A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM

BILL JOHNSON

GETTING BACK TO THE GOODNESS OF GOD

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Get Bill Johnson’s new book, God is Good
The reason for this special message.

“The greatest missing element in the consciousness of humanity is the goodness of God.”
Most every believer confesses that God is good. We have to. It’s in the Bible. It’s not the belief in His goodness that threatens us. It’s our definition of this goodness that has brought much debate and sometimes conflict and turmoil into the family of God.

If He is as good as many claim, how we respond to this truth will require massive change in how we do life. Instead of creating doctrines that explain away our weakness and anemic faith, we’ll actually have to find out why “the greater works than these” have not been happening in and around us (see John 14:12). Creating doctrines of no miracles today not only contradicts His Word, it is a sneaky way to avoid responsibility. Instead of changing the standard for life given by Jesus, who walked the earth two thousand years ago, we are to embrace it and follow His model. We were designed with the capacity to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus, the One who is resurrected from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father (see 1 John 4:17). The bottom line is, it was never meant that the hour we live in was to be inferior to Jesus’ earthly ministry. It’s quite the opposite.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father (John 14:12).

The Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to their positions of power and influence. In a similar way, many leaders today feel threatened over a possible shift in theological positions that implies we’ve not been as successful in ministry as we could have been. We empower the lie we believe. The fight to protect the sanctity of our history has kept us from a more significant future. I’m thankful for my past. I’m thankful for what our forefathers fought for so that we might live in greater liberty.
in Christ. But there is more. And things are about to change because the greatest
harvest of souls of all time is about to come in. And it won't come because of our
advanced skills in preaching, our use of media, or even our powerful music. Each
of those areas has importance, but they do not exist unto themselves. They are im-
portant in that they are vehicles that carry the greatest revelation of all time—God
is good, and He is a perfect Father.

His goodness is beyond our ability to comprehend, but not our ability to ex-
perience. Our hearts will take us where our heads can't fit. Understanding is vital,
but it often comes through experiencing God. Faith for the journey of walking
with God leads to encounters with God. It results in a growing knowledge and
understanding of truth, as in “by faith we understand that the worlds were framed
by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). Having said that, one of the great commands of
Scripture pertaining to the experience of His goodness is “taste and see that the
Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). If you’ll taste it for yourself, you’ll see it more clearly. Your
perception of truth will increase as you experience truth more deeply.

As it is with this most important doctrine of being born again, we always un-
derstand a subject more clearly once we’ve experienced it. Hearing someone teach
on being born again who isn’t born again is almost laughable. There is hardly a
group of believers anywhere that would treasure that teaching. Yet a similar prac-
tice is almost applauded as noble in much of Christendom—theology that requires
no experience. I realize that some may assume I mean that theology is based on
experience, which implies to some we throw reason out the door. That is a true
and present danger. But the issue that has had much more damage in present-day
church life is theology without experience. The Pharisees were known for theories
that never had an effect on their own lives. To combat this, we must exercise our
faith to put a demand on what we believe. Simple mental assent must not be the
end of the story.

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Common Beliefs Must Be Challenged!

Changing our theology doesn’t change Him. Either He is authentically good,
or He is not. I would never suggest that we pretend that He is different than He is.
Nothing is accomplished by allowing our imagination to create our own image of
God. He would then be no better than the gods made out of wood or stone, also
created by human initiative. Inventing Him in our minds or building Him with
our hands is a similarity that is both vain and ultimately destructive. Discovering
who He is and what He is like in reality is the only possible way to discover His
true goodness. This eternal journey into His infinite goodness is the one we are
privileged to embrace.
I’ve heard people say they don’t believe in God anymore after experiencing a disappointment or tragic loss of some sort. I don’t mean to treat their situation with disregard, but you can’t turn a consciousness of God on and off like that. You may be mad at God. You may accuse Him and refuse to serve Him. But you can’t decide He no longer exists. To claim atheism as a belief system doesn’t get rid of Him. It merely deadens a person’s awareness of Him and attempts to remove the awareness of his need for Him from the context of daily life. Merely changing our theology changes us, not Him. But when what we believe is anchored in the reality of who He is, earth comes into agreement with Heaven where the reality of His world increasingly invades ours, manifested in both power and glory.

It’s impossible for us to create a concept of what He is like that is greater than He really is. He is either greater than we can understand, perceive, describe, or imagine, or He is not God—we are. Neither can we exaggerate His goodness. We can twist it, pervert it, dilute it, and misrepresent it. But the one thing we cannot do is exaggerate the goodness of God. It will take us all of eternity just to broach the subject of His goodness. The apostle Paul gives us an extremely challenging promise in this regard:

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

The phrase “beyond all that we ask or think” is quite impressive. “Beyond all we ask” addresses the impact of our prayers, which include both those that are outwardly expressed as well as the secret cries of the heart. What God does for us is beyond the reach of our biggest prayer on our greatest day with our highest level of faith—He exists in that realm to work for us. “Beyond all we think” is another very powerful statement dealing with the impact of our imagination. This describes us on our best day, with our most well-thought-out dreams, plans, goals, and imaginations. His commitment to us is to function beyond the limitations of our imagination and perform the unthinkable on our behalf. These are expressions of His goodness, which come from His being. He is perfect goodness personified.

I said “yes” to this journey many years ago and have since discovered that His goodness is beyond my wildest dreams. My yes started by simply recognizing that I have sinned and fallen short of God’s purpose and design. Jesus then became for me the perfect manifestation of goodness. He rescued me from all that would destroy me and brought me into a relationship with Him where more of His goodness could be discovered. Many have taken that first step but tragically have stopped after step one, picking up the view of who God is as seen in the Old Testament stories. Those stories are important and necessary. But the fact is, Jesus came to replace them with a clearer view of what God is like. There are few deceptions more devastating than this one. It is tragic and so completely unnecessary.
Civil War in the Church

The one thing that concerns me most in the day in which we live is the possibility of another civil war. The reality of that potential conflict is upon us right now. However, it's not racial, political, or economic. Neither is it fought between groups with differing moral or social agendas. While those tensions obviously exist in society, they have permission to exist because of the division that is celebrated in the Church. We set the stage. It's tough to get reconciliation in the factions that exist in the world around us when the Church itself sponsors the wars of internal conflict with religious delight.

I'm referring to a war within the family of God—it is spiritual. This one is not being fought with guns and bombs. It's being fought with words of accusation, character assassination, ridicule, and slander. The conflict is over the goodness of God. That spirit of accusation is welcomed in many circles as the voice of reason, the voice of discernment. My prayer is that through an arresting revival in the nations, we will see another Great Awakening that dismantles the tsunami of the demonic that thrives on our self-righteous theology and the corresponding division it creates.

The Church isn't known for handling conflict well. We tend to be the only army in the world that shoots their wounded, especially if they were wounded through their own doing. When there are doctrinal conflicts, there are books written and radio shows broadcasted to expose and shame those attempting to serve God with their best effort to teach truth. Good theology is essential. But theology without love is a loud clanging cymbal—annoying at best. I believe that a true discovery of the goodness of God could heal this issue for us all.

“We will know our mind is renewed when the impossible looks logical.”

The Heavenly Mind

The biblical concept of the renewed mind is in part an answer to this problem. It is made available to us as a gift from a good Father—it is the mind of Christ. The renewed mind is more than having the ability to give a biblical answer to a problem. It includes that, but in reality it is so much more. It is seeing from a divine perspective.

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).*

In the Romans passage, the renewed mind proves the will of God. That is fascinating when you realize that the best definition for the will of God in Scripture
is “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). It can be said that the renewed mind is what reveals and illustrates God’s will on earth. The mind of Christ, seen in Jesus’ lifestyle, illustrates this beautifully. He confronted storms, healed bodies, multiplied food, and did countless other miracles to reveal Heaven’s effect on earth. The renewed mind in us should do the same. We will know our mind is renewed when the impossible looks logical.

Yet there’s another twist provided in the word prove. It can also be translated “approve.” Let me illustrate. If I were the world’s greatest art specialist and authority on Vincent van Gogh paintings, and you discovered a painting signed “Vincent van Gogh” in an estate you inherited, you’d want my services to evaluate whether or not it’s an authentic masterpiece. If it’s real, it could be worth one hundred million dollars. If it’s a fake, it may be worth one hundred dollars. My approval makes quite the difference in what someone would be willing to pay to purchase such a potential treasure. The burden of proof is then put upon my shoulders. If the painting is authentic, it will be celebrated worldwide as a great new discovery. If it’s a fake, it must be labeled as such so no one is duped into buying something that has very little value.

My process of study would include the examination of every brushstroke of your painting to see if it’s consistent with his style. I would also test the colors, paints, and canvas to see if they’re similar to ones we know are consistent with his known works. It would also be prudent in my examination to research the subject of the painting to see if I could place the location or content with what we know about his life. If after weeks of examination, I put my approval on your piece of art as a previously unknown Vincent van Gogh painting, you, of course, would be ecstatic. The news of my authentication of your painting would hit the art world worldwide within minutes. You would then need to decide whether you wanted to keep the piece for your own enjoyment, display it in a museum for others to enjoy, or auction it to the highest bidder. Please note that such an approval is not a careless opinion, as my entire reputation as a specialist is at risk. It has to be a scholarly conclusion based on the study of previous works as well as the known nature and life of the artist himself.

Discovering the will of God in some of our most difficult situations is often as easy as using the same reasoning offered through this illustration. For example, if someone calls me on the phone and tells me that the sickness I am suffering from has been given to me by God to teach me to trust Him, I need to examine his word to see if it is an authentic word from God. God, the Chief of all artists, has left us with many masterpieces throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The stories of the Master’s touch abound as person after person is healed and delivered by the love of this perfect Father. As I study these four gospels, I must take note that I can’t find any “painting” with the same strokes or colors. There’s not one example of Jesus giving a disease to anyone. In fact, His lifestyle was the opposite. What the person claims is an authentic word from God contradicts the examples of His known works. The renewed mind is able to come to the conclusion that what was
given to me with God's signature at the bottom is in fact a forgery. The nature of this deceptive piece is so severe that it requires me to expose it as a fraud so that no one buys the counterfeit art in His name. And even though I soundly reject this person's word to me, I don't reject the person. I know that my approach to that person sets the standard for how I am to be treated in my day of need. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7). He is to be valued for who he is in God, not because he gets everything right. None of us do. In the Old Testament, the prophet was judged if he gave a wrong word. In the New Testament, the word is to be judged.

Tragically, many forgeries are accepted by believers day after day and then sold to others in the Christian marketplace as authentic revelations of the will of God. They in turn distort the revealed will of God throughout the Scriptures, perverting our sense of what He is like. The biggest forgery of all just might be the teaching that Jesus no longer heals people from sickness and delivers them from torment. Simple examination of Scripture proves that such a concept is a devilish misrepresentation of the One who gave Himself to reveal the Father and redeem humanity. Many good people believe such lies. They must be treated with kindness—they were poisoned with a lie. But it's equally true that the lies they promote must be exposed as forgeries. What causes me the most grief is that this way of thinking misrepresents the nature of God. It hurts our approach to life, seriously damaging our ability to represent Him as good. Perhaps it's these forgeries that have been marketed for decades by well-meaning believers that have contributed to the single greatest vacuum in human consciousness—the knowledge of the goodness of God.

Like Cutting Wood

A number of years ago, I heard a pastor tell us about a building project he once had for his church. He told us of how much he wanted to help the contractor in the building process. He was obviously excited for the new project, but because He had no building skills, it wasn't easy to find a place for him to fit in. He was persistent in asking if there was any work he could do. His enthusiasm over their building project finally persuaded the contractor to find something for him to do. The contractor told him that he needed one hundred two-by-fours cut to eight feet in length for the next morning. The pastor was excited that he got to be involved in his own church project. So after everyone else left for the night, the pastor stayed and cut the lumber. He took the first piece of wood, measured eight feet with his tape measure, and marked it. He then carefully cut it to eight feet exactly. Instead of using the tape measure for the second piece of wood to be cut, he used the previously cut board, as he thought that would be so much easier. He laid it on top of the new one, carefully drew a line where that board needed to be cut and sawed off the part that was too long. He then took that newly cut board and placed it on top of the next piece that needed to be cut. He used this method of measuring throughout his assignment to cut one hundred boards.
I’m sure you can see the problem. By using the previously cut board as the measure, the next board is marked and cut about one-eighth of an inch too long. This process wouldn’t have been so devastating had he only had two or three boards to cut. But when that method is used for one hundred boards, you end up with the ones at the end of the pile being over nine feet long.

For two thousand years, we’ve been comparing ourselves to the previous generation, noticing only slight differences. And to console ourselves with the task at hand—the great commission to disciple nations, displaying the greater works—many create watered-down doctrines that dismantle the example and commandments that Jesus gave us. Instead of comparing ourselves with ourselves, we should have been using the original standard found in the life of Jesus so that the measure of God’s goodness revealed in Christ would have remained the same through the past two thousand years. God is bringing us back to the original measurement so that He might be revealed more accurately as the Father who loves well.

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NEW BOOK FROM

BILL JOHNSON

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