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BAD PRESS FOR A GOOD GOD

Psalm 100

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Bad Press for a Good God Psalm 100

In these days of modern media, every President knows that he needs a good spin doctor to put a positive spin on the news, so that the President looks good. I read an article recently on the late President Kennedy that told about the many serious health problems that he suffered from throughout his life. He had a serious kidney disease, along with several other maladies that caused severe chronic pain. He took pain medication and received multiple steroid injections every day. But in spite of his precarious health, he managed to convey to the public that he was young, energetic, and physically fit. He had some good spin doctors!

Politicians know that bad press can ruin their reputation and result in defeat at the polls. Sadly, most politicians don't focus on truthful, upright behavior, but rather on how to convey the image of being truthful and upright, even if they aren't. They want good press, but not always stemming from good character.

From day one, Satan has been on a campaign to smear the truth about God's goodness so that people will not follow Him. When he tempted Eve in the Garden, his main ploy was to get Eve to doubt that God intended good for her by forbidding her and Adam from eating the fruit. Satan told her (Gen. 3:5), "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The slander was, "God is trying to keep you from a good thing." And the extension of that thought is, "God is not really good."

The devil has used this falsehood in varying forms to keep people from following the Lord. Satan promotes the lie, "If you follow God, you'll have to stop doing the things you enjoy and start doing things that you hate. God wants you to get rid of your ice cream and eat spinach for dessert! Isn't it fun to be a Christian!"

Unfortunately, many Christians have played into the devil's scheme by conveying that being a Christian is a glum, grim way of life. I heard once of an American Christian drama group that

played in a church in Scotland. The routine they did on that occasion was supposed to be very funny, but no one laughed. They thought that they had failed until one team member overheard a man from the congregation say to another man, "They were so funny that I almost had to laugh in church!" I'm not endorsing comedy or drama in the church, but surely our churches, our homes, and our individual lives as Christians should reflect joy and gladness in the Lord! If not, our good God gets bad press from those professing to be His people.

First Peter 2:9 says that God has made us to be a people for His own possession "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Or, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism begins, "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." Or, as John Piper has improved on it, we glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever (*Desiring God* [Multnomah Publishers, 1996], p. 15). As Piper often says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

And so our job as believers is to give good press to our good God, not by spinning or bending the truth, but by conveying by our demeanor and words how excellent He truly is. And that is the message of the well-loved Psalm 100:

Because the Lord is good, we who belong to Him should be people of joy, submission, and praise.

Psalm 100 is the only psalm with the title, "A Psalm of Thanksgiving." The Hebrew word for *thanksgiving* literally means, *confession* (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. by R. Laird Harris [Moody Press], 1:365). In this case, it means to confess God's character and His works. Psalm 100 is the "unclouded summit" (*Psalms 73-150*, by Derek Kidner [IVP], p. 355) that closes Psalms 93-100, which proclaim God as King. It overflows with the exuberant joy of those who know themselves to be God's people.

There are several approaches to outlining the psalm. Some point out that there are two verses of exhortation followed by verse 3, which is explanation; then the cycle is repeated: verse 4 is exhortation and verse 5 is explanation. John Piper (sermon on his web site, www.desiringgod.org) labels verses 1 & 2 and verse 4 as

exultation, with verses 3 & 5 as education. Another way of looking at it is to note that there are four verses of exhortation followed by one verse giving the reason for the exhortations. There are seven commands: Shout joyfully (v. 1); Serve (v. 2a); Come before Him (v. 2b); Know (v. 3); Enter (v. 4a); Give thanks (v. 4b); and, Bless (v. 4c). Then verse 5 gives the reason behind the commands. I'm going to begin with the reason and then move to the commands.

1. The Lord is good (100:5).

"The Lord is good." It's easy to say that, but do you *really* believe it? Some of you have gone through very difficult trials. You may be in difficult trials right now. Do you believe that God is good and that He is using these trials to work together for your good, so that you will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29)? The psalmist wrote (Ps. 119:67), "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." The very next verse is (119:68), "You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes." A few verses later he writes (119:71), "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Even in our afflictions (*especially* in our afflictions!), we must submit to God and affirm His goodness by faith.

Satan knows that if he can get you to doubt God's goodness, you won't trust Him. And if you don't trust Him, you won't obey Him. Why trust and obey a mean God who is trying to make you miserable?

Some of you had mean fathers. Maybe your dad claimed to be a Christian, but he was difficult to be around. He'd come home from work grumpy and mad at life. He didn't want to be bothered by a bunch of hyperactive kids. So as he retreated behind his newspaper or settled down in front of the tube, the only words you heard out of his mouth were, "Can you guys keep it down? Stop fighting! Do your homework! If I have to tell you guys to be quiet one more time, you're really going to get it!" As you grew up, you assumed that the heavenly Father must be sort of like that—mean, grumpy, barking commands, and not wanting you to enjoy life.

So it's essential that you derive your understanding of God from the Bible. And at the root of who God is, you must affirm that He is good. This means that He "deals well and bountifully

with His creatures" (Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* [Baker], 2:219). A. W. Tozer (*The Knowledge of the Holy* [Harper & Row], p. 88) put it, "The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men." The Bible attests to God's goodness in His creation (Gen. 1:31); in His salvation and deliverance of His people (Exod. 18:9; Num. 10:29, 32); in His provision for His people (Neh. 9:25); and, in His Word, which instructs us in how to live so as to be blessed (Ps. 25:8; Deut. 30:15-16), even in affliction (Gen. 50:20).

But the psalmist mentions two facets of God's goodness, which frequently occur together in the Psalms: His lovingkindness (see 106:1; 107:1); and, His faithfulness (see 89:1, 2).

A. God's lovingkindness is everlasting.

This is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which we've noted in previous studies. It comes from their word for *stork*. The Hebrews noticed how storks had an uncommon love for and protection of their young. They built their nests securely in the high trees (Ps. 104:17). And so they said, "God's love for His own is like that!" He nurtures us and protects us from all enemies. He cares for us and feeds us. His love does not depend on us, but on His eternal nature, which is good.

B. God's faithfulness is to all generations.

That is just another way of saying that it is everlasting. God is not fickle. He is not moody, where one day He acts one way towards us and the next day He's different. He is true to His eternal attributes. He is faithful to His covenant promises. He is true to all His revealed purposes. The Bible contains the record of His faithfulness to His people in the past. It also shows how He will be true to His promises to glorify His people in the future. And so we can rely on His faithfulness to us in the present, no matter what kind of trial we're going through. As Psalm 119:75-76 affirms, "I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant."

So we must affirm at all times in all situations, "Lord, You are good to me! Your lovingkindness and Your faithfulness are always with me. You will never leave me or forsake me (Heb. 13:5)." The

first four verses of Psalm 100 show how the truth of God's goodness should affect us:

2. We who belong to God should be people of joy, submission, and praise (100:1-4).

A. We who belong to God should be people of joy (100:1-2).

"Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing." Is that your image of the Christian life? There's no allowance there for grumpiness! Nothing about snapping at your wife or kids! No room there for complaining about your trials! The psalmist is telling us four things:

(1) Joy in the Lord should be exuberant.

"Shout joyfully!" This word refers to the spontaneous shout of victory that greeted a king returning from battle. The messenger would run from the battlefield with the good news, "Our king has won the victory! The king and the army will march into the city tomorrow!" The excited people would line the streets, waiting for the glorious moment. When the king rode through the city gate in triumph, the crowd would roar with applause and cheers.

That's how our joy in the Lord should overflow at times. The Bible does not suggest that it should be that way always, of course. We all go through high points and low points. We are to rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep (Rom. 12:15). The shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is, "Rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16). In English, it is, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). So there's a balance. But, if God has worked a victory in your life, whoop it up! If He has answered your prayer, shout for joy!

But maybe you're thinking, "That's just not my personality. I'm a rather calm, reserved person." But, notice,

(2) Exuberant joy in the Lord is commanded for all.

The psalmist does not say, "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all of you who have exuberant personalities!" He says, "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth." There's a missionary focus to the verse. For all the earth to shout joyfully to the Lord, they must know who He is. And one way that they should know that He's worth shouting about is that they see joyful Christians. Are you giving God bad press or good press as the pagan world observes your life?

The only time I've ever gone to a professional football game was in Dallas when a medical doctor who went to our church invited Marla and I to watch the Rams (then from our home town, Los Angeles) play the Cowboys. We learned that Texans take their football seriously! When the referee would make a penalty call against the Cowboys, this otherwise reserved, professional doctor would leap to his feet, shake his fist threateningly at the official, and yell, "Boo!" As he sat down, he would mutter some nasty comments about the man. When the Cowboys made a good play, this dignified church elder would leap spontaneously to his feet, scream at the top of his lungs, and even hug whoever was close by!

But I never saw him or anyone else do that in church. Why do we get so excited about our games and not about our God?

(3) Joy in the Lord should permeate our service for Him.

"Serve the Lord with gladness." There are two parts to the command: "Serve the Lord; and, do it with gladness." Do you serve the Lord? Do you do it with gladness for all that He's done for you?

People (even Christians!) serve sports, recreation, computer games, movies, music, business, possessions, the stock market, and many things other than the Lord. The Lord threatened Israel with some frightening consequences if they did not serve Him gladly (Deut. 28:47-48), "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you..." As Bob Dylan sings, "You gotta serve somebody." Make sure you serve the Lord with gladness!

(4) Joy in the Lord should be expressed in singing.

"Come before Him with joyful singing." Don't miss the first part of that command, that in coming to sing, you are to *come before Him*. We gather in His presence. If our singing is lackluster, my hunch is that we've forgotten that we're offering it to Him. Does the way that we sing as a church give our good God good press or bad press? "Come before Him with *joyful* singing." We who belong to God should be people of joy.

B. We who belong to God should be people of submission (100:3).

You won't find the word *submission* in this verse, but it's written all over it: "Know that the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture." Why does the psalmist insert this verse in a psalm dealing with joy and thanksgiving? What does the fact that the Lord is God and that He made us and that we are His people and His sheep have to do with thanksgiving?

A lot! Verse 3 describes a relationship of submission to God and submission is directly related to thankfulness. If you're grumbling or griping about your circumstances, you're not subject to God's sovereign hand in your life. You're implying that you could do a better job than God at running your life if He'd just give you the chance. It's not until you willingly submit to God as God that you can also say, "Thank You, Lord, that You are good and that You will work this trial together for my good." Verse 3 gives us four reasons why we should submit to the Lord:

(1) We should submit to the Lord because He is God.

The psalmist says, "Know that the Lord Himself is God." That means, "You're not God!" Even when we don't understand why something is happening to us, we need to acknowledge, "Lord, You're the only true and living God. I submit to You."

(2) We should submit to the Lord because He is our Creator.

"It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." A marginal reading in the Hebrew text says, "and we are His." But whichever is original, the clear implication is that since God made us, we must bow before Him. Evolution has gained such a large following, not because there is scientific evidence for it, but because it eliminates the need for proud man to submit to God. If God created us, then we must be in submission to Him!

(3) We should submit to the Lord because He is our Redeemer.

"We are His people." Israel once was not God's people, but He chose them and called them to follow Him. He redeemed them

from bondage in Egypt. We, in the church, once were not His people, but He chose us and called us to follow Him, redeeming us from bondage to sin (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Because He is our Redeemer and we are His people, we must submit to Him.

(4) We should submit to the Lord because He is our Shepherd.

“We are ... the sheep of His pasture.” This reminds us of Psalm 23 and of John 10, where Jesus claims to be the good shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep. His sheep know His voice and follow Him as He leads them to abundant pasture.

Because God is good, full of lovingkindness and faithfulness, we should be people of joy. Because He is good, as the only true God, as our Creator, Redeemer and Shepherd, we should submit to Him. Finally,

C. We who belong to God should be people of praise (100:4).

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.” Dozens of times in the Bible we are commanded to praise the Lord, which implies that we are to do it whether we feel like it or not. If we never feel like praising the Lord, something serious is wrong with our Christian life! But there are times when you must begin praising God because He commands it. The feelings will follow. As we grow to know Him better and to experience His love and faithfulness more deeply, we will praise Him more and more. Heaven will be filled with praise because we will see God in all His majesty and splendor. You can't see such a glorious God without praise welling up in your heart.

While we should praise and thank God in our private devotions, this verse focuses on worshiping Him corporately. “His gates” and “His courts” refers to the Tabernacle or Temple, where God's people came together to worship. To enter those gates with thanksgiving and praise implies *preparing your heart* beforehand and coming with the deliberate purpose of offering praise to God. I encourage you to take a few minutes on Saturday night to prepare your heart for Sunday morning. Pray for the worship time, that it will honor the Lord. On Sunday morning, get up early enough to spend some time before the Lord, reading His Word and praying

for your heart and the hearts of others to be right before Him. If you're feeling down on Sunday morning, come anyway and hopefully you'll be encouraged. But most of us should come ready to praise our gracious God and loving Savior.

Our praise should focus on *what God has done* and on *who He is*. We *give thanks* for what He has done, especially, that He has saved us from our sins through the blood of His own dear Son. *Blessing God's name* means to praise Him for who He is, as revealed in His Word and through His Son. He has blessed us with His great gift of salvation. We return the blessing by praising Him.

Conclusion

Does your life give God good press or bad press? If you're doubting His goodness and grumbling about your trials, you're giving Him bad press. Those around you who don't know God will think, "I'm not so sure I want to know his God." But if those around you see your joy, your glad submission to Him, and your thankful spirit, they may be drawn to the God who is so good.

Before his conversion, John Wesley was deeply impressed by a conversation he had with the porter of his college. Wesley discovered that the man had only one coat and that he had not eaten that day because he was so poor. Yet the man was overflowing with gratitude toward God. Wesley said, "You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon! What else do you thank Him for?"

"I thank Him, answered the porter, "that He has given me my life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him." (A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze* [Eerdmans], p. 100.)

That poor man gave his good God good press and it was one factor that God used to bring John Wesley to saving faith. Because God is good, we who belong to Him should give Him good press by being people of exuberant joy, glad submission, and thankful praise.

Application Questions

1. A person has experienced many difficult trials and doubts that God is truly good. How would you counsel him?
2. What should a Christian do who has lost the joy of serving the Lord? Should he quit until he regains his joy?
3. How should a person who does not have a bubbly personality express genuine joy in the Lord? Does he have to change his personality?
4. Is it hypocrisy to praise God when you don't feel like it? How can we overcome such feelings?

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