

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Romans 2:4 “Consider the Goodness of God”

Intro. In this chapter Paul is dealing with the type individual who sees himself as a good, upright man. His attention is not upon his own sins, but upon the sins of others. He is like a person who goes around with a flashlight, shining the light upon other people’s faults, but in the process the light does not shine upon his own faults. Such a person does not see a need to be saved. After all, God seems to bless them with good health, an adequate income, and they are respected in the community and in their church or synagogue. Surely the goodness of God toward him is a sign that God will welcome him into heaven.

But now, the finger of Paul the preacher turns on such an individual. He raises some questions in vv.3-4. In v.3 he says, “Do you think... that you will escape the judgment of God?” Many of the Jews thought they were exempt from the judgment of God just because they were children of Abraham. Likewise, the moral person supposes that God has passed an act of amnesty just for them, or that their sins are too few for God to even judge. Then, as Paul’s accusation builds, he points out to such a person in v.4 that “the goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Many Jews assumed that if they were healthy and at least somewhat prosperous, that meant that God was pleased with them. But they have it all wrong. If God seems to be good to them, that does not necessarily mean that they *deserve* it. It doesn’t mean that they are righteous. Paul says that a proper contemplation of God’s goodness should lead you to repentance, not smug self-righteousness!

Could it be possible that *you* have been thinking like this? Do you think that God is good to you because you are good person? And if you are a good person, do you conclude that your goodness will earn you a spot in heaven? If so, I’m preaching especially to you this morning. And don’t be quick to assume that I will be preaching to someone else today. When the Word of God is preached, it is to be applied as much as possible to each individual. I am not preaching just to a crowd. I am preaching to individuals. I am preaching to *you*.

Those of us who went to the Evangelism Conference Monday heard a story about a preacher who had a member who always had the same comment after the sermon, “You sure told ‘em today, Preacher!” This dear fellow was the most faithful member, always attending every time the church doors were open. But, somehow he always seemed to think the sermon was for everyone else, and not for him.

One day there was a terrible snow storm and the only ones who showed up for church that day was the preacher and this man. Well, the preacher decided to go ahead & preach anyway. Of course, he preached his sermon to no one but this man. He thought *this* time he would surely apply the message to himself. But after the message, the layman came up to the preacher & said, “Preacher, they sure should have been here today!”¹

Well I hope you will listen to the message today, and open your heart to the Spirit of God, and give heed to what He is saying to you today. The main focus of my message today will be upon the goodness of God, which is mentioned twice in this one verse. Paul especially has in mind the

¹ Adapted from Russell Brownworth.

goodness of God toward the unconverted sinner. Now with that in mind, I want you to see first of all from my text:

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF HIS GOODNESS

In v.4 Paul gives a trinity of graces that the typical unsaved sinner enjoys. And notice that Paul refers to “the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.” The word “riches” governs all 3 terms that follow. God does not have a meager supply of these attributes. He is not stingy in His goodness. There is an abundant supply of these manifestations of His goodness. So let’s look at each of these manifestations of His good:

A. Consider God’s Kindness to You – The word translated “goodness” (*chrestos*) can also be translated “kindness.” This refers to the positive dealings of God with men. In this context Paul mainly has in mind the goodness of God bestowed upon the Jews. He had favored their nation above every other nation. They were His chosen people. In His goodness, God had given Israel great material and spiritual riches: a wonderful land, a righteous Law, a temple and priesthood, God’s providential care, and many more blessings. As long as they obeyed God, they were blessed above all other nations. He had even sent them His Son to be their Messiah.

What about the rest of mankind? Sadly enough many people don’t view God as good & kind. Instead of focusing on the many manifestations of His goodness, they wonder how He can allow certain bad things to happen. But since we are all sinners, the question is not, “Why do bad things happen?” The proper question is, “Why do good things happen?” The reason sinners experience any goodness at all from the hand of God is because of His goodness. You see, the Bible teaches that there is common grace for sinners.

For example, God is good in bestowing earthly blessings upon all. Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 “that ...He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Psalm 33:5 says, “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” He gives us a blue sky, a warm sun, green grass, and beautiful mountains. In Luke 6:35 He said, “But love your enemies, do good, ... and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind [same word] to the unthankful and evil.” You are surrounded with so many earthly comforts. Some are well provided for financially. You sit down to a good meal. So many people enjoy good health, and when they get sick, they usually recover. Many times God has spared them from death due to sickness or some terrible accident. Isn’t God good to them? Your house has not burned to the ground; thieves have not ransacked your house either. You are not fleeing as refugees along the highways of a country desolated by war. God gives us people to love. Can’t you see how good God has been to you? God demonstrates His goodness in many ways.

God has also been good to us spiritually. Over 1 billion people on earth have never even had the opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ. The missionary has not reached them. Their minds have never been enlightened with God’s Word. But that is not true of us! Just about every person in America has easy access to the gospel. Most every home has a copy of the Bible. Hasn’t God been good to us? You can find some good preaching on TV or the radio. Some even have had the privilege of being raised by good and godly Christian parents. You have known what it was like to have a godly mother pray for you. Most all of you here today could say that God blessed you with parents who tried to teach you right from wrong. They gave you a good start in life, much better than many others. Furthermore, God has given you a conscience and the Holy Spirit to strive with

you when you sin, and to lead you to faith in Christ. God has been good to you, giving you and me far more than we deserve.

Now let's see from our text how else the goodness of God is manifested toward us.

B. Consider God's Forbearance toward You - Forbearance is an attribute we all need to have in dealing with people. When people annoy us or do us wrong, we need to forbear such people. We need to just put up with them without getting all bent out of shape.

God has an abundant amount of forbearance toward us. He puts up with quite a lot. People take His name in vain, and yet God does not strike them dead, or afflict them with some disease. Most people sin against Him dozens of times each day, and yet God forbears. Why doesn't God cut people down when they sin, as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why doesn't He cause the earth to open up and swallow us like Dathan and Abiram?

Do you realize what a blessing God's forbearance is? There are quick tempered individuals who only need a little provocation, and hard words and blows come quickly and furiously. Ah, but with God, it is different. The hand of justice may lay hold of the sword, but the hand of mercy restrains it.

Furthermore:

C. Consider that God Has Been Longsuffering toward You - These two words are closely related in meaning, and we must not press too much distinction. This word literally refers to one whose wrath, anger, and vengeance are slow in coming. Neh. 9:17 says God is "slow to anger, and of great kindness." God has patience toward us. Forbearance has to do with present provocation; longsuffering relates to that provocation repeated, and continued for a length of time. God will often put up with a sinner for many years before striking in judgment. It is a wonder of wonders that a God so sensitive to sin and a God so able to avenge Himself should nevertheless exhibit such great forbearance and longsuffering.

God is indeed longsuffering. But be sure you understand this. There is a limit to His patience. In fact, if you look at v.5 you see what is really happening while God is holding back His wrath. The flood of God's wrath is slowly filling up behind the dam of His patience, and the full fury of the gathering storm of judgment will burst upon you some day if you do not repent, perhaps when you least expect it.

God was longsuffering in the days of Noah. Even though mankind had become very wicked and corrupt, God gave them 120 years to repent. It was only after they had rejected the preaching of Noah for 120 years that God unleashed the flood of His wrath upon this world. He was so patient & bore with both Israel and Judah for hundreds of years before allowing their enemies to destroy their nations.

I hope you will agree that God is good. He is rich in kindness, forbearance, and patience. Why has God been so good to you? Why is God so patient with sinners? Well let's move on to the next main point. We not only see in v.4 the manifestations of His goodness, but also:

II. THE PURPOSE OF HIS GOODNESS

We know God is good because He is so patient with sinners. Some are patient because they are powerless: they forbear because they cannot fight back. But it is not so with God. Had He but willed it, you would have been swept into hell long ago. All He needed to do was speak the word, and it would have been done. Had it not been for His longsuffering, you unbelievers would long

since have known what it is to fall into the hands of an angry God. So why is God longsuffering toward sinners?

Perhaps the main reason God is so good, forbearing, & patient is because that is His nature. He is loving & merciful. God says in Ezekiel 33:11, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." However, Paul gives in v.4 one reason why God is good, forbearing, & patient toward sinners. He is seeking to lead you to repentance. Repentance is a radical change of mind that leads to a change in behavior. We need to turn from our sin and turn to Christ. The goodness of God is not intended to encourage the sinner to continue in his sin, but it is meant to woo and win him away from it. Friend, if you are still not a Christian, and yet you have been prospered by God, then you should understand why God has been good to you. All this is to lead you to repentance. You should not be so unwise as to say, "I am prospering although I am living in sin; therefore, I will continue to do so."

Now I want you to consider with me how His goodness should lead you to repentance:

A. By Giving You Time to Repent - By the time you are 18 you have sinned quite a bit. If you are not saved by the time you are 18 there is a real spiritual problem. Why didn't God judge you? Why are you still alive these many years? God has been patient with you so that you will have plenty enough opportunities to repent. It is as if God keeps saying, "I will give him more time. Perhaps he will yet repent." In 2 Peter 3 the apostle is addressing those who scoff at the idea that Jesus is coming again to judge this world. The delay in His coming leads some to believe He is never going to come and judge this old wicked world. But we should not misinterpret the goodness and forbearance of God. V.9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God is longsuffering to give sinners opportunity to repent, for once Jesus comes again, the door of salvation will be shut forever for those who had opportunity to repent.

Sir, why it is that you were spared in battle, while some of your comrades were not? Why is it that you were spared on the highway when the people in the car right in front of you or behind you were not? Some of you have done some foolish things. You could have gotten yourself killed, but you were spared. Why was that? Surely, your preservation means that God was saying to grim Death, "Spare him, for he is mine. I intend to save his soul as well as to spare his life. It grieves Me to think of him going into a devil's hell. Give him another year."

Think of John Newton, the one who wrote, *Amazing Grace*. He was a godless sailor who became a slave trader. He went from sin to sin. Many times he became very sick, but he did not die. A number of times he suffered shipwreck, but he did not drown. Why did such a wicked man not die? Well we know from history that God's patience paid off. The day came when John Newton came to realize that even a sinner like he could be saved and forgiven. Later he wrote the line, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound! That saved a wretch like me." He also preached the amazing grace of God.

Because of God's forbearance, you have been given at least one more opportunity to be saved. Will you be saved today?

Furthermore, God's goodness should lead you to repentance:

B. By a Distinct Leading - The text does not say that by God's goodness sinners are *called* to repentance, but it "leads" (*ago*) sinners to repentance. His goodness lays its gentle hand on you and seeks to lead you along down the path of repentance. Furthermore, He does not want to drive you to repentance with the whip of hardship. I suppose some are driven to repentance out of

desperation as they are fleeing from the consequences of sin. But God wants willing obedience, not forced obedience. So He seeks to lovingly lead you to the point where you are willing to repent of your sin.

Imagine that you have just found out that someone has poisoned your dog's food. You look out the window and see your precious dog walking toward his dog bowl. You rush to the refrigerator and grab a leftover ham bone with a good bit of meat still on it. You quickly go out and call out to your dog. You break off a piece of meat & throw it to him. He turns away from his dog food and eats the ham. Then you lead him away from his poisoned food by throwing another piece. Then as he gets closer you give him the whole bone. That will keep him occupied for a while! You have led him away by offering him something better. Meanwhile, you dispose of the poisoned dog food while he is enjoying that ham bone.

Folks, sin is poison to your soul. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." Yet we are so prone to fill ourselves with sin. So God seeks to lead you away from sin by giving you samples of His goodness. He gives you food that tastes good. He gives you friends and laughter. He gives you a family that loves you. Little by little He is seeking to lead you to repent of sin, and embrace His goodness.

It is clear that one purpose for the manifestations of God's goodness is to lead you to repentance. And that leads to my last point. Consider with me:

III. THE RESPONSES TO HIS GOODNESS

It is clear from our text that the goodness of God should draw from us a response. Unfortunately, most of the time people respond to the goodness of God in the wrong way. For example:

A. Some Despise God's Goodness - The Lord's goodness ought to be admired and adored, and yet many despise it. Paul says in v.4, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering...?" The word translated "despise" (*kataphroneo*) literally means "to think down on." It means "think little of; devalue" (Mt. 18:10; 1 Cor. 11:22), or "to hold in contempt" (Mt. 6:24; 1 Tim. 6:2). The people described here certainly do not think highly of God's goodness and patience in judgment. They underestimate the significance of it all. It has not occurred to many that God's patience is at all remarkable or worthy of the smallest thanks. You think that since you do not indulge in great sins, God should be thankful *to you!*

Why is it that many think so little of the goodness & forbearance of God? Do they think that God is too weak to do anything about their sin & rebellion? Do they assume that God just winks at sin, and does not care how men behave? So long as they do not go into gross and open sin, they do not believe that it is of any consequence whether they love God or not, or whether they do righteousness or not. Some people think that God doesn't seem to care if they sin because they are not immediately chastened by God. But let me ask you something. Does a man chasten someone else's children? No! He only disciplines his own children. So if you sin and you seem to get by with it, it means according to Hebrews 12 that you are not a true child of God! You need to rethink what all this means.

And then some despise God's patience toward sinners because they assume that God's threats of judgment against sin will never be fulfilled. What is our attitude toward one who is always making threats, but never carries them out? We look down on such a person. But many have made a terrible mistake with God. Many people continue in sin year after year without

anything terrible happening to them. In fact, they may even prosper from the good hand of God. After a while, they get the idea that God is *never* going to judge them. They imagine that because judgment is long delayed it will never come at all. But if you think so, sir, then you have indeed despised the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God. Do you imagine that this forbearance will last forever? How long do you think you can put off turning your life over to Jesus Christ? It is a dreadful despising of God's mercy when you keep on playing with God and say, "Leave me alone; I will follow you at some later point in my life." Because they're so used to His mercy they continue to sin, figuring God will forgive again and again.

B. Many Remain in Ignorance of God's Purpose – Paul says in the last of v.4, "not knowing (*agnoeo*) that the goodness of God leads you to repentance." Many are ignorant of God's purposes, and they misinterpret the meaning of God's goodness & forbearance. The apostle is not excusing the offence by appealing to the ignorance of the person addressed; he is rather expanding the base of his indictment. He is saying in effect, "You have missed the great lesson and purpose of the goodness of God as it bears upon your responsibility." "Not knowing" has in this case the force of "not considering." God holds you responsible to consider what His goodness means, and what it should lead you to do.

None who has heard this message can claim ignorance about this. You now know that prosperity is not a sign that God is pleased with you, and that you have no need for concern as you face Judgment Day. When God is patient with you, and withholds His judgment, that does not mean He is pleased with you. Will you continue to sin against such a good God? Will you continue to reject the One who loves you enough to die on a cruel cross for you?

Now let's consider how we *should* respond to the goodness of God. Think with me for a moment. Why has God been good to you? Why has He put up with your foolish sins so many times? Paul gives us the answer in v.4. In response to the goodness of God:

C. You Should Repent of Your Sin - Has God's goodness led you to repentance? I want you to weigh it out in your mind. I have described to you how God has already given you a foretaste of His goodness. Do you not see how God has blessed you in all sorts of ways? What will you choose in response to His goodness? You can continue to choose sin, which only brings temporary pleasure and then sometime later suffering & death. Or you can repent of sin and choose God, who will bestow even more blessings upon you. What will your choice be? It is time to consider your ways, and turn to the Lord. Will you not, therefore, give Him your heart? But if you do not repent of your sin, but continue in sin, you will be in contempt of God's goodness.

With few exceptions, one of the greatest loves is that of a parent for their children. A mother goes through great pain & suffering to give life to her child. For several years the parents give hours of loving service to their child. They spend thousands of dollars for their child. They teach their child right from wrong, and go to the trouble of giving discipline, and often the punishment is less than they deserve. They provide a good education, and many play opportunities. And yet, when a child disobeys their parents, and rebels against their parents, they are showing contempt for their parents' goodness. Instead, the right contemplation of your parents' goodness ought to lead you to repentance! Give the love, obedience & respect that they deserve.

Even so, God loves us. He has been better to us than we deserve. He often withholds the judgment we deserve. Let us not respond by despising His goodness, and taking advantage of His forbearance. Let us respond to His love and goodness by repenting of our sin, & giving Him our love, our faith, and our obedience.

Also consider how good God will be to you if you come to Jesus and believe in Him. He will forgive every sin you have ever committed! Acts 3:19 says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out....” Then, He will clothe you in a robe of righteousness and make you a child of God. He will give you His Holy Spirit, and He will help you live the way you should live. He will set you free from those sinful habits that bind you, and ruin you. He will provide for your every need. You will become a joint heir with Jesus Christ! Heaven will be yours. All these good gifts will become yours. Isn’t God good?

And let us respond to His goodness in one other way:

D. Be Grateful - You should reflect upon all the ways God has been good to you, and be grateful. Psalm 106:1 says, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” Psalm 107:8 says, “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness.”

Conclusion: Today I have asked you to consider the riches of the goodness of God. He has blessed most of us with good parents. He has blessed most of us with good grandparents. He has provided for our every need. He gave us life & breath & many blessings. He has given us His Word, and He has *even* given His Son to die for our sins. He has been rich in forbearance and patience toward us. He has put up with the times we have put off repenting of our sin, and trusting in His Son Jesus. Don’t despise the goodness of God. Instead, respond to His goodness by repenting of your sin today, and put your faith in Jesus as your Savior. Don’t put such a good God off another day. Don’t boast of tomorrow. You do not know you will have tomorrow. Trust in Him today!

There may be some Christians here today who have strayed from the Lord and presumed upon His goodness. It’s time to repent, & come back to God. Do it today!

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); John MacArthur, Jr., *Without Excuse: Principles of God’s Judgment: Study Notes on Romans 2:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Sermons on Repentance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973 reprint), 110-131 [25G.51]; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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