

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... GOODNESS

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

Recently Val and I watched the 1971 movie musical, "Fiddler on the Roof." It is an adaptation of the Broadway musical by the same name, which was based on the writings of Sholem Aleichem in the late 19th century. The story centers on Tevye, the father of five daughters, and his attempts to maintain his family and Jewish religious traditions while outside influences encroach upon their lives. One of his dilemmas is trying to find husbands for his older daughters, who have strong wills and ideas of their own about who they want to marry.

Tevye makes an arrangement for his oldest daughter to marry a widower, the local butcher, who is quite wealthy and about three times the age of his daughter. As he thinks about the arrangement, he reviews to himself all the reasons why this man should not marry his daughter. Like most fathers, the idea of losing his daughter is hard to take, but the thought of losing her to someone unworthy is even worse.

But as he gazes off into the distance, contemplating the situation, he finally says to himself, slowly and with great feeling, "But...he is a good man..." And that settles it for him. He agrees to the marriage. By the way, if you haven't seen the play, that marriage never actually happens. She ends up marrying the man she really loves, a poor struggling tailor.

In the book of Acts, when the apostles in Jerusalem learned of a growing, rapidly expanding work up in Antioch, they sent Barnabas there to assist in the work and to encourage the new believers. In Acts 11:24 we find the reason they chose him for this purpose. It says, "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." The fact that he was a good man settled the question for them, too.

So, what is a 'good' man? "Good" is one of the most common words in the English language, yet it is so vague, it defies easy explanation. Funk & Wagnall's dictionary has 21 definitions for the word "good."

In the Greek, we find just about an equal number of variations. The word, goodness—*agathosune*, which we find in Gal. 5:22—the fruit of the Spirit—is actually used only 4 times in the New Testament. However, the root of that word, good—*agathos*, is used 102 times in the NT. In Thayers Greek-English lexicon there are about a dozen definitions given—most of two columns.

However, the definitions, whether in the Greek or in English, include such terms or ideas as: genuine, virtuous, honorable, healthy, generous, desirable, pleasant, reliable, worthy, morally excellent...

Given these definitions, I ask myself, who could possibly qualify as good? Certainly not me. A look into the Scripture points us directly to God as the essence of goodness. When Jesus was here on earth a young man came to him one day and asked him a question. We find it in Luke 18:18-19:

"And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (Luke 18:18-19 ESV)

"God is good" – the very essence of goodness is embodied in the person of God. This morning I want us to consider the goodness of God, and then carry that over into the question of how I can be a good person.

The Goodness of God

What do we mean when we say that God is good? We've all used that phrase—we've said it, we've sung it, but what does it mean? How do we define the goodness of God? Well, the Bible gives us a number of clues.

A. God's Goodness is in His Glory

In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked to see the Lord's glory. Here is what God replied... "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." (Ex. 33:19-20 ESV)

God equates His glory with His goodness. In order for Moses to wit-

ness the glory of God he had to first recognize the goodness of God, which is rooted in His grace and mercy (compassion) – v. 19.

This is the very foundation for understanding goodness. Goodness, in the character of God is inextricably linked to his grace and compassion. He is good because he is gracious. He is good because he is compassionate. And this, in turn, is equated with His glory. Our God is a glorious God because He is a good God.

B. God's Goodness is in His Provision

National provision for Israel - in 1 Kings 8 we see God's goodness linked to his provision for the nation of Israel. The occasion was the dedication of the temple. After Solomon had offered thousands of animals as sacrifices, and had provided a national feast which lasted seven days, we read, "On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for ***all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people.***" (1 Kings 8:66 ESV)

God's goodness was displayed by providing for his people a king with tremendous forethought (David) and another king with wisdom to carry out his father's vision (Solomon).

Physical / Material provision – the psalmist says, "Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad; you restored your inheritance as it languished; your flock found a dwelling in it; ***in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.***" (Psalms 68:9-10 ESV)

Spiritual Provision - "Let them thank the LORD for *his steadfast love*, for his wondrous works to the children of men! For he satisfies the longing soul, and ***the hungry soul he fills with good things.***" (Psalms 107:8-9 ESV) He provides goodness to the soul – note the connection to his steadfast love, a reflection of his compassion and grace.

So, God's goodness is in His glory and in his provision...

C. God's Goodness is in His Protection

"Oh, ***how abundant is your goodness***, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked ***for those who take refuge in you***, in the sight of the children of mankind! In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues." (Psalms 31:19-20 ESV)

God's goodness is seen in his protection over his children in the face

of dangerous or difficult circumstances. One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 121 which speaks of God's providential care and protection.

D. God's Goodness is in His Presence

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (Psalms 23:6 ESV) There is, in the mind of the psalmist David, an assurance that in the presence of the Lord he also enjoys all the goodness of the Lord.

So we see that God is, in His very nature, the essence of goodness. God is good, even when we see troubles and trials in our life. None of that changes the goodness of God. But the question is, how does that carry over into my life? What does it mean to be a good man or a good woman?

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. It is clear that if the Spirit is reigning on the throne of our life and He is producing his fruit in us, then this quality of goodness must be evident to some degree. We must be good people.

Goodness in our Lives

There are three factors related to goodness in our lives, which I would like to mention this morning.

A. The Source of Goodness in our Life...

In order to be good, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Goodness is a fruit produced by the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us as believers – Gal. 5:22.

Earlier we looked at the description of Barnabas in Acts 11:24. There it told us that Barnabas was "...a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Certainly the fact that he was a good man was related to the fact that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit's presence, and apart from the Holy Spirit's work in us, we can never be truly good in the Biblical sense.

B. The Meaning Goodness in our Life...

To be good, as the Bible describes goodness, we must be morally upright. We spoke earlier about the many definitions of the word good. But the bottom line is that "good" is defined as moral excellence. To be good is to be morally right.

The Bible continually contrasts good with evil. They are opposites.

To be good means we cannot be evil.

“So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.” (Matthew 7:17-18 ESV)

So to be good, we must be morally pure. There must be an inner cleanness or purity. Paul speaks of a good conscience. By that, we mean having inner purity and moral uprightness, knowing that there is nothing in my heart that accuses me. Goodness is moral excellence. This involves honesty, integrity, and purity of life.

** Just a note: There is such a thing as right and wrong. God has absolute moral standards, and to violate those standards is to court punishment and disaster.

C. The Outworking of Goodness in our Life...

Goodness must be demonstrated in our actions. It is not enough to “be good.” The Bible also speaks much about “doing good.”

In “*The Holy Spirit and His Gifts*” O. J. Sanders writes, “Goodness is more than a kindly disposition; it is a kindly action that must find expression, as in the case of Dorcas, who was “full of good works.” He refers to Acts 9:36 - “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.” (ESV) Good works are the outgrowth of a good conscience and a good character.

“For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

“... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, **bearing fruit in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10 ESV)

So goodness, in its purist form, is first of all an inner godliness and purity – moral excellence. But it is also a life filled with good deeds—actions that please God and benefit others.

Conclusion

So, what is a “good man”? Honest, genuine, virtuous, honorable, generous, desirable, pleasant, healthy, proper, morally excellent.

These are all definitions of goodness. And when I look at them, I have to say if that’s what it means to be a good man, then I could never be good. Yet, as God’s children, filled with His Holy Spirit, we are called to be good for...

“The fruit of the Spirit is ... goodness.”

One final thing I must make clear before we close this morning. Many times we hear people say, “He is such a good person.” Often it is said with the idea that the person’s goodness is what makes them acceptable to God. The Bible is very clear that our goodness is not what God is looking for. What He wants is first of all to be our Savior. This requires repentance and faith.

Then, when we know Jesus Christ, and have been forgiven by his blood, we are given the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. As He begins to work in us and to produce his fruit in our lives, then we will begin to see the goodness that pleases God.

The only goodness that meets God’s approval is that which comes from the Holy Spirit.

So, as believers in Christ, I ask this question. When people look at you or me, do they say, “He is a good man” or “She is a good woman.”

I trust that they do.