

The Goodness of God

One of life's amusing moments comes when we [observe](#) a puppy or a kitten chasing its own shadow. It tries in vain to catch it. When it moves, its shadow moves with it. Not so with God. James declares: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

God never changes. With him there is "no shadow of turning." This suggests not only that God is immaterial and therefore incapable of casting a shadow, but also that there is no "shadow side," in a figurative or moral sense, to God. Shadows suggest darkness, and in spiritual terms darkness suggests evil. Since there is no evil in God, there is no hint of darkness in Him either. He is the Father of lights.

When James adds that there is no "shadow of turning" with God, it is not enough to understand this merely in terms of God's unchanging or immutable being. This reference is also to God's character. Not only is God altogether good, He is consistently good. God doesn't know how to be anything but good.

So [closely](#) linked is goodness to God that even [pagan](#) philosophers such as Plato equated ultimate goodness, the highest good, with God Himself. God's goodness refers both to His character and His behavior. His actions proceed from and flow out of His being. He [acts](#) according to what He is. Just as a corrupt tree cannot bear incorrupt fruit, neither can an incorrupt God produce corrupt fruit.

The law of God reflects His goodness. God is said to be good not because He obeys some cosmic law outside of Himself that judges Him or because God so defines goodness that He can act in a lawless manner and by the sheer power of His authority declare His actions good. God's goodness is neither arbitrary nor capricious. God does obey a law, but the law He

obeys is the law of His own character. He always [acts](#) according to His own character, which is eternally, immutably, and intrinsically good. James teaches that every good and perfect gift comes from God. He is not only the ultimate standard of goodness; He is the Source of all goodness.

One of the most popular New Testament verses is [Romans](#) 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” This text on divine providence is as difficult to comprehend as it is popular. If God is able to make everything that happens to us work together for our good, then ultimately everything that happens to us is good. We must be careful to stress here the word *ultimately*. On the earthly plane things that happen to us may indeed be evil. (We must be careful not to call good, evil or evil, good.) We encounter affliction, misery, injustice, and a host of other evils. Yet God in His goodness transcends all of these things and works them to our good. For the Christian, *ultimately*, there are no tragedies. Ultimately, the providence of God works all these proximate evils for our final benefit.

Summary

1. Creatures have shadows cast by the darkness of sin.
2. There is no shadow side to God.
3. God is not under Law
4. God is not apart from Law
5. God is a Law unto Himself

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