

## Fruit of the Spirit. Goodness

What makes someone a “good” person? We can all do good things, especially when others are watching. But what are we like when alone? Are we the same on the inside as we are on the outside? Do our hearts match our public actions?

In the Old Testament God gave His people commandments. Here were the guidelines. This is what to do to please God and be a good person and receive His blessing. It was an outward system of regulation that no one proved able to keep completely. This Law just underlined how sinful and flawed we are before God. The prophet Jeremiah looked forward to the days of the Messiah, to a ‘New Covenant’, a *New Testament* when God would write His laws inwardly in human hearts.

The Christian Good News is that these days have come! Jesus Son of God came and lived among us, perfectly keeping the law of God, dying as a perfect sacrifice for our sin, rising from death and reascending to Heaven. So now, in fulfilment to Old Testament prophecy the Holy Spirit has been generously poured out into the hearts of all Christian believers.

As we submit daily in prayer to the Spirit of Christ dwelling inside us, He produces spiritual fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness in our lives. The Holy Spirit produces elements of God’s own character in us. We are enabled to become genuinely good like God.

Psalm 23 speaks of the goodness of God. Because the good and kind Lord is my Shepherd I shall not be in want. I’ll be taken good care of – provided for, protected and guided. In the valley of the shadow of death I’ll be comforted. Even when surrounded by enemies, my Shepherd will nourish and strengthen me because His goodness and mercy are accompanying me all the days of my life, promising me a home in His house eternally.

God is good – His steadfast love endures – forever! God is morally pure yet merciful and generous and as Psalm 112 makes clear, He richly blesses those who practice goodness out of reverence for Him.

“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in His commands ... even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous ...” .

What does it mean in practice to be a good person? Well let’s think of it as both inward and outward. Goodness is both an inward attitude of mind and heart and it is an outward lifestyle of positive action.

Goodness is an attitude or quality of heart and mind that governs how we think, feel and relate to things and people. Let’s consider some examples.

God saw all that He had created and said it was good. Creation reflects His glory so we will enjoy the natural order with wonder and treat it with reverence and respect. We live in a society where the trends are increasingly immoral. Sometimes Christians must oppose certain trends, upholding God’s standards. And yet when faced with someone who is ill or poor or lonely, whatever their beliefs, whatever their sins we will look on them as Christ does and see them as made in God’s image, precious, worth dying for.

What we are in our hearts dictates what we do in practice, how we treat others around us. Evil and selfishness nurtured in our hearts will result in bitter, cruel words and actions. But as God’s goodness begins to dominate our hearts and minds we will find the ability to live positively, benevolently.

Grateful for all God has provided for us in this earth we will share and practice responsible stewardship of its resources. We will promote and demonstrate godly values, “practising what we preach”. And yet while God’s goodness in us will cause us to hate sin and corruption,

that same goodness will cause us to look on sinners with real compassion. Remembering that we too have sinned and depend on God's grace and mercy we will look for opportunities to show justice, kindness, generosity to people, whatever their circumstances.

We are to hate sin but love sinners because God does and God is good.

Perhaps nowhere is this better demonstrated in the Bible as in John 8 where Jesus is confronted with someone caught red-handed in adultery. Jesus as the sinless Judge was quite within His rights to punish her but instead He offers mercy. "I choose not to condemn you. I forgive you. You're free to go with my blessing of peace. But this is wrong and you know it and I want you to change your lifestyle now."

There's something very powerful and very beautiful about this encounter. And in fact one of the Greek words translated "good" in the New Testament is "kaloo" which also means "beautiful". Our Lord is beautiful in His goodness and we are beautiful like Him when we conduct ourselves in ways that are noble, honourable, merciful, upholding God's standards yet showing compassion to our sinful fellow men and women. Indeed people may be more inclined to listen to the Gospel or consider God's standards if they are persuaded by the goodness they experience in us.

There is certainly no shortage of opportunity. We live in a world plagued with poverty, war, disease and natural disasters. We live in a society racked with social problems, addiction not to mention the common sorrows of disappointment, financial hardship, sickness and bereavement. Plenty of occasion to show thoughtfulness, charity willingness to do what is right and constructive, sympathetic and helpful.

Paul encourages the Galatian believers: "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.”

Being and doing good brings glory to God and helps spread His kingdom, resulting in eternal life for many. With gratitude for Jesus our Good Shepherd let us submit to His Spirit – to being and doing just like Him.

Amen