one of the greatest texts on the election of God in the Bible. And that he is long-suffering. Not one single one of the elect shall escape. So his long-suffering is exercised towards the elect.

Now, I said I was going to deal with the problem of the divine goodness. But we’re not going to have time for that. For, time is up.

Essentially, the problem is this: If God is so good, why is there sin? Why is there suffering? And why is there such slow progress in the redemptive plan?

Now, I could answer this by saying that a child cannot understand what his father thinks. And so we who are children better just shut our mouths. That’s what we are. Or I might say, peasants never understand what goes on in the headquarters of the empire. And we are peasants.

There have been rational answers attempting to deal with this problem. Some of them involved the denial of sin. Others say that God couldn’t prevent sin because in a moral system with free agency -- not free will, free agency -- he must not permit any kind of certainty. If that were true, God couldn’t govern the universe at all.

The Bible says, simply, I think this, that God’s self-manifestation is the highest good. And since the highest good is the end of all things, the glory of God; if he is really going to glorify himself, that’s the highest good. And his self-manifestation is the highest possible good. The ultimate end is the glorification of God. And if that is true, then there must be individuals around to appreciate that. And so he has created sentient creatures for the manifestation of these aspects of his character. And his mercy cannot be known if there are not some people who are miserable. And his grace cannot be known if there

are not some people who are in sin. And his justice cannot be known if there are not men who are under condemnation.

And so he has permitted sin in order that he might be perfectly glorified in all of his attributes inclusive of his mercy and his grace. The knowledge of God is eternal life. It is, for men, the highest good. And so, consequently, he must give us the knowledge of himself. And that demanded sin, condemnation, and judgment. But he is good. And even this works for his good.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the revelation of Thy self. Help us, Lord, to think the thoughts of God after Thee. Deliver us, Lord, from being wrong about Thee. For when we are wrong about Thee, we are wrong in the most important area of human existence. Go with us as we part.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.