

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 XVIII

March 27, 2012

The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad

☉ The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad

- **God explains a reason he permits evil—to glorify himself by demonstrating to his children the wonders of his character.**

- Paul writes in *Romans 9:22-23 (HCSB)* ²² And what if God, desiring to display His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath ready for destruction? ²³ And [what if] He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory—
- God says he shows patience to those whom he will ultimately judge. He shows his wrath, [power, and patience to unbelievers, “to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory— “

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- The objects of God's mercy are his redeemed people. By permitting evil to continue until the final judgment God reveals to us his attributes.
- God's saving work in Christ, including his resurrection triumph, happened according to *Ephesians 2:7 (HCSB)* ⁷ so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through [His] kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
- God knows that permitting evil and suffering—paying the price to end them, we well we patiently delaying judgment and then bring it decisively—will all ultimately reveal his character and cause his people to worship him forever.

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- **Satan and God intend the same suffering for entirely different purposes, but God's purpose triumphs.**

- Satan ought Job’s ruin and loss of faith; God sought Job’s refining and faith-building. The very thing Satan intended for Job’s destruction, God intended for his betterment and ultimate reward (though certainly at a terrible cost).
- ☉ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - Second Corinthians 12:7 gives us a striking picture. We see God sending a physical disability for his purposes and Satan sending the same disability for his.
 - Why was Paul inflicted with his disease or handicap, his thorn in the flesh? “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” ([2 Cor. 12:7](#)).
 - Notice Paul says Satan gave him his thorn in the flesh. But He simultaneously sees the larger picture—God gave him his thorn in the flesh. Clearly Satan does not give us adversity to keep us from becoming conceited. He wants us conceited. This passage attributes “a messenger of Satan” as something given with God’s intention for our good and His glory.
 - Paradoxical? Yes. Contradictory? To pea brains like ours, yes. To God, no.
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 - Paul says, in the next verses, he asked God three times to remove the “thorn” but God refused.
 - He did, however, reveal the purpose behind Paul’s unanswered prayer: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
 - How did Paul respond?
 - ☉ He said he rejoiced in his afflictions.
 - Why?
 - ☉ Because he knew God had a sovereign and loving purpose.
- ☉ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - “Joseph’s brothers intended his suffering for evil; God intended it for good.
 - Satan intended Job’s suffering for evil; God intended it for good.
 - Satan intended Jesus’ suffering for evil; God intended it for good.
 - Satan intended Paul’s suffering for evil; God intended it for good.
 - In each case God’s purposes prevailed.
 - Satan intends your suffering for evil; God intends it for good.”
 - Satan attempts to destroy your faith, while God invites you to draw near to him and draw upon his sovereign grace to sustain you.
 - If we recognize God’s sovereignty even over Satan’s work, it changes our perspective.
- ☉ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - **Scripture uses a variety of terms to describe God’s relationship to evil, including *permit* and *allow*.**
 - *Exodus 21:13 (NIV)*¹³ However, if he does not do it intentionally, but **God lets it happen**, he is to flee to a place I will designate.

- *Mark 5:12-13 (NIV)* ¹² The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³ **He gave them permission**, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.
- *Ezekiel 20:26 (NIV)* ²⁶ **I let them become** defiled through their gifts--the sacrifice of every firstborn--that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the LORD.' (God had a purpose even in permitting terrible sin.)

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- Sometimes God inhibits demonic and human choice by not permitting them to fulfill their evil desire.
 - ☉ Jacob said of Laban, *Genesis 31:7 (HCSB)* ⁷ and that he has cheated me and changed my wages 10 times. **But God has not let him harm me.**
 - ☉ God tells Abimelech in *Genesis 20:6 (HCSB)* ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you did this with a clear conscience. **I have also kept you from sinning against Me.** Therefore I have not let you touch her.
 - ☉ When casting our demons in *Luke 4:41 (HCSB)* ⁴¹ Also, demons were coming out of many, shouting and saying, "You are the Son of God!" But He rebuked them and **would not allow them to speak,** because they knew He was the Messiah.

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- Some argue against saying "God allows" because some think "God causes" is more accurate. But Scripture uses both kinds of language, and so should we.
- We are deliberately focusing now on God's permission rather than God's decrees or ordination.

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- The point to made is that *divine permission is not passive and weak, but active and strong.*
- The more power someone has, the more significant permission giving becomes.
- Countless millions of choices and actions are contemplated every instant across this globe.
- Our all-knowing and all-powerful God chooses exactly which ones he will permit and not permit.
- Scripture suggests he does not permit evils arbitrarily, but with specific purposes in mind. Everything he permits matches up with his wisdom and ultimately serves both his holiness and his love.

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- God "permitting" something, then, describes what is far stronger than it may sound. After all, whatever God permits actually happens; what he doesn't permit doesn't happen.
- "Sometimes God allows what he hates to accomplish what he loves." — [Joni Eareckson Tada, *The God I Love*](#)

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- Read Job carefully. Who sent the diseases and disasters on Job? Satan did. But note that from chapter one on the writer makes clear this was never Satan exercising power apart from what God purposefully permitted. God is very much involved in the book of Job, and he is accomplishing His sovereign purpose. This is not speculation. Note what the inspired author says in the final chapter of Job, after the suffering is over: “They comforted and consoled him [Job] over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him” (Job 42:11).
- Many find this truth disturbing, but properly understood it should be comforting. What should be disturbing is the notion that God stands passively by while Satan, evildoers, diseases, and random accidents ruin the lives of his beloved children.
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - **Human choices, real as they are, cannot thwart God’s sovereign plan.**
 - **C. S. Lewis wrote** “Perhaps we do not fully realize the problem, so to call it, of enabling finite free wills to co-exist with Omnipotence. It seems to involve at every moment almost a sort of divine abdication.”
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - In one sense every murder, rape, and natural disaster confirms that God has permitted the world to violate his will, which could be called a “divine abdication.” But what if this apparent abdication is not clearly so great as it appears, or is of a completely different nature than we understand?
 - Scripture indicates that when an omnipotent God grants real and effectual choice, he does not lose power. He delegates power, which can be and regularly is abused. Yes, he can still overrule; he can perform miracles of intervention. But if he does this too often, he will take back the power he has delegated, thus minimizing the consequential dimension that makes choice meaningful.
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - Before sin, God gave people dominion over the world. In delegating this responsibility, God acted like a father who started a great business, then handed over the company to his children. Though he remains as owner, controller, and final decision maker, he has granted leadership powers to his children. Consequently he chooses to subject his company to their decisions, good or bad. If he intervenes to stop all the bad ones, he revokes his charge to them.
 - Now suppose the manager of the universe can do what a human father could never do – sovereignly use every decision, right or wrong, to accomplish an ultimate purpose. Could he not then be seen to maintain control even as he apparently abdicates it? This, I think, is what Scripture teaches.
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - One of Corrie ten Boom’s favorite analogies was that God is weaving together a beautiful tapestry. While he sees from above the magnificence of his creation, we see the knots and tangles on the underside. But one day we will be with God and see the topside of the tapestry.

- This is an analogy for God decreeing, not only permitting, for a master weaver doesn't merely permit threads, he carefully chooses and weaves them.
- Corrie ten Boom never denied evil or suffering in the concentration camp, and neither should we. But God can weave the tapestry despite evil and suffering, and can even use them to create a finished work of startling beauty. One day we will behold it."

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● **Even "random" occurrences can accomplish God's sovereign purpose.**

- In a fascinating passage, evil King Ahab assembles his troops for war. A brave prophet tells him, "The Lord has decreed disaster for you" (2 Chronicles 18:22). Ahab asks an allied king to go to battle in Ahab's royal attire, while Ahab dresses like a common soldier. That way, any enemy going after King Ahab will actually pursue someone else.
- What happens? "But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor ... Then at sunset he died" (2 Chronicles 18:33-34). Scripture itself uses the term "random", but God's hand directed that shaft in its flight through the air. That "random" arrow had Ahab's name on it.

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- This passage doesn't prove God orchestrates or directs every random occurrence. Nonetheless, it demonstrates God has decreed that at least some "random" events accomplish eternal purposes, even if he alone understands them.
- Can't God have a purpose and plan in a tragic "accident" or an "unlucky" fall just as he can in a "random" arrow?

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● **The false notion of random events outside of God's control sets us up for a lifetime of "what ifs" and "if onlys".**

- No matter what we mean by free will, we should distinguish it from *autonomy*. Autonomy speaks of complete independence and self-governance. This does not square with God's sovereignty. None of our actions lie outside the reach of his governance.
- For this we should feel deeply grateful. Otherwise we could wonder, *What if the doctor had run the right tests or looked at the x-rays more carefully two years ago? Or, What if I'd stopped to make the phone call or if the line had been shorter at the grocery store, or if I hadn't had that five-minute conversation before leaving? Then I wouldn't have been at that intersection when the drunk driver ran the light and smashed my car, and then my wife wouldn't have died.*

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- If the world is as random as some theologians suggest, it would seem that people, demons, and luck determine our destinies. We can drive ourselves crazy with such thoughts – or embrace God's higher purpose in painful and even tragic events, thus affirming God's greatness.
- God calls us not to victimization or to fatalism, but to faith in his character and promises."

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- **Romans 8:28 -- “Working all things together for our eternal good, including evil and suffering, sovereignly demonstrates God’s love.**

- We need to take a closer look at a verse I’ve mentioned, one of the most treasured (and also maligned) in Scripture: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).
- The context shows that the Holy Spirit’s main concern is conforming God’s children to the image of Christ. He brings challenging circumstances into our lives so we may develop Christlikeness.

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- Paul’s use of “we know” indicates that if you don’t know this, you know less than God intends you to; and when times of evil and suffering come, you’ll be ill-equipped to face them.
- I believe that if God could not use something, in eternity, to contribute to the good of his child, then he will not permit it to happen. I know of no other way to interpret this passage, written in a context of profound evil and suffering. It does not say God causes *some* or *most* things to work for our good, but *all* things. And what does “all things” not include?”

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- ☉ **Romans 8:28 declares a cumulative and ultimate good, not an individual or immediate good.**

- Different translations of Romans 8:28 suggest different nuances: for those who love God, “all things work together for good” (ESV, KJV),
- “in all things God works for the good” (NIV), “God causes all things to work together for good” (NASB).
- In each case there is an all-inclusiveness in “all things”. Three of these translations use “together”, emphasizing a focus not on isolated events in the believer’s life, but on the sum of all events. It does not say “each thing by itself *is* good,” but “all things work together *for* good,” and not on their own, but under God’s sovereign hand.

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- Before my mother made a cake, she used to lay each of the ingredients on the kitchen counter. One day, as only a boy can, I decided to experiment. I tasted all the individual ingredients for a chocolate cake. Baking powder. Baking soda. Raw eggs. Vanilla extract. I discovered that almost everything that goes into a cake tastes terrible by itself. But a remarkable metamorphosis took place when my mother mixed the ingredients in the right amounts and baked them together. The cake tasted delicious. Yet judging by the individual ingredients, I never would have believed cake could taste so good.

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- In a similar way, the individual ingredients of trials and apparent tragedies taste bitter to us. Romans 8:28 doesn’t tell me I should say, “It is good,” if my leg breaks, or my house burns down, or I am robbed and beaten, or my child dies. But no matter how bitter the taste of the individual components, God can

carefully measure out and mix all ingredients together, and raise the temperature in order to produce a wonderful final product.

- When Paul say, “for good,” he clearly implies final or ultimate good, not good subjectively felt in the midst of our sufferings. As his wife, Joy, underwent cancer treatments, C.S. Lewis wrote to a friend, “We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.”

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- **“We define our good in terms of what brings us health and happiness now; God defines it in terms of what makes us more like Jesus.**

- ☉ In the next verse, Paul explains the basis on which he can claim that God works everything together for our good: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (verse 29).
- ☉ As a young Christian I believed that going to Heaven instead of Hell was all that mattered. But as I read the Bible, I saw that to be called according to God’s purpose is to be conformed to the character of Christ. God’s purpose for our suffering is Christlikeness.
- ☉ That is our highest calling. If God answered all our prayers to be delivered from evil and suffering, then he would be delivering us from Christlikeness. But Christlikeness is something to long for, not to be delivered from.

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- Ten months after his son was killed in a car accident, Greg Laurie told me, “What I wish is that I could have learned and grown and drawn close to the Lord just like I have, but Christopher was still here.” Greg captured it perfectly – I too wish I could have all the good God has brought me, and will bring me, through adversity, but without all that pain and loss. But it doesn’t work that way, does it?
- When a sovereign, all-powerful God predestines our conformity to Christ, all the evil and suffering that intrude upon our lives form part of that plan. Our doctrine of human free will must never lead us to believe that God cannot act unless we give him permission. Although we have a real ability to choose (for God has made it so), he will accomplish his purposes.
- Everything that comes into your life – yes, even evil and suffering – is Father-filtered. Whether suffering brings us to Christlikeness depends, to some degree, upon our willingness to submit to God and trust him and draw our strength from him. Suffering will come whether we allow it to make us Christlike or not – but if we don’t our suffering is wasted.”

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- **“God wondrously displays his greatness when he brings good out of bad.**
 - ☉ We judge someone’s greatness by the size of the obstacles he overcomes. Climbing Mount Everest brings glory to the climber and testifies to his greatness precisely because of the mountain’s enormity. An athlete who pole-vaults ten feet does nothing amazing. But one who pole-vaults twenty feet makes history. People still celebrate the U.S. hockey team’s “miracle on ice” in 1980 because of the greatness of their Soviet opponent.

- ◎ So it is with the drama of redemption. Sin and death, the Fall and the Curse, Satan and his demons, the Hell we deserve – what powerful obstacles for God to overcome. But the biggest obstacle was the satisfaction of his own holiness. For God to demonstrate his greatness, he had to overcome all these obstacles.
- ◎ The greater the obstacles, the greater the glory to God.
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - We see something remarkable about a person who can bring some good out of bad. But most remarkable is to bring something incredibly good out of something desperately bad. To redeem what appears irredeemable magnifies the greatness of the Redeemer. If the universe exists to demonstrate God's infinite greatness, then shouldn't we expect God to scale the highest redemptive mountain? The problem of death, evil, and suffering must be vast in order for God to show his superior greatness.
- ◎ **The God Who Brings Good Out of Bad**
 - Every time we ask God to remove some obstacle in our lives, we should realize we may be asking him to forgo one more opportunity to declare his greatness. Certainly he sometimes graciously answers our prayers to relieve our suffering. This too testifies to his greatness, and we should praise him for answering. But when he answers no, we should recognize that he desires to demonstrate his greater glory. May we then bend our knees and trust his sovereign grace.”