

# Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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## Pastor's Bible Study

# If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series  
Based on the book  
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

## Part XII

January 17, 2012

### Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Evil and Suffering: Limiting God's Attributes Is God's *Limited* Goodness a Solution?

- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - John K Roth writes what he calls a "theodicy of protest" against God. In his own words he "puts God on trial, and in that process the issue of God's wasteful complicity in evil takes center stage. ...Human repentance will have to be matched by God's." He argues, "Such a wasteful God cannot be totally benevolent. History itself is God's indictment."
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - Roth continues, "I affirm that God is good, but not perfectly good, and that both God and humanity could be better. ... The amount, degree, intensity of evil are too great to justify fully God's creation of the world we inhabit. ...If God has a 'a plan,' it is wanting."
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - If evil lurked within God—if he were not entirely good—then this could explain why God would not only permit evil, but actually commit it.
  - If he were partly good and partly evil, like a flawed human, his mixture of goodness and evil could explain the world's partial goodness and evil.
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - Satan attacks us by bringing us to doubt God's goodness.
  - The statement "God is not perfectly good" comes from the pit of Hell. It is an accusation the Bible firmly rejects.

- Larry Crabb writes,
  - “Doubt of God's goodness creates the terror of aloneness in an unreliable world, which leads to rage against God for doing so little to protect us from suffering.
  - “When I am not convinced that God is good, I will quietly—but with tight-lipped resolve—take over responsibility for my own well-being.”
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God is good.**
    - God is the Greatest Good and is the source of all lesser goods: “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*” (James 1:17, ESV)
    - Wayne Grudem says, “The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.”
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - Scripture contains many direct affirmations of God's goodness, such as:
    - “*The Lord is good and upright; therefore He shows sinners the way.*” (Psalm 25:8, HCSB)
    - “*You are good, and You do what is good; teach me Your statutes.*” (Psalm 119:68, HCSB)
    - “*a sound of joy and gladness, the voice of the groom and the bride, and the voice of those saying, Praise the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good; His faithful love endures forever as they bring thank offerings to the temple of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as in former times, says the Lord.*” (Jeremiah 33:11, HCSB)
    - “*The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; He cares for those who take refuge in Him.*” (Nahum 1:7, HCSB)
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God extends his goodness to his people.**
    - Three attributes of God are closely bound together: mercy, grace, and patience or longsuffering. Wayne Grudem defines each (Grudem, *ST*, 200).
      - ☉ a. God's mercy is God's goodness toward those in misery or distress.
      - ☉ b. God's grace is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.
      - ☉ c. God's patience is God's goodness in withholding punishment toward those who sin over a period of time.
- ☉ Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God manifests his goodness to all people.**
    - God does not restrict his goodness to believers only. He is good to all his creatures:
      - ☉ “*The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation.*” (Psalm 145:9, NLT)
      - ☉ “*but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts.*” (Acts 14:17, NLT)



- **To say that God is good is *not* to say God will always *appear* to be good, or that when he is good we will always like him for it.**
  - Consider the anguished cry of Jeremiah: *“He has led me into darkness, shutting out all light. He has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and flesh grow old. He has broken my bones. He has besieged and surrounded me with anguish and distress.”* (Lamentations 3:2–5, NLT)
  - This outcry doesn’t appear to affirm God’s goodness, does it?
  - God be loving without bowing to our every wish or desire.
- ☉ Is God’s *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God’s acts of goodness may appear harsh or even cruel.**
    - Imagine a three year old boy has swallowed poison. The father calls poison control and they say “You have to get him to the hospital, and whatever you do, don’t let him fall asleep. If he falls asleep, he’ll die.”
    - It’s a cold winter night and the boy’s in his pajamas. His father rushes him to the car. He’s sitting beside him in the front seat. Dad rolls all the windows down. The boy’s head starts to drop. His father reaches his right arm over and slaps him in the face. The boy cries. His head starts to nod again. The father slaps him again and again, all the way to the hospital.
- ☉ Is God’s *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - ***Can the child understand why his father is slapping his face?*** Of course not. He’s only three years old. His father, through tears, says “I love you, son.” But if this is love, the boy doesn’t want any more of it.
    - ☉ Even though the child isn’t able to understand, the father is acting in his best interests. What the father is doing is good. It appears to be out of line with what the child knows about his loving father. But what the child thinks of as cruelty is actually kindness. His father is doing what is best for him.
- ☉ Is God’s *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **Is it possible that God is showing his love in the midst of human suffering, and that like three year old children, we sometimes don’t understand**
    - ☉ Because we lack omniscience, holiness, justice and love, we are unqualified to pronounce judgment on God. After Job has questioned God about why he has allowed him to undergo suffering, we’re told in Job 38, “Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!”
- ☉ Is God’s *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **Sinners don’t need help *feeling* good; they need help *being* good.**
    - Sinners need more than pleasantness. In fact, if they received only life’s delights, they would never come to terms with the sin that separates them from God.

- Though there's no lasting happiness without God, sinners could at best live their short time on Earth relatively content, only to die go to Hell for eternity.
- Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - Envision a canoe heading down river, Smiling campers wave from the shore, sending the message, "Everything's fine."
  - Oblivious to what's coming, the canoeists feel good—right up to the moment of panic when they realize they are about to plunge over a waterfall.
  - The helpful person—the one who does them good—yells at them from the shore and warns them of the danger ahead.
  - We are not merely travelers who need to be guided, we are rebels who need to surrender.
  - But no one surrenders until he suffers his adversary's strength.
- Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **We argue against God's goodness in allowing suffering, not because our goodness exceeds God's, but because it falls so far short of it.**
    - God's goodness entails more than whatever makes us feel warm and happy.
    - We argue that if God were as good as we are, then evil and suffering wouldn't exist.
    - On the contrary, evil and suffering wouldn't exist if we were as good as God is.
- Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **Sometimes we conclude God is not good, because he's far better than we'd like him to be.**
    - In God's presence are eternal pleasures, but God's goodness doesn't make him an endless dispenser of pleasures to sinners.
    - Goodness involves holiness and justice.
    - Rather than indulge us with what we think we want, God considers the long-term effects that may keep us from what we actually need and *really* want.
- Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God can accomplish good through our affliction.**
    - Psalm 119 says:
      - "I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me." (Psalm 119:75, ESV)
      - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." (Psalm 119:71, ESV)
    - If it was good for the psalmist to be afflicted, then for God to send that affliction would be to send good, wouldn't it?
    - To withhold that affliction would be to withhold good.
- Is God's *Limited Goodness* a Solution?
  - **God's goodness seen on this fallen Earth is merely a sampling of God's goodness in Heaven.**
    - God promises to ultimately remove all evil so that we will live in a world of utter goodness. Consider this picture of the world where we will live forever:

- ☉ *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”” (Revelation 21:3–5, ESV)*