

Goodness

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Date: 01 April 2018

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[0 : 00] So this evening we're going to look back at the next of the fruit of the Spirit that we've been looking at in our evening worship, and this evening the fruit of the Spirit we're looking at is goodness.

So before I begin, because really I was looking at the theme of good and I guess evil as well. So sometimes I think the Lord, just to help you get a better handle on your own heart and on what you're going to say, gives you some experience that makes you rely afresh on Him.

So I was in Camelton on Thursday and Friday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday preaching in the evenings, and in the mornings I thought, well that's when I'll do my sermon, I'll prepare my sermon there.

So Thursday morning, did all the ground work, spent a lot of time, went up a bit of quiet peace and got it all down in my iPad, great technology, tremendous.

And then Friday I spent the home where you're praying and then honing it down, changing it, just getting it exactly as I wanted with a spectacular conclusion to it that I was really looking forward to preach.

[1 : 12] And then I went into the computer today this afternoon at the church and the Google Doc had not downloaded.

Well, it had downloaded, but it had downloaded an early rubbish version. And so I got my iPad and the original was still in the iPad, it's great.

And then I emailed the original back to the computer and in so doing lost the original and lost it on my iPad and on my computer.

So very many evil, wicked, wicked, horrible, black, dark thoughts came into my heart about iPads and about stamping on top of them and beating them up and viciously throwing them into the water because my sermon had been ruined.

So I spent the last half hour before the evening service praying to be good and also trying to get the sermon together as I had originally intended it. So it probably isn't, it's a rough rubbish kind of draft version that you're getting this evening.

[2 : 25] So you need to be praying even more than you normally do for the service this evening. In fact, the first thing I had in my sermon notes was that I was tempted to use the sermon from two weeks ago on kindness and simply replace the word kindness with goodness because then actually there's a lot of similarity between the two words and between the two concepts and ideas.

And we can clearly see that our similar principles involved in working out kindness in your life and working out goodness. So there may be for you this evening a degree of meaningful repetitiveness and hopefully when there is such repetitiveness it's because God wants us to remember something. But kindness and goodness are different. They have their own particular emphasis. They're not going to go back into the whole kind of idea of kindness this evening, but they're like sweet twins. There's a lot that's similar about them, but there's different emphasis and they're unique in their own character, these characteristic fruit of the Spirit. Goodness is really a broader concept than kindness biblically.

It's really, kindness is more, yes it does stem from our hearts, but it's more about the acts that we're engaged in. Now, so is goodness to a degree, but it's wider.

[3 : 48] It involves our moral consciousness as it's played out in the physical world. Now, I just want to say a couple of things by way of a longish introduction and then move into one or two thoughts about goodness.

But I'm going to mix it up a little bit this week because if you know what we've done, if you've been here in the last number of weeks, we've used a structure for going through the fruit of the Spirit.

We've asked the questions, what is it? What it's not? What's its counterfeit and how do we get it? I'm not going to do that this evening, I'm going to kind of blend these questions into the study, but not clearly define them in such ways.

But I want to look at a couple of things by way of an introduction. The first is to look at goodness philosophically and then practically, very briefly of course in doing so.

But I think that if we are to recognize that good exists and its opposite evil exists, however we choose to define these things, then it really, it must be the case that we have a conscious and a moral and a personal source for that.

[5 : 07] So that goodness, a good and evil, don't simply exist in a world without a moral reality and without consciousness.

The greatest question in fact for the secular atheist is where good and evil and conscious come from when there is no personal God or personal being from which they are derived?

Where do they come from in this world that is purely materialistic? If they deny any kind of moral absolutism and a personal God, then it's very hard to posit the whole idea of good and evil in any meaningful sense.

At best, without God, what we do is we make up our own definitions of what is good and what is evil, without even thinking of their origin or where they come from.

But we know that it can only therefore ever be relative. If that is what we consider as the universal universe without moral absolutes or without a personal moral creator, then good and evil can only ever be the sum of what a group of people decide that good and evil is going to be, usually based on power or influence of a particular group or society.

[6 : 39] Or it becomes radically individualistic, which is the direction in which we're going, where society is derided and decried and community is less and less important when what is right in my own eyes is the only ultimate authority, but the end game of such thinking will always be chaos and anarchy.

So philosophically, there's issues that you would need to spend a great deal of time thinking about on this issue. But also practically therefore, without God or without considering God, what is goodness and where does goodness come from?

Is it my idea of goodness or is it your idea of goodness? Whose version of goodness do we believe? There's a way of thinking today, which is, well, surely I can do what I want and I regard that as good as long as it doesn't harm anybody else.

But the question arises then, what do you mean by harm? And whose harm is involved in that? And there's all kinds of difficult questions with regard to that.

So that often people regard what is good as simply something that they regard as good and evil is whatever we think is not good.

[8 : 08] So in a society, maybe that loving your enemy is seen as something that is evil. Resisting revenge is not a good thing. Resisting gossip, recognizing marriage between a man and a woman, not necessarily agreeing with gender fluidity, seeking to protect the most vulnerable in society.

We find that there will be different measures of what is good and what is evil and what is accepted and what is not. But we also give thanks that there is still goodness at a moral level in the society, even when God is rejected, we rejoice in that and we give thanks that there is a moral consciousness in people, even though it's tainted.

But what we do recognize, even when that is the case, that often evil and good and the definitions of evil and good are being turned on their head.

God says in Isaiah chapter 5, what do those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness? Very often in that definition of goodness and definition of evil, it will be externalized to other people, sell them, internalized, which gives us what we often find is a blame culture.

Everyone else is wrong. Everyone else is evil. And we know that that is often the case in our own hearts as well. It's often the case in a church community context.

[9 : 49] What is it that we most often do when we're challenged with what we think is not good in a church or in a Christian community? We blame others.

We think they don't know what is good. We think they're doing what is bad. Maybe not in a deep-seated evil way, but in reality there's this temptation for us to constantly be blaming other people.

We recently had the Presbyterian oversight visit and they put questions in about church life, which is great, and the responses were really interesting and helpful.

But one question I would always put in a questionnaire about a church community like that as a matter of course, which is never in it actually.

It's usually, you know, what do you think of the church and what do you think needs to change in the church and what's not so good about the church and what is good about the church? One thing I would always put, or two questions I would put, what is it in your heart that needs to change to make things better in this church?

[11 : 01] Or what do you need to repent of to encourage goodness to flourish in this church? So there's a move sometimes away from the external and what everyone else needs to do and a recognition of, as we'll come on to see in God's economy, that there's often, in terms of goodness, a lot of change that we need to make in our own lives.

Our natural and our worldly response to what you would change in your life or your family or your church to make it good, to make it better is never usually me.

It's usually always somebody or something else. And that is fundamentally not biblical goodness. What else is fundamentally not biblical goodness?

When we say, others need to make my world good. External realities need to change to make my world good.

That is not primarily understanding biblical goodness, but rather goodness as a fruit of the Spirit is me being made new by a good God, is me being changed and transformed by a good God into His image.

[12 : 26] And it always, the fruit of the Spirit will always be primarily a recognition, a morally of our need to change. Yes, it will involve community change, but it always begins with a recognition of our need and of our hearts.

So goodness as a fruit of the Spirit recognizes in the first place God as its source. All of the fruit of the Spirit are a fruit of the Spirit, of the Spirit of God.

A reflection of His character, of His being. All these characteristics reflect the being and the character of God. And God in His moral being and in His activity is a good God.

That's the definition that we have in His justice, in His righteousness, and in His intentions. He's the Father of goodness. He is the one who has originated goodness.

It's defined by Him. He is the definition of goodness. It evil, evil only exists in the context, in the reality of a living good God.

[13 : 41] It only exists in opposition to a great and good God. Now beyond that, beyond that the genesis of evil is an unrevealed mystery.

But it only exists in contradiction to a good and holy and righteous God. We know that evil was spawned in the heart of Satan as a fallen angel.

He's the opposite of God. He is the Father of lies in John 8.44. I think we have these words. You are of your Father, Jesus says, the devil, and your will is to do your Father's desires.

You are a murderer from the beginning. And there's nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in Him. When He lies, He speaks out of His own character for He is a liar and the Father of lies. So we see evil and its darkness and the opposite of good comes from the Father of lies as opposed to goodness, which comes from God as our Father.

And we recognize that evil in this world is not a vague ethereal, mysterious and impersonal force.

[15 : 03] It is morally linked to the hearts and minds of every single individual, whether it be an angel or a human being.

Only responsible individuals are those who reflect the goodness of God or the reality of evil. So God is its source, both in His being and His creativity and we'll also see in His redemption.

So in His being, in Mark 10, 18, Jesus said interestingly to the person who came up to Him and said, Good teacher, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone and indeed in an inverted way He was claiming divinity there as He makes this statement about God.

God is just and God is perfect, God is holy and loving and all of these characteristics define the parameters of His goodness.

[16 : 04] Evil never comes from the heart of God. Now that's an important practical reality for us as we consider blaming God for evil that happens in our lives or evil that happens in this world and

many people do that.

We can't because God is the author of good and we can never blame God for the reality of evil. It is the deception of the Father of lies and you must tread carefully when you seek to accuse God of evil because the reality is if God is evil then we are all damned and there is no hope.

In His being, therefore He's good, also in His creativity. We know from the very beginning that He created the world and He created the world and said it is good. It is good.

It is good. It is good. And then He says it is very good. He saw the world and the humanity that He made in His own image and the creativity of what He had made and the provision and food and drink and relationships and society has been good, really good, very good.

And His creative genius is an expression of His goodness not only in itself but in the provision that is made for us now.

[17 : 31] We all know, we all know that that creation is tainted and broken and subject to death and decay and it's in shadow and in confusion and in doubt and in darkness as humanity rejected the good Father in creation and the Lordship of God and His reign and wanted their own independence.

But He is good in His creativity and in His being and He's good in redemption in the gospel story.

What does the gospel mean?

The gospel simply means good news. We've been celebrating that today, celebrating at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which is always about not only the death but the resurrection of Jesus, celebrated in our own salvation, celebrated in all that He has done for us, celebrated in the links between the Passover and the Lord's Supper and all it speaks of, of freedom and of goodness and of grace and of hope.

The greatest, so what we have is the greatest act of evil, the taking of the life of the only good and perfect human being who was also God in the flesh.

The most evil, the darkest moment when even the sun wouldn't shine for these three hours on the event of the cross becomes also the greatest good where sin and rebellion and the wrath of God is taken and defeated, where forgiveness is offered, where God opens up His welcoming good arms back into fellowship with Him, to belonging and to a good life and to a good future with Him.

[19 : 23] So God is its source and that's very important when we're thinking about goodness. It's not simply what society thinks is goodness, it's not simply what we think inherently is goodness.

It is external to us at one level. It is primarily God being its source as we see. But can I say secondly and finally and briefly that Christ buys it back for us.

Christ buys back goodness. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit. As we trust in God, He gifts us His Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit are these characteristics that reflect the transformation in our lives.

So Christ buys back goodness for us all in our definition, in our appreciation and in our lives.

So in our definition we recognize God is its source. For we worship Him and we can worship Him because of His grace.

[20 : 35] So primarily the goodness that's spoken of here is reflected in a heart transformation.

Luke 6.45, the passage we read before that Cori read earlier, it's the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.

The evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and again and again and again the key to our understanding of the gospel and of the fruit of the Spirit is where our heart lies, where our trust lies and our definition of goodness as it comes from the source which is the living God and our dependence on Him.

So our definition of goodness is molded by and is defined by our experience of His goodness in salvation and redeeming and forgiving us and giving us new life.

And then in our appreciation also of what He calls good. So we of all people should be those who live with gratitude for all His great gifts, His great gifts of food and drink.

That's why I think it's nice still to say grace and significant still to say grace before a meal, except one of these recognitions of His goodness. We appreciate creation. We seek to protect creation.

[22 : 02] We love His good things. We love His good gifts. We appreciate what He has done for us and we seek to live in accordance with His will because of gratitude for His goodness.

The Christian life for us therefore can never be moralism and be moralistic and simply acting outwardly in a certain way because it meets certain parameters of living.

It must always come from a changed heart, a heart of gratitude that is learned to appreciate God for who He is and live in goodness. So we define it in terms of God, we appreciate it from God and we live it as it is characterised in the Bible by God.

We become Holy Spirit intentional and intentionally seek to follow God in His way.

We recognise that goodness is defined by God and we do good simply because God says it is a good thing to do.

[23 : 17] We obey Him and we say no to what is evil. We learn to hate the things God hates and we seek to love the things God loves.

We don't seek to do good things simply so that other people will do good things back. We don't seek to do good things simply because someone will do as a favour in return.

We recognise that we do good things and we do good to our enemies and we do good because God has shown us what goodness is.

It's never for popularity that we do these things but we love what God loves and we stand up for what is right and what is just and what is good.

And I want to finish with this paradox about goodness. I think it's one of these things that we're kind of tempted to compare ourselves a lot with other people in terms of goodness.

[24 : 29] I'm better than the next person or I'm good in the context of this church or I'm better than others in the context of church. And it's a really difficult thing to live out self-unconsciously.

But can I finish this with a paradox of being truly good? I think being truly good has two dimensions to it.

Being truly good has two dimensions. One is that if you're truly good by grace, you're truly good unconsciously. In other words, there's a sense in which you don't know and you don't sense that you're good.

It simply happens when your roots spiritually are in the right place, when you're rooted to the Spirit of God and to the character of God.

It's like, you know, the Bible speaks about a seed. We don't know how it grows. It just grows. And you know that a child, some people were in church this morning who used to come to this church and I haven't seen them for a while.

[25 : 47] And one of the boys is about six feet high. And the last time we saw him, he was about two feet high. They just grow. They just grow. They're unselfconscious about it. They don't spend their life thinking, I've grown.

I'm growing a little bit more. It's hugely, it's a mystery and growth simply happens when they're in the right place and they're eating the right foods and they're healthy.

They simply grow. There's a mystery to it. And that is true about goodness. The key is where our heart is. And in a sense, when our heart's in the right place, there's such humility and self-forgetfulness that we don't appreciate that we are acting in a godly or in a good way.

It's a little bit of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. Bit of self-unconsciousness in our lives. It becomes the instinct of grace that is simply how we react because we are rooted to the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So you do unconsciously. In other words, you don't do it and then say, well, that was pretty good. And I'm glad I did that.

[27 : 01] And I feel quite proud about what I did there. So that's what I mean by being self-unconscious. So this paradox of this, of being truly good, I think, is also is that you're conscious of always needing to learn.

You never stop learning about goodness. Yes, it becomes instinctive, but it is always about learning. And the Bible is full of teaching to us about goodness.

Ephesians 2 verse 10 says, For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus. For good works which God prepared for that we should walk in them.

So He's given us a way to walk. And Galatians 6, 9 and 10, Don't grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

So then as we have, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith. So there's things to learn about doing and about being good. And Micah 6 verse 8, My favorite of all.

[28 : 07] He's told you, oh man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

And these are really significant and important lessons we learn about how to live not just instinctively but consciously disciples learning about goodness.

And that also comes into play when we are faced with evil in our lives. In Romans 8, 28, we have these words for, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good who are called according to His purpose.

So there's reality that we can see goodness even in the darkness of our experiences. And that's a non-stop learning experience. That doesn't come instinctively.

That is not an unconscious reality for it's something we need to keep learning. Real intentionality for us always learning. It's not natural, it's not a given, it's not genetic.

[29 : 13] We are constantly needing to go to our source to the Lord Jesus Christ for that. We're always falling short. We are always building. We're always ripping down and building up and changing.

We came here 17 years ago, about 16 years ago, they closed the quarter mile, or they kind of opened I guess the quarter mile.

They closed the hospital that was there and they started working on the quarter mile. Now 16 years on they're still working on it. So work in progress. And they're constantly building.

They're constantly updating. They're constantly renewing and refreshing and making it better, making a beautiful place. And I do wonder sometimes, it's the very first glass building that they did beside the middle middle walk.

If they now look at that and think, oh, it's a bit old hat now, we should maybe rip it down and start again. And all the things we've learned as we've gone along, we can maybe put it into this building again.

[30 : 13] And in a sense our Christian lives are like that. We're always learning. We're always developing. We're always kind of renewing and being matured and becoming more and more like God in goodness as we rely on Him.

So in conclusion, the question is a very simple one. Is the fruit in your life and in my life falling near to the tree, or falling far away from the tree?

Well, in this week that we've entered, you'll have many spur of the moment moments when maybe trouble will come, or you'll have choices to make, or you'll be tempted to lose your temper, or you'll have a decision that's important.

What will be your instinct? What will be your spiritual instinct when you're faced with trials or difficulties or extremely bad news medically?

When someone wrongs you, what will be your instinctive response? Will you be tempted to be bad in return? Will you sense, like I sensed with the iPad, this evil, vicious, destructive desire coming up from within?

[31 : 34] What will it come to mind? Will you respond prayerfully? How will goodness reveal itself in your life and in my life this week as we are faced with a myriad of darkness and evil and temptations and difficulties?

What will be the evidence that you and I are born anew? Because it should be that we bear the fruit of the Spirit more and more. This morning we had the Lord's table and kind of in an inverted way, we were encouraged always to examine ourselves before sitting at the Lord's table.

Well, maybe this evening it's a good thing to do as well in the light of God's Word, in the light of Scripture, to be examining ourselves as to the fruit of the Spirit that we are bearing.

Not in church. Not when everything's going well, not when it's easy. That's no problem. Not when we are tested and tried, are we bearing His fruit and also as a Christian, take great comfort where your roots are.

Take great comfort in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gift of the Spirit and in the transforming power He has to make our ugly and dark and evil and bad hearts good.

[32 : 49] Let's pray. God help us, we pray, to know you and to love you and to serve you better. Help us to understand goodness as it is defined in your word through your character.

Keep us from moralism. Keep us from that horrible, merely outward parameters of living which are legalistic and are never sufficient to suppress the darkness of our own heart.

Remind us that we can't possibly simply live as Christians with an exterior holiness. Help us to recognize and know and understand and confess our own need of renewal and our own heart that needs to be changed and the transformation that needs to be wrought within us before a holy God.

Remind us that your goodness is simply too great to look on and your holiness and your purity is impossible for us to reflect or to in and of ourselves enter into your presence.

We thank you that through Jesus Christ and His goodness and His holiness and His righteousness we are brought into that place where we can stand before God as our Father and know His love and His grace and His goodness.

[34 : 29] So we thank you for Jesus Christ who is the great example for us but also the great atoning sacrifice for our sins and we rejoice in His goodness and pray and seek that we might reflect His goodness through the Spirit in our lives into this week we've entered.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.