

## From Acorn to Oak

*Who is God, and what is he like?* Part 11: Does God have a dark side?

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We frequently hear people say that “God has a dark side” and, regarding creation, that “God created human beings so he would not be lonely; he needs us for companionship.” In the Bible, God’s Word, his revelation of himself, his creation, and the unfolding of his plan for redeeming his creation, we see that neither of these propositions is true. The latter implies that God is imperfect and the former that he is not totally good. What does the Bible say about God concerning these two aspects of his being?

### **God and all his ways are perfect.**

Jesus said that God is perfect (Matthew 5:48), and Moses sang, “I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:3-4)

Since he is perfect, God does not need anything. (Acts 17:25, John 2:25) A need indicates a lack of something, hence an imperfection. It indicates dependence, and God is not dependent on anyone or anything; he is independent and self-sufficient. God did not create me because he needs me. Though being one, he has fellowship within the three persons of the Trinity, the three distinct persons who share one substance, his own being. He created us not out of need but out of his love.

Further, God defines perfection. His perfection is the standard by which he and we determine what is perfect. The converse is not also true. He is not the product of, or constrained by, our definition of perfection. We call something perfect if it conforms to God’s standard. God is not to be judged, and neither are others, by our standard of what we think is perfect. Our perception is finite and flawed by sin (Romans 3:23); how could it be the criterion and normative?

Since God is perfect, he does not make mistakes. Furthermore, he doesn’t make mistakes because he’s had so much practice: he has never made a mistake. Therefore, when something painful occurs in my life, (not if, since we live in a fallen world where everyone sins) I can rule out any thought that God is at fault; he is not; never was; and he never will be culpable. In order to make sense out of what has occurred and what I should do now, I turn to him and ask him to help me, directly and through the church, the body of Christ, where I can find more true wisdom that is helpful.

### **God is good.**

When people say that God “has a dark side,” they are disclosing a human tendency to make God in their own fallen image, which has been done in all other religions apart

from the Bible. To cite only a few examples, in Greek mythology we see gods portrayed as greedy, lying, and sexually promiscuous, among many other negative characteristics, typical of corrupt human nature rather than of divine perfection. As in many other religions, Hinduism's gods marry, e.g., Brahma and Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Shiva and Kali. Islam's Allah is not married but is harsh and is not characterized by grace. I am informed by people who know Arabic and have read the Qur'an that the word love nowhere appears in the Qur'an.

The goodness of the one true God revealed in the Bible is seen in the kind and bountiful blessings he continually bestows upon all people, the absence of any flaw, or "dark side," in him. "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

The goodness of God is also seen in the reality that everything he does or allows is for the ultimate good of others, even when that ultimate good is unapparent to our limited perspective. To illustrate, sometimes for our own good we need correctives, which are not always pleasant, in order to refocus our attention on what is right, just as our earthly parents had to do at times. The Israelites, whom God disciplined for their disobedience, recognized that reality and responded accordingly: they "worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, 'He is good; his love endures forever.'" (2 Chronicles 7:3)

God's goodness is proclaimed throughout the Bible. David, whom God disciplined due to his heinous deeds, praised God saying, "You are forgiving and good, O LORD, abounding in love to all who call to you." (Psalm 86:5; cf. 25:7-10) In two other psalms we read, "...the LORD is good and his love endures forever" (Psalm 100:5a), and "You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees." (Psalm 119:68) Jesus said, "No one is good—except God alone." (Mark 10:18)

Moreover, God is good not only to those who trust and obey him, but even to those who disregard and disobey him. For example, Jesus said that he "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45) We should not fail to note that the Lord made this statement as a basis for his teaching that he commands us to do what is good to all people, specifically showing love (defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as being patient, kind, etc.) to all, not just to those who love us. "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Matthew 5:45-47) He requires us, who have been called to be his witnesses, to live differently. We'll only be effective on this mission if we act Godly and not as the world does.

### **More Practical Benefits for You**

Many blessings come to us through these two attributes of God; space allows the mention now of only a few. Since God is perfect, you and I can have no small comfort in always being certain that no matter what God causes or allows to occur in our lives, he doesn't make mistakes. That awareness should be one of the bases, or basic assumptions, for our

perception of the circumstances we engage. For believers in Christ, “who love him, who have been called according to his purpose,” God works in all things for our good, even though that good may be perceived only in retrospect after time, sometimes substantial time, has elapsed. (Romans 8:28) Indeed, all that is good has come from him. (James 1:17; 1 Chronicles 29:16) Whatever we experience that is unpleasant he will help us overcome. (2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:11-13)

Sometime ago my family and I faced a major challenge. We couldn't help but notice innumerable blessings begin to occur immediately. I opened up a document on my computer's desktop and began to list the blessings directly related to this challenge. I daily added to the list and didn't discontinue doing so until after recording 50, and they hadn't stopped!

His goodness is a blessing to us in itself. We have no fear of him doing any wrong to us. Moreover, he gives what is good to those who obey him. The writer of Psalm 84 declared, “no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” Blameless? Have we not all sinned? Of course, but God credits Christ's righteousness to those who believe, who follow him, and who ask his forgiveness when they fail in obeying. (John 15:9-12, Romans 4, James 2:14-23) Talk about good news!

As we offer our prayers at Thanksgiving, let us express our gratitude to God for himself, including the many blessings we receive from the attributes of his character, in particular his perfection and goodness. Those two characteristics will be abundantly perceived on Thanksgiving Day, but we will not have to look hard to see them also on every other day of the year. As we become more and more aware of these blessings, let's look for ways to help others perceive them as well.