

## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GOODNESS

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading:

**Intro:** Today as we come to the sixth characteristic out of the nine which make up “the fruit of the Spirit.” It is the word, “goodness.” In the Greek it is the word **ἀγαθωσύνη**. In addition to our text in Galatians 5, this word is only used three other times in the NT. Let me give them to you:

- 1) Romans 15:14 – “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”
- 2) Ephesians 5:9 – “(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)”
- 3) 2 Thessalonians 1:11 – “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.”

You can readily see from the references where this word is used in the NT, that it only appears in Paul’s writings. We know that all of Paul’s epistles which are a part of the Word of God, were written under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God, but the Spirit did not hesitate to use the understanding of the writers of Scripture and their experience of God’s dealing in their lives, to enforce the truth of what they wrote from God.

The word “goodness” has been described as

The perpetual desire and sincere study, not only to abstain from every appearance of evil, but to do good to the bodies and souls of men to the utmost of our ability. But all of this must spring from a good heart – a heart purified by the Spirit of God; and then, the tree being made *good*, the *fruit* must be good also (Clarke, Adam, VI, p. 413).

So in defining “goodness” we have to begin with the character of God, and then by the work of the Holy Spirit, begin to experience the desire to act toward others as we know that God acts toward us. Most of you know that we read in the Bible, in the OT as well as the NT, that God is a good God. He does not try to be good; He is good. He never tempts us to do evil, nor does He ever do evil to us. As Paul said in Romans 8:28,

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them

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that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Some translations of this verse read, “And we know that God works all things together for good . . .” It just doesn’t happen; God is doing it, and it applies to all things. And the “good” is that God is conforming us to be like His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we count on the goodness of God, don’t we? If we don’t, we should. When God created the heavens and the earth, including Adam and Eve, He looked at it all and pronounced it very good. That is, it was totally pleasing to Him. It all was just as He intended for it to be. Creation itself is a revelation of the goodness of God. And infinitely more is our salvation a continual revelation of God’s goodness. This does not mean that we don’t have our painful experiences, nor that our lives are trouble free. Sometimes it appears that God is not good. But that is just our apprehension. We all have our times when we are inclined to doubt the goodness of God. That is why we need to know this truth, and stand by faith on it, when winds of trouble and sorrow blow in our direction.

Now the definition of “goodness” that I gave to you says that it needs to be our constant desire, and I would add, our prayer, that we would see the opportunities which God sets before us to show “goodness” to others. We need to be thinking about this continually. And, if we are sincere in wanting to be good to other people, we must stay away from even the appearance of evil, or sin. Our sin grieves God. It has a hurtful influence upon ourselves. And it sends the wrong message to people in the world. And let us remember that this trait of character can only be shown in us as it is produced by the Spirit of God.

Illustrations are always helpful for us, especially illustrations that we find in the Word of God. When I think of goodness, one person I think about is Joseph in the book of Genesis. You remember how he had a couple of dreams in which God told him that the day was coming when his brothers would fall down and do homage before him. I think we can question his wisdom in telling his brothers about his dreams because they were already jealous of him because he obviously was his father’s favorite. His dreams made them hate him even more.

Well, you remember how Jacob, his father, sent him to check on his brothers when they were out taking care of Jacob’s sheep. They recognized that this was their opportunity to kill Joseph. Reuben stood up for

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Joseph, but when some slave traders came by, they sold Joseph to them and they took Joseph down into Egypt, and they sold him to Potiphar, a high ranking officer in Pharaoh's army. Joseph went through thirteen years of difficulty, but at last when he interpreted some dreams for Pharaoh, he was made second to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt.

In the course of time there was a severe famine throughout that whole area, and the only place that Jacob and his sons could get food was in Egypt. Joseph had been in charge of collecting grain during seven years of plenty, and then he was in charge of selling it to the people during the seven years of famine. In the course of time Joseph's brothers came down into Egypt and had to deal with Joseph, but they did not recognize him because they thought he had died by that time. When they found out that it was Joseph, they naturally feared for their lives. Joseph, however, was merciful to them, and actually brought his whole family down into Egypt where he took care of them until the famine was over, and afterwards.

Eventually Jacob, their father, died, and this revived the fear in the hearts of his brothers that this was the time that Joseph would get even with them. When they came to seek forgiveness from Joseph, Joseph wept with grief that they would think that of him. I want to read to you what Joseph said to them because it is such a perfect illustration of goodness. I am reading from Genesis 50:19-21:

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Previously when he first told his brothers that he was Joseph, his brothers were troubled and fearful at that time as to what Joseph might do to them. He could have had them all killed. But instead he had said this which is recorded in Genesis 45:4-8:

4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet

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there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

All of the years had not changed Joseph's heart toward his brothers. God had enabled Joseph to see that even in the bad thing that they had done to him when they got rid of their younger brother, that God was working through the whole thing to turn their sin into a great blessing which was actually going to preserve their lives many years afterward.

You see, it was an amazing act of goodness on the part of God to turn what they meant to be a curse, into a blessing for themselves. And not only that, but while the Lord was working to preserve those brothers in years to come, He was also working His goodness into Joseph's heart so that he had no thought of seeking revenge on his brothers, but was delighted to show them mercy.

We turn from this story, not only marveling at the amazing goodness of God toward the brothers, but also at God's goodness in putting in Joseph's heart total forgiveness toward his brothers. Joseph couldn't have done what He did apart from the goodness of God to him, but he wanted his brothers to know that he had been taught to look beyond the sin of his brothers to see the goodness of God in all of their lives.

And the story is permanently recorded in Scripture that we might see the goodness of God in our lives.

The words "gentleness" and "goodness" are so closely related that many students of the Greek consider them practically synonymous. As I have expressed before, there must be a relationship between the words that Paul used in verses 22 and 23 of Galatians 5 to show that one does lead to the next, and that they are tied together like links in a chain. And each word has to be considered in the light of the character of God and the character of the Son of God. So "goodness" has to be considered in the light of that which is good to God. And there is no place where the goodness of God is shown more in its true light than in the Gospel.

Look with me for a few moments at 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

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It seems that Paul's first use of this word, "goodness," was in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica. There the Apostle Paul spoke of "goodness" in connection with his praying for the people of God in Thessalonica. And this suggests that it ought to have a major place in our prayers for each other, as well as for ourselves. We must never get over the goodness of God in saving us. And you will notice at the end of Paul's prayer in verse 12 he mentioned the grace of God in connection with the goodness of God. The only way the Lord could manifest His goodness in saving us was to save us by grace. Notice at the end of verse 12 in 2 Thessalonians 1 he spoke of "the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." It was grace and grace alone that opened the way for us to be saved. God manifested His grace in loving corrupt and defiled sinners like we all were. There was not one single reason in us that would move God to do any-thing about our sin. There was not a single evidence of worthiness in us that would make Christ obligated to do anything about our sin. It was God's grace that opened the way for us to experience the goodness of God in salvation.

Now Paul was mindful of this, and that is why he felt burdened to pray for the believers in Thessalonica. You will notice that Paul spoke of salvation as "this calling." God has called everyone of us to Himself, or we would never have come. His call in our lives was an effective call because it was an enabling call. Now when Paul pray that "God would count you worthy of this calling," he did not mean that we can show by our lives after we are saved, that we show that God did the right thing in saving us, that we are worthy of what He has done. But we show ourselves worthy by the recognition we give as believers to His goodness, that we do not take any of the credit for ourselves, but we glorify the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the grace of God, and give Him the glory for His good pleasure in extending His goodness to us through Christ. I show that I am worthy of the salvation that I have in Christ by always remembering that it was all by "the grace of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that twice in verse 12 Paul spoke of our Lord with His full title and name. He is the Lord whose Name is Jesus, and He came as the anointed One of God.

It is no wonder that Paul said in Galatians 6, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). As long as we live, and then through all eternity, we confess that our sin was so great that nothing could be sufficient for our salvation but the goodness of God,

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the undeserved goodness of God, in the death of Jesus Christ for our sins. The Holy Spirit will continually remind us that we did not deserve to be saved except through the goodness of God in sending Jesus Christ to die that I might be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life.

Now the fact that this “goodness” of God, is a part of the fruit of the Spirit, is so there will be a constant reminder in my heart, a growing consciousness, that there was no reason in me as to why God would save me, but that it is all due to His goodness in sending Jesus Christ to die for me that I might be saved.

Now before I close look with me at the Ephesian passage where Paul used this word “goodness”: Ephesians 5:9.

I am sure that you have noticed that this verse is a parenthesis. Now if you read verse 8 and then skip to verse 10, the two verses make perfectly good sense:

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

...

10 Proving what is acceptable to the Lord.

Why is there a parenthesis between these verses? What is a parenthesis? It is a statement in the middle of a statement in which a further word of explanation is given to add to the meaning of the statement, and set apart by curved lines ( ). Our translators have done this, not because the sentence is incomplete without them, but to show in what spirit the command in verses 8 and 10 is to be obeyed.

In this case our walk is to be characterized by “goodness and righteousness and truth.” And probably “goodness” is placed first because our lives should reflect that we are what we are, not because of our goodness, but by the goodness of God.

**Concl:** “Longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness” are very rare today, even among those of us who are Christians. And perhaps the very fact that they are rare, makes them very attractive when they are seen. They are very convincing evidence that while we used to be “darkness,” now we are “light,” not because of anything in us, but due to the goodness of God, and to the righteousness of God, and to the truth, or probably the faithfulness of God. This is a very important parenthesis. Let’s make sure that we are paying special attention to it.