

The Fruit of the Spirit - Goodness

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[0 : 0 0] For a short while I'd like us to turn to Galatians chapter 5 where we read of the fruit of the Spirit which is the topic that we've been studying over the past few weeks. Let's read again Galatians 5 verses 22 and 23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. This has been the topic of our study for the past few weeks and today we come to focus on goodness. And as we've been saying throughout this study the fruit of the Spirit is emphasising two great points. The fact that these items that are listed here are the effect that having God's Spirit dwelling in us should have and they're also the evidence of the fact that we are following the Lord Jesus Christ and his Spirit dwells in us. It has an inward and an outward effect, it changes us and the presence of God's Spirit in us is evident or should be evident to all who look upon us. So that applies to each element of the fruit of the

Spirit and today as we look at goodness we are reminded that as Christians we should be characterised by goodness. Now you may remember that last time we pointed out that kindness and goodness are in many ways very similar and the same is true in Greek as it is in English. These terms overlap in many ways, they correspond very closely. Both these terms can be translated along the lines of goodness, generosity, kindness, benevolence, honesty, all that kind of thing. But you remember that we said the fact that Paul includes them both would surely imply that he's emphasising two different things and so although they're similar terms Paul must be deliberately including them both in order to highlight something specific and so that means we have to ask what exactly does Paul mean. And last time we said that in this situation where you've got a word and you're not exactly sure how to understand it, it's good to look at how this word is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Always remember that if you're not sure how to understand a word think well where else is this word used and if you've got an electronic Bible on your phone or on your computer then you can search for the word and it'll tell you where else it appears. And we did this with kindness, we looked at different versions where the word kindness and we concluded that kindness was emphasised in our conduct with respect to others, how we are to other people. So it's very very much dealing with others and we saw how God has shown us kindness in the way he has acted towards us and we saw that that was true in three ways in terms of what God hasn't done, in terms of what he has done, in terms of what he will do and we as Christians, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, should also be kind to others. That was kindness, what about goodness? What does Paul mean by this word? Well the word good is a very broad word isn't it? When you say that something or someone is good you might be saying that good at football, that's talking about ability isn't it? You might say that it was good food, you're talking then about quality, you might say that somebody is good in terms of the fact that they're well behaved and so there's all sorts of different nuances to this word good and the same is true in Greek, it's very very broad. But if we apply our test and say where else is this word used it'll help us understand. So we have three versions in the New Testament where this exact word goodness appears and we'll read them. Romans 15-14, I myself am satisfied about you my brothers that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. Ephesians 5, 8-10, but at one time you are darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, that's the same word there, and right and true and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. And then lastly the second Thessalonians 1, to this end we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now does that help us? Are we able to see what Paul means by goodness?

Well I think that if you look at those verses we can say that the emphasis seems to be on our own moral condition. Paul is saying that we ourselves are to be full of goodness and that goodness is in terms of that which is right and true, it's a moral standard of conduct and behaviour and by that the name of Jesus is glorified in us and so I think that we can come to the conclusion and this is just in fairly general terms so I think we can say that kindness is emphasising really how we are to other people. Goodness is highlighting how we are with respect to ourselves, our own standard of morality and conduct. In other words as Christians we are to be good, good people to our very core. Now that's very simple but it's well worth thinking about but kindness and goodness go together, they're both essential and it's important to remember that you can actually be one without the other. You might have an international criminal, an notorious individual who is wanted by the FBI and everybody else, he might be a clear and dangerous criminal but he might be very very kind to his hometown, maybe he's from an island or a community and he might use his wealth to be very generous to that community so that you would have somebody who is kind but not good and the other, the opposite is true, you might have somebody who has never broken a law, somebody who is absolutely upright and yet he never helps anybody and so that person would be good in terms of their own morality but not kind and so Paul is highlighting in terms of the fruit of the spirit that as Christians we must be both and I focus today on goodness, that own standard of morality and conduct that should shape all that we are. So that raises the question what does this goodness look like? What kind of people should we be if we're good people what does that mean?

Well the first place to start with that is to look at God because as we've been saying the fruit of the spirit is the fruit of God the Holy Spirit and so the characteristics that that Galatians 5 listed are primarily theological, they are revealing what God himself is like and so if we want to learn what kind of goodness should be found in us the first thing to do is to look at the goodness of God and that's something that is fundamentally true about God, he is good and that is seen both in terms of who he is, his nature and in terms of what he does, his actions and the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God is good. The Psalms that I've made place to see this, good and upright is the Lord, praise the Lord, oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love in Jewish forever, oh taste and see that the Lord is good. So that's telling us that at the core of

[8 : 30] God's being there is a perfect moral uprightness, he is utterly and always good and that's what we mean when we say that God is righteous, that word righteous is referring to a standard of conduct and behavior from which God never ever deviates, therefore God is not just good sometimes like we are, it's reminding us that it is integral to God himself, integral to the very fact that he is God, he is never ever anything other than holy good and perfectly righteous and that reminds us that there are many many things that God can't do and how we should thank God for what he can't do, we often might say God can't do anything and we understand why we say that because God is powerful but it's not strictly speaking through because there are so many things that God can't do and we rejoice in this fact because God cannot lie, God cannot betray, God cannot be greedy, God cannot be selfish, God cannot exploit, God can never ever be bad and that applies to God at every moment of his existence, God and evil, God and badness are just incompatible, whoever does goodness from

God whoever does evil has not seen God, John tells us in his third letter because God and evil are just incompatible and it reminds us of a really important question, how do we know what sin is?

How do we define sin? There's a really interesting question, we talk about sin all the time, how do you know what sin is? How do you define sin? Well the answer is that sin is defined by God because sin is everything that God isn't and that's something that we've got to remember, sin and evil and everything that's wrong with the world is the very opposite of what God is and we have to stretch our minds to grasp this, it's the kind of thing that's easy to say but we've really got to stretch our minds to grasp it because in our experience in this world we will only ever come across people who though they may be very good ultimately fall short of being wholly good and we know that's true from our own experience, people who we maybe admire for so many reasons yet there's always something about them, every one of us has flaws and we can easily think that God is no different, we can think that God is good most of the time but there might be times when God will let me down and that mindset is often shown in the fact that people tend to blame God for things, isn't that true? Something goes wrong, people blame God and by doing that you're thinking basically God's not being good here, God is doing something bad and at one level that's understandable because we don't want to be the kind of people when something bad happens we're just completely blasé and we don't care, evil should always affect us but as God's people it is vital that we always always remember that even though life can be awful, God is always good and that's the theological truth that the Bible is teaching us because we have the kingdom of

God, the kingdom of evil and we are affected by both and sin affects our lives, sin causes problems, sin leaves all sorts of devastation in its wake but alongside that we have God who is always good and we must remember that, it applies in so many situations, if you have a health scare so you have something wrong with your health which is something that we all fear and for those of you who are getting on in years, I'm sure it is a greater reality all the time, constantly worry about your health and when that happens it's awful, it's awful when you face uncertainty, when you face a threat to your health, that's awful but God is good, God is the one who gives grace and help in time of need and we're reminded that though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self has been renewed day by day, if work is stressful which to be honest it is for all of us some if not most of the time when work is breathing down your neck and making you tense and when it's just the pressures of work are there when you arrive in the morning, they come with you when you go home, they're there when you lie down in bed at night, they're there when you wake up in the morning, it's awful when you have that pressure and that stress, that is awful but God is good, always good and he is always a refuge and their strength, a very present help in trouble,

God is there to carry that burden of work, to carry that load of stress, to carry that concern, to strengthen you, that's exactly what he wants to do, sometimes tomorrow can seem overwhelming for whatever reason and when we feel like that it is awful but we must remember that even though tomorrow might seem awful, God is good, that's what Jesus tells us in Matthew 6, he says do not be anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear for the Gentiles seek after these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself, sufficient for the day is its own trouble and that's such a relevant verse relevant verses for our lives today when often tomorrow can be a thought but one thing I can guarantee you about tomorrow is that God will still be good, he will still be good and whatever you experience in life, whatever leaves you broken always remember God is good, the Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit and these are the kind of verses that we need to hold on to when life is hard and that's why our theology has to be at our fingertips every day, don't ever leave theology for Sundays or for when you're reading your Bible or for just certain times, theology should be at our fingertips every day so tomorrow you get grief with a phone call or with an email or with somebody you meet or customer or whatever, have your theology at your fingertips which reminds you that God is always always good and he will always be good to you, he will always help you and this is important because often it's only when things are going well that we say God is good, isn't that true? Something great happens and we say God is good and that's true and it's right to do that but the glorious truth of the Bible is that even when things are really bad God is still good and he will always be good to you so that's a fundamental truth of the Bible is teaching, God is good and if we look at scripture we see that God's goodness is revealed in various ways and I want us to just look at four together, the first one's very brief, first two are quite brief and the second two in more detail, God's goodness is revealed first of all in his actions and the things that God does and we could say a lot of things here but all I want to say is that that is one of the very first things that the Bible teaches us about God, we read Genesis 1 and there God creates the heavens and the earth and again and again and again we are told that his work is good and that message continues throughout the whole of scripture, God's actions are good, he creates, he sustains, he provides, he speaks, he plans, he protects, he says, he gives, God's works, the things he does, they show us how good he is so that's the first thing,

[18 : 34] God's goodness is revealed in his actions, secondly God's goodness is revealed in his law and that's an interesting one because it's so easy to think that God's law is kind of harsh and cold and restricting but the truth is that God's law shows us how good God is, the law is holy, the commandment is holy and righteous and good and the great reason that God has given us in his law is to instruct us and the reason he's instructing us is because he wants what's best for us and that's really very easy to prove because if you look at some of the 10 commandments and you ask yourself the question what's better okay so let's test it with three or four, what's better, is it better to worship a false idol or is it better to worship the true God who can actually save you, what's better is it better to work seven days a week or to have a day of rest, what's better is it better to be unfaithful to your spouse or to be loyal and devoted and trustworthy, what's better is it better to be content with what you have or to be longing jealously after your neighbour's possessions, now those questions are easy aren't they, they're easy questions to answer and that's why God's law is such a precious thing because it is showing us the best way to live, God is keeping us away from the things that will harm us and disappoint us and leave us empty and he's pointing us towards that which is good and that's why God's law is such a precious thing it's revealing God's goodness to us, so God's goodness revealed in his works, God's goodness revealed in his law, thirdly God's goodness is revealed in Jesus Christ and that's really where God's goodness is revealed most perfectly and there's a really interesting version Acts 10:38 it's talking about how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy

Spirit and with power he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him and that's one of the many many ways in which Jesus reveals the nature of God to us, Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature as Hebrews 1 tells us Jesus is showing us God's goodness but what I love about this verse is that it's telling us that Jesus shows us God's goodness just as he went about it's that great thought isn't it Jesus just went about different places different people and all the time he was showing the world a goodness the likes of which it had never seen before so when you think of Jesus think of the moment Jesus woke up in the morning think of everything that he did in a day and think of him going to bed at night at every moment his words his thoughts his actions were always good and that's what you see when you read the gospels read through Matthew

Mark Luke and John what do you see Jesus doing you see him being good to people you see him healing sick people you see him restoring people who are demon possessed you see him welcoming people who are shunned by the rest of society you see him teaching people who are unlearned you see him helping the weak you see him loving people who are unloved and by our standards are unlovable Jesus went about doing such good things and that's why Jesus should always be our hero he should always be our hero always be our role model he should always be our inspiration just imagine that Jesus came to Carlowe today imagine tomorrow morning Jesus came to Carlowe what would he do where would he go well he would knock on the door of everyone who is lonely he would come alongside the people whose lives are a mess and we all know that there are people whose lives are a mess he would teach people who are confused and who are disillusioned and he would encourage people like you and me who are tired who are busy who are stressed and this is where we see what the goodness of God is really like you look at Jesus and ask the question what does God want to do with people who are prostitutes or con men or criminals or who are disabled or who are broken in their lives or who are even insane what does God want to do with people like that well Jesus is showing us that God wants to come alongside them and do them good God wants to be good to them and to give them a life that is far far better that's one of the many amazing things about Christianity and it's one of the many amazing things that Jesus has done and this raises a really important point and theologically and in terms of our own faith because for centuries I think really probably since the very earliest days of the Christian church there has often been appearing a heresy now heresy is what we mean by false teaching there has been a regular appearing heresy in associated with the Christian church a false teaching that basically says Jesus is just a good person and that's a heresy that we still see today you often hear that people say Jesus is just a good person it's not divine he didn't do miracles but he's a good person and he is a role model to us now we oppose that heresy and the reason we oppose that heresy is because we worship Jesus we worship him because he is the Son of God and he is our Lord he is our God he is not just a good person he is far far more than that but we must remember that every heresy every false teaching has an element of truth in it and in our opposition to this heresy we must be very very careful that we do not lose sight of something very precious Jesus is not just a good person but God forbid

that you and I ever forget the fact that he is a good person he is the very embodiment of goodness and he is the best that there has ever ever been and that is only possible because he is the Son of God he is good because he is God but let's never forget how good a person Jesus is and that's why we long to be like him he's our example but to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps he committed no sin and neither was deceit found in his mouth he never did anything bad he was always always good that's where the goodness of God is most perfectly revealed but this brings us to our fourth point

Jesus Christ he is the embodiment of the goodness of God if he was standing here in our midst and we could look at him we would see perfectly the goodness of God and so Jesus in the person that he was in his body he reveals God's goodness but is Jesus's body still on earth?

[27 : 48] No however is Jesus's spirit still on earth is it? Yes it is. Where is it?

In you, in you as Christians and that's why the fruit of that spirit is that you and I must be characterised by goodness to our very core God's goodness is revealed in his works God's goodness is revealed in his law God's goodness is revealed in Jesus Christ and God's goodness is revealed in us and that brings us back to what we said at the very start that our own moral character and conduct must be thoroughly good because through what we are as people the goodness of God is being shown to the world and of course that makes us immediately ask well how do we do that how do we show goodness the goodness of God to the world? Well the best way to learn how to apply something to our lives is to make sure we've grasped the theology that lies behind it and we have to take the theology that we've just been studying and let that shape our lives so we have just said God's goodness is revealed in his works in what he has made and what he has done and therefore we all must remember the goodness of the world that we are in. Now this is important because at one level we say that sin has affected every aspect of the world it has but there is still much that is good and therefore we have to value that we have to appreciate that and just as Adam was told at the very beginning we must care for the world and look after it and that is especially true when it comes to other people because it's so easy to see the bad in others isn't it? We have a whole media system that is based I think in many ways around magnifying the faults and mistakes in people's lives and yet our theology is telling us that every person we meet, every person you are going to meet this week, they are made in the image of God and they are precious and even though we see things that are wrong in people we must never use that as an excuse to treat them badly we might think well this person is an alcoholic I'm going to avoid them. We have no biblical justification for thinking like that ever. We have no excuse to be anything other than good to one another now I look at myself and I think I need to learn that lesson because we have to remember sin is never right and so gossip is never right, resentment is never right, selfishness is never right. We as Christians are to be always good to other people, gloriously good and reversing the damage that sin has caused. So we remember the goodness that is still in the world. We also remember that God's goodness is revealed in his law that's why God's law is still so important to us. God's law is not how we become a Christian, we become a Christian by faith but

God's law is how we live as Christians and by obedience to God's law we become more like him because God's law is revealing his ways. So God says don't covet, don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery, don't murder, honor your father and mother, keep the Sabbath day, don't take God's name in vain, don't worship through images and don't ever ever ever have any other gods than God alone and that should shape our lives and if we read through the New Testament it gives us wonderful application as to how we should apply that on a daily basis. Our goodness is only going to arise from our willingness to listen to what God is saying, to follow his instructions and to keep his commands. Now every day is a test for this isn't it? Because you and I live among people who don't listen to God and they become futile in their thinking and they suppress the truth and so I am certain that this week you will be exposed to gossip, you will be exposed to obscene talk, you'll be exposed to blasphemy, you'll be exposed to temptations, to lust, to covet, to be greedy, to be idolatrous, to sin and in that context our goal must always, always be goodness. That's always be good, not in order to be Christians but because we are

Christians and that applies even in secret, even when we are alone we are to be characterised by goodness and we also have to remember that God's goodness is revealed in Jesus, that's why we want to be like him and really being like Jesus is just another way of saying that we want to keep God's love because that's exactly what Jesus delighted to do. He said if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

You remember many years ago there were some bands that people used to wear on their wrist with WWJD, what would Jesus do and it was a great thing in many ways because it reminded us to think what would Jesus do? Well what would Jesus do in any given situation? Jesus would obey God's law.

[34 : 10] Not in a legalistic way but in the knowledge that this is God's way, this is the best way and that should shape every day of our lives. That's why it's so good to read about Jesus in the Gospels because he is an example and that's why we should pray to God make me like Jesus and do you know this is what lies at the heart of being a witness. Matthew 5, 16, in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. At the heart of being a witness for Jesus it's that our own goodness as the people of God is evident for everyone to see. Now that's a big challenge for us but it's such a powerful witness and we have to remember that this is what Jesus is prioritising so before you challenge someone about their faith, before you question them about their eternal destiny, before you try and start with somebody about the reality of hell, the first question that you and I need to ask ourselves is this, are people seeing good works in me? That's a very simple question but it's incredibly important. So what good works are people going to see in you at work tomorrow?

What are they going to see in me? And so the goodness of God is revealed through us. That's why Christians should be the best people in terms of our moral conduct and uprightness. Now don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that Christianity is only for the best people, it's not. Christianity is for everybody and you can look at Jesus, he didn't go to the high flyers in society, he didn't go to those who were respected, he went to the people who were at the bottom of the pile, the people at the very bottom but the transforming work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts should make a big difference and we should be the very best models of how to treat other people, how to treat our fellow Christians, how to treat outsiders, how to treat people who are in need. Now I hope that that really motivates you and I hope it really inspires you but I am also sure that it probably makes you feel a sense of failure as I feel that myself. But this is where you must remember that God himself by his spirit dwells in you and he will help you. The only way any of us are good is because

God is doing it and so God is in our hearts by his spirit, he will help us to be the good, good people who can bring the hope of Jesus to this world. May that be true of us all. Let's pray.