



The Fruit of the Spirit - Faithfulness

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The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. What do you think of when you hear the word goodness, or the phrases a good sermon or a good job? It refers to something that meets a certain standard, someone's expectations. It fulfills the goal of the job. The sermon does what sermons are suppose to do — change lives. The meaning of goodness often depends on the context. A good book is different for different people and purposes. A good book for scholarly research is quite different from a good book for bedtime reading; and what is good recreation for one person may not be for the next.

What do you mean when you say you had a good experience? Each person may mean something different, but I believe there is one principle in common — the idea that there was some kind of benefit to us. A good deed benefits someone in some way. It is an act of kindness.

And what is a good friend? Probably the common quality above all others is someone who is dependable, someone you can count on to be there for you in need. The relationship benefits you.

Finally, what is a good heart? It is sincere, honest, and moral. But who defines morality? For Christians, God is the One who defines moral goodness. He sets the standards, and it is His expectations that must be met. The Scriptures reveal an ultimate and absolute definition of goodness.

Thus, from our common usage of the idea of goodness I see three aspects that all derive from the first. Goodness, or the idea of being good, means that the thing fulfills its purpose or the expectations for it. In the ultimate context of God's expectations, goodness includes the second aspect of morality, and that is defined by God. The third aspect is that in most situations the purpose or expectation involves some form of benefit.

These three aspects are just what is found in a study of goodness in the Scriptures. By looking at the usage of this word in the circles of context of the fruit of the Spirit passage beginning Galatians 5:22, we can see these principles expressed. The circles of context from the far to the near are: the Greek culture, the Hebrew background of the Old Testament, the rest of the New Testament, the rest of Paul's writings, and then Galatians itself.

The Greek word for goodness in Galatians 5:22 is agathosune. Besides being used in this passage, it occurs about a dozen times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament from around 200 BC, called the Septuagint. There are no references to it in existing secular Greek literature from ancient times. Should we make anything out of this? The biblical writers simply added the Greek equivalent of the "ness" ending to the word good. But the idea of goodness was not new to the culture. We may not use the word teachableness, but that does not mean we do not have the concept in our culture. However, secular Greek writers did not know the depths of God's definition of moral goodness.

The root adjective of this word, agathos, was used in the Greek culture as our word good is used in the examples given above: for practical goodness in the sense of a good result, a benefit, or what we call a blessing; for moral goodness; and for something pleasing to the gods. There is another word for good, kalos, which some say emphasizes the aesthetic angle; but I have found it to be used interchangeably with agathos in Paul's passages, and in the Gospels.

The Hebrew word for good is *tov* and has about the same range of meaning as has been discussed for the English and Greek words. Simple concordance work shows this. Various enlightening illustrations will be discussed below, but first a point needs to be made that the original languages do not open up any great insights on this word. A person does not have to be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to understand the biblical teaching on goodness. But knowing how to use the language does make possible quicker study and more confident conclusions.

The first place in the Old Testament where something is called good is Genesis 1. As God spoke into existence each phase of creation, He saw that it was good. What does this mean? How could it have been bad or evil? I believe the point here involves expected function. God's creation did what He intended it to do. It accomplished its purpose. It met His expectations. And that is one of the basic ideas of the goodness the Spirit wants to manifest in our lives.

In Genesis 50:20, Joseph says to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about his present result, to preserve many people alive" (NASB). The Septuagint has *agathos* here. God had a purpose, which was to save many lives. God's good purpose in every situation is ultimately to save lives. Joseph suffered some very hurtful things, but they turned out to great benefit for him and for many others. They fulfilled the purpose of God, His redemptive purpose.

Deuteronomy 30:15 presents the covenant choice: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction" (NIV). The word prosperity here in the NIV is *tov*, the word for good or goodness. God calls His people to choose His way which will be of great benefit to them rather than great harm. The opposite of life and good is death and destruction. Again we see God's ultimate beneficial purpose of saving life and providing a new quality of life and well-being in fellowship with Him.

The sense of moral good versus evil is seen in Genesis 2 in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Evil here has the idea of rebellion against God. The character of God defines moral goodness. Exodus 33:19 shows this when in response to Moses' request to see God's glory the Lord says: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD [Yahweh], in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." This says that all the Lord is represented by His name, is called His goodness, and is expressed in merciful, gracious love which offers forgiveness and salvation to all who will receive it. This association of goodness, forgiveness, and love is seen also in Psalm 86:5. Thus, there is an overlapping of goodness with other fruit of the Spirit such as kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and, of course, love. Goodness is a quality of God associated so closely with Him that people use it as a euphemism for Him when making an interjection, such as "Oh, goodness!"

Besides describing the character of God, goodness describes His acts on behalf of His people, the benefits of His salvation. At the end of Psalm 23 David confidently proclaims: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." One of the places in the Septuagint where *agathosune* is used is Nehemiah 9:25 (and 35). It says there in going over the history of Israel that they enjoyed God's great goodness, which refers to the benefits of His salvation.

Finally, Amos 5:4-15 is a powerful passage which parallels seeking the Lord with seeking good and doing good for others. Verse 6 says, "Seek the Lord that you may live," and verse 14, "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live" (NASB). The good in this context is the opposite of oppressing the poor and the needy. Verse 15 indicates it is hating evil and loving good by maintaining justice in the courts. Seeking good meant seeking to benefit rather than harm the needy, thus demonstrating the kind of saving, redemptive purpose God has.

Significant New Testament references must include the commendation of the servants in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:21, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (NIV). Good is associated with faithfulness, and it refers to conduct which goes even beyond expectations in taking care of the master's capital. These servants made an extra effort and even took a risk to bring their master gain and benefit, because of their commitment to him. Goodness involves going beyond the mere requirements.

Luke 8:15 talks about good ground and then speaks about a person with an honest and a good heart who hears the Word and responds to it. So here goodness involves the honesty of receiving God's Word repentantly, then responding in faith and obedience, and accomplishing His purpose for one's life.

One of the most famous and interesting passages is Luke 18:18,19. The rich young ruler calls Jesus good Teacher, or Master in some versions. “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good, except God alone” (NIV). We can talk about good people and good things in terms of human standards, and our expectations for them, but when it really comes down to it, who sets the ultimate standard and expectations for goodness except God? Jesus was challenging the young ruler to consider the truth that He was God come in the flesh, and that appreciating God’s holiness and the gift of His Son would end the thinking that there is anything one can do to earn salvation. Third John 11 says that the one who does good is of God. True goodness can only flow out of a life right with God and yielded to Him.

An important example from Acts is Barnabas in 11:24. He is called “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (NIV). He encouraged others, according to chapter 4, and was generous and honest. Later, in giving Paul a chance and then Mark a second chance, he showed great patience and unselfishness which reached out to benefit someone else. He demonstrated the connection between being filled with the Spirit and these qualities in one’s life.

Paul’s use of goodness outside of Galatians includes an interesting passage in Romans 5:7: “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die” (NASB). You can name righteous people who do things right and never break the rules, but you do not feel like dying for them. However, the person who benefits you somehow, out of generosity and kindness, going beyond what is right, is one you might die for. Goodness goes beyond righteousness.

Another famous passage is Romans 7:18-21: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (NIV). In our sinful, selfish human nature there is no motivation to live God’s way and accomplish His purposes.

Romans 15:14 says the Christians in Rome were “full of goodness [agathosunes], complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (NIV). They were able to benefit and to help one another fulfill God’s purpose in their lives. They were characterized by God’s moral qualities.

Chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians give specific ways goodness is to be expressed in our lives. Some of these are, beginning in 4:25, speaking truthfully, not sinning in our anger, not stealing but doing something “useful” (NIV). That word useful translates the Greek word agathos, usually translated good. We are not to do hurtful, harmful things but helpful, beneficial, useful things. Then, continuing in verse 29, we are to build up one another with our conversation. We must get rid of all malice and be kind, compassionate, forgiving, imitators of God and Christ, living lives of love. In this way we align ourselves with the Holy Spirit and avoid grieving Him.

Furthermore, verses 5–12 of chapter 5 remind us that God’s goodness in His people avoids sexual immorality, impurity, greediness, all disobedience, and fruitless deeds of darkness. On the contrary, God’s children live as children of light and seek to please the Lord, “for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (verse 9, NIV). Here Paul clearly parallels righteousness and truth with goodness. Finally he calls for us to be filled with the Spirit, blessing God, blessing others, and submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

This brings us to Paul’s context in Galatians. He is clarifying the gospel message of our salvation by grace through faith, and not by keeping the law. He shows that it means freedom from bondage to the law, freedom from condemnation, and freedom from bondage to our old sinful nature. In 5:6 Paul says that what matters is faith working through love. This freedom is not to mean license, he says in 5:13, but serving one another in love. We are exhorted in 5:16-25 to walk in the Spirit, or live by the Spirit and bear good fruit. This is the opposite of fulfilling the works of the old sinful nature which are sexual immorality, hurting other people with strife, and wild, drunken, destructive behavior from alcohol.

Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit, like his list of the works of the flesh, seems to have a lot of overlapping. Goodness following right after kindness seems to be closely associated with it. In fact, that same Greek word for kindness (chrestotes) used in Galatians 5:22 appears in Romans 11:22, translated goodness in the King James Version where it refers to the goodness and severity of God. I believe there are many ways in which all the fruit are interrelated. To understand

one must understand all the fruit.

A demonstration of God's kind of goodness is called for in Galatians 6 where Paul appeals for gently and humbly ministering to others who are stumbling. We are to carry each other's burdens and care enough to get involved with one another to prevent moral and spiritual ruin.

Finally, verses 7—10 read, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (NIV). We must keep sowing to the Spirit, which means we must keep seeking God and letting His qualities be developed in us and flow through us by the Spirit. When we do, we will benefit others; we will reach out beyond our own selfish needs and be self-giving, or generous as some translations refer to this fruit. God's goodness goes beyond what is legally right, goes the extra mile, and gives what is needed and what will benefit, build up, and bless others.

The fruit of the Spirit must continually be cultivated. We do not produce them once for all time. We need to sow to the Spirit continually so goodness will be expressed in our lives instead of the old selfish qualities. If I meditate on envy, jealousy, lusts, worries, or fears I am going to reap from them some very selfish evil fruit in my behavior and relationships. I may explode all over someone and cause great harm rather than good. But when I sow to the Spirit by meditating on God's qualities through the Word, I will bear good fruit of kind, generous, beneficial acts toward others. I will help others experience God's forgiving, restoring love in Christ through faith. I will also live a morally pure life according to God's holiness. Bearing goodness means God can depend on me to be honest, repent of my sins, and turn away from evil. We need to continually seek to express this goodness in our responses and actions toward others.

In conclusion, think of your favorite apple. What do you expect it to be like when you bite into it? What are the qualities of a good apple? Now, think about what you are like when someone bites into you. Do they receive goodness from you? Remember, only God in you is good.

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