

The Goodness of God Expressed Through Conflicting Ideas

Is God confused about Sin and Judgment¹?

The Bible presents a spectacular and whole portrait of God but does so in a way that can be quite confusing at first. Today, we have the Bible as a completed book, neatly bound in leather or conveniently platformed in an easy to view app form. But the Bible was written over the span of roughly 1500 hundred years by men living many centuries apart. Most of them did not know one another and many of them would have lived hundreds of miles from each another if they did. Remarkably, in spite of all of this, the Bible maintains an incredibly internal harmony. Each of the Bible's 40 authors wrote as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pt.1:21; 2 Tim.3:16). Each author carried a particular set of emphasis from the Lord. Some loudly proclaimed judgment, while others boldly praised the goodness of God and of His tender mercies. Some spoke often of future events, others functioned as biographical sketches, some on pastoral concerns and still others lauded wisdom in the form of poetry. As a whole, the Bible contains many, many descriptions and expressions of God's nature and power. But no one author contained them all. In the wisdom of God, He spread out His self-revelation over many centuries and through many unique personalities and storylines. Why would God do this? Does He intend to confuse humanity? Well, first of all, the knowledge of God is inexhaustible. We can never fully understand everything about Him and no matter which way He chose to reveal Himself there would always be questions that are tough to answer. In reconciling the truth about God then, one is forced to consider that the whole of God's truth is communicated, often, in the form of ideas or concepts that seem to contradict one another.

Often, the nature of God is called into question because the Bible seems to emphasize such extreme characteristics of the Divine. Some see in the Old Testament a particular emphasis on the judgment of sin while in the New Testament the same emphases on the forgiveness, mercy and tenderness of God toward sinful man, particularly in the person of Jesus. But if there is one overwhelming characteristic of God to which the scripture testifies, it is His abounding goodness.

Sometimes though, the challenge of recognizing His goodness comes when we do not understand that certain expressions of His goodness can differ quite widely from the next.

The goodness of God is pervasive in all that He says and does. The truth of this statement is to form the basic building blocks of our theology.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes this statement. *"But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.'" (Mt.11:16-*

¹ For a supplemental resource on the judgments of God visit riveroffire.net/crisis and [prayer page/the response-addressing prophetic paradoxes](http://prayerpage.com/the-response-addressing-prophetic-paradoxes)

17). In context, Jesus is saying something quite dramatic. He is referencing the way in which God was currently revealing Himself to Israel. God spoke tenderly and affectionately while displaying His kindness through the wonderful miracles and generous friendship of Jesus. Simultaneously He spoke through John the Baptist of the need to turn from sin and the dire judgment consequences for refusing to do so. (*see Mt.11:18-19). In doing this, He revealed the truth about His nature as both a redemptive and merciful Father and a just and righteous judge.

This section of Isaiah deals with a universal, worldwide judgment yet to come. *“For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword The Lord will judge all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many.”* -Is.66:15-16

This section of Jeremiah deals with a future time period after the second coming narrative of the previous verse (Is.66:15-16). In this text the way in which God causes the nations to tremble is by the open manifestation of all His favor upon the nation of Israel. *“Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.”* -Jer.33:9

It is important to remember that in our zeal for biblical truth, truth must be balanced. If we over-emphasize one dimension of the truth to the exclusion of the other, we have become unbalanced. For example, Jesus taught that following Him would bring unique difficulties (Jn.16:33). But the scripture also defines the life of a believer in Jesus as righteousness, peace and joy (Rom.14:17). Is the Christian life always difficult, no. Is it always defined by feelings of peace and joy? No. Often the full council of God is found in the harmonizing of two conflicting ideas.

“Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.” -Rom.11:22

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” -Rom.2:4

