

February 23, 2025

Being Fruitful

“Goodness”

Galatians 5:22-23

Titus 3:4-8

Intro:

What do we mean when we apply the word “good” to something or someone? “That was a good meal,” or “That was a good movie,” or “That was a good shot.” In those scenarios it is an acknowledgement of our expectations being met or exceeded – the food was particularly tasty (or maybe the food wasn’t memorable, but the company around the table was), the movie is something that we would want to see multiple times, or the skill needed to make that shot was phenomenal. Sometimes we apply “good” to a professional function – a good doctor or teacher or parent, meaning that the person is particularly skilled in their area of expertise, and probably we are giving them a promotional plug too. Sometimes we use it with our pets, especially dogs, “Who’s a good boy?” when we are particularly happy that the dog didn’t chew up the couch cushions.

As we look at the fruit of goodness, are those applications adequate? Goodness is more than just a skill, the meeting of expectations, or relief at not being disappointed. If we go back to the professionals, what is it that makes them good, in our opinion? Certainly, their skill at their profession, but there is usually something more that we see. We are seeing in that individual a level of integrity and trustworthiness. Goodness is not just doing a good job; it is related to how we interact with others and how they interact with us. This is a good mechanic not just because he could fix my car, but because he didn’t overcharge me and didn’t try to up-sell me a repair I didn’t need. She is a good teacher because even though I am the student, she doesn’t speak down to me.

In the Bible, goodness and kindness are often closely related, as we find in the fruit of the Spirit. Good people are often also kind people.

Character of God:

In *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, there is a moment when the Pevensie kids are all huddled together in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver learning about this amazing being known as Aslan. When they discover that Aslan is a lion, Susan expresses a hope that he is a safe lion, as she would be nervous about meeting an unsafe lion. Mrs. Beaver assures her that it is quite natural to be nervous, and anyone who doesn't feel that way is either very brave or just silly. At this point Lucy repeats the concern, saying, "Then he isn't safe?". Mr. Beaver settles the matter by saying, "Safe? Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he is good. He's the King, I tell you."

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the book, Aslan represents Jesus.

Since the fruit of the Spirit comes from the Spirit of God working within us (as I have been saying throughout this sermon series), we need to continue to keep the character of God in front of us as we work out how the fruit of goodness becomes evident in our own lives.

In churches you can sometimes hear the responsive phrase: "God is good!"

"All the time."

"And all the time,"

"God is good!"

What does it mean when we say that God is good? We could go on a lengthy study of all the times in the Old Testament that God's goodness is acknowledged, but that would take us much longer than we have time for this morning.

However, if you would like to do some reading on your own you could start with Psalm 136, Psalm 119, and Deuteronomy 32:4. Christopher Wright concludes that those passages, and others like them, bring us to a conclusion that when we say that God is good it means that He is "generous and trustworthy, without any deception or crookedness, and he is like that always, through and through like a solid rock, in his own character and in all his actions. That means, like an axiom in

mathematics, it is an affirmed truth that is foundational to all the other deductions and calculations you may make. No matter what the circumstances are or appear to be, God *is* good and God *does* good.”¹

What about when bad things happen, or evil is at play? Well, the story of Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-47, 50) shows us that even when people make bad choices that are intended for evil, God can bring good from them. “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” (Genesis 50:20). What this means is that God is sovereign over even evil actions and can bring about good things from them, even though they originated from an evil desire. Evil was done, but God is still in charge and he is good.

The goodness of God is shown through the generous giving of his Son as a sacrifice for our sin. This is goodness that overcomes evil. The cross is completely evil, but what comes from the cross – grace, forgiveness, Jesus’ victory over death and sin, is good that overcomes the evil. This is essence of the message that Paul was giving to Titus in the passage we read earlier. And it is the challenge to us to pursue goodness in our own lives, because we have placed our trust in God and in His goodness.

The fruit of goodness that is evidenced in our lives is not a reflection of our own ability to be good, but is evidence of the Spirit of God in us. His character is displayed in our lives. This is what Jesus is getting at in Luke 6:43-45:

“⁴³ “A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. ⁴⁴ A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. ⁴⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.”

The Holy Spirit is the treasure that is in our heart.

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of The Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 99.

Conclusion:

So we are to do good. Doing good is our work against evil. When we act with kindness, grace, mercy, and generosity we press back against the evil that is done to others in this world. Doing good is something that Christians are instructed to do time and time again in the New Testament. Not because by doing good deeds we will earn any particular standing in heaven, but because the goodness of God's character is shaping our own and is producing that kind of fruit in our daily actions.

Every day we are presented with opportunities to be good, and I don't mean "well behaved". It is all those character qualities that I have already mentioned, as well as integrity and doing what is right. Doing what is right is a tricky one. Who determines what is right? Sometimes "right" means going against what society says, or what the law says. Sometimes "right" is costly and can hurt us. Acting on the part of "right" carries a heavy weight of responsibility. Even so, we are still to go out into the world and do good. So, we need to remember to keep our everyday encounters and decisions covered in prayer. Seek God for the wisdom and insight to know what is "good and right" and the best way for us to act in those moments. And in the end, we should hold all open to God and, as Wright says, "Do what is good! Do what is right! And let God take responsibility for the consequences."²

Let's pray.

² Wright, 111.