

Today I would like to begin our time together by declaring a particular divine proclamation that I often use at Arrowsmith, and that I have often used in other churches and in numerous services I have done in prisons and campgrounds and in the mission field – which is “God is good, all the time . . . and all the time, God is good! And all God’s people said: Amen!” Now we have all just proclaimed that God is “good” twice *because* we all truly do believe God is “good” – but if I were to ask 20 of you what “God is good” means, I most likely would get 20 different answers. The reality is the word “good” is somewhat ambiguous because the word is used in so many different ways because we each have our own definition about what *good* really means. While the word *good* can be used as a noun, adjective or adverb – it also carries with it a sense of a moral standard, but that’s also vague in that while we may think something is *good*, someone else may say it’s fair, poor or bad or even evil. This is reflected in the old saying that, “some people you have to pay to be good - while others are just good for nothing.”

The truth is, for the most part, each one of us has our own definition of good. We see this in the phrase: “One man’s junk is another man’s treasure.” But even in the midst of this confusion about what is good, there are times when we can clearly tell the difference between what is good and bad. We all probably would agree on who is good and who is bad when I say the names Adolf Hitler, Mother Teresa, Osama Bin Laden, and Billy Graham – but this morning we will surely have some differences of opinion regarding who is good and who is bad when I mention the names Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper and Thomas Mulcair. The English word “good” in itself has implications of some degree of excellence. What varies is the precise *degree* of excellence that is unexpressed, which lies hidden deep in the heart. The common idea of *good* in almost all of its uses suggests that good is a desirable quality, something commendable, reliable, welcome, enjoyable, beneficent, kind, noble, admirable, favourable and exemplary. The word “goodness” usually makes us think of a person’s inner qualities of virtue, excellence of character, morality and attitude that we see in that person’s behaviour. This is where we begin to connect with our sermon from last week and with the context of our current sermon series.

In Galatians 5:16-25 God’s Word tells us that our natural fallen inclination to “*gratify the desires of the flesh*” which will cause us to produce “*works of the flesh*” - but if we “*live by the Spirit*” and “*keep in step with the Spirit*” we will bear the “*fruit of the Spirit*” of “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” Now this should be the priority and purpose and passion of every follower of Jesus Christ because “*the fruit of the Spirit*” in the emotional, intellectual, and physical *manifestation* of the presence of the Spirit of God in the life of born-again Christian that has been dramatically and powerfully transformed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. This is not something we can do on our own but rather a gift of God’s mercy and grace we receive and experience when we humbly surrender our hearts, minds and wills to the Holy Spirit. Paul’s point in Galatians 5 for today is that the only “*goodness*” we can know on earth is that which is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Last week we looked at the spiritual fruit of “*kindness*” – which sometimes in the Bible and often in our own minds is interchangeably connected with the twin word “*goodness*” which we see directly follows “*kindness*” in our fruit of the Spirit list. Now God’s Word does that for a reason because these two words are intimately related. Last week we learned that the original Greek word translated as “*kindness*” means “a gentleness of character and inner heart toward others.” And we also learned that while “*goodness*” does carry with it some of the characteristics of “*kindness*” - the original Greek word translated as “*goodness*” is a different Greek word from “*kindness*” in that it is a much more an *active* term in that “*goodness*” is generally defined as “a generous character in uprightness of the heart expressing itself in *active good* towards others.” What is significant for us here is that the English word “*goodness*” includes many of pleasing qualities in how we define “*goodness*” whereas the Greek word for “*goodness*” indicates one particular quality. It is more than an excellence of character (English) or gentleness of character (Greek) in that it is character *energized*, expressing itself in active good.

What this means is that the Greek word Paul uses here for “goodness” is “a generous character in uprightness of the heart expressing itself in active good towards others” *that is* so powerfully energized in expressing itself in active good that it *will not* spare sharpness and rebuke in order to produce good in others. Thus goodness means that sometimes we must correct or be corrected, and sometimes very severely, and in order to bear the fruit of “goodness.” This is why parents should and must correct their children, as it helps produce responsible adults. We know this is true in the Kingdom of God because God can and does correct, sometimes very severely, in order to put His goodness in action.

We are to do the same as spiritual leaders in our homes and in the body of Christ, the church. Romans 15:14 provides a clear sense of this: *“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.”* What is significant here is that Paul causatively links being “full of goodness” with “all knowledge and able to instruct one another.” This gives us insight into what the apostle Paul knew of and expected from Christians in Rome, placing before us God’s expectations for in our relationships within the church. In the context of speaking of how we are to live out the gospel in Romans 15, God, through the apostle Paul, out of the generous character in uprightness of His heart expressing itself in active good towards us, does not spare us His sharpness or His rebuke in order to produce the spiritual fruit of “goodness.” 1 Corinthians 8:1 tells us that *“Knowledge puffs up”* and the word “instruct” literally means, “admonish, caution, reprove, warn.” Knowing that the pride of “knowledge” combined with the command to “admonish caution, reprove, warn” others could result in a spewing a torrent of self-righteous offense, God calls us to first bear the spiritual fruit of His “goodness” – which will the causatively hold our self-righteous pride in check and awaken us our need for admonishment, caution, reproof, and warning – so that we might then be able to bear the fruit of *goodness* together, in order to build up rather than divide and destroy the church.

The Greek word for “goodness” in Romans 15:14 is the same Greek word we see in Galatians 5:22 - “a generous character in uprightness of the heart expressing itself in active good towards others - *that is* so powerfully energized in expressing itself in active good toward others - that it will not spare sharpness and rebuke in order to produce good in others.” Now that is a mouthful of words and those words are clearly impossible for us to live out without help from God – but we already know that because the only “goodness” we can know on earth is that which is empowered by the Holy Spirit. And so the question needs to be asked: What is “good” – whether it be active good or the fruit of good? Well that’s the very same question that a wealthy, young man asked Jesus in Matthew 19:16-22.

*Behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Matthew 19:16-22*

In regards to the question of “What is good?” - Jesus made two major points with the rich young man. First of all, Jesus told him that we can’t do anything to be “good” enough to be right with God in order to earn “eternal life” on our own. We see this in Jesus told the young man not to call Him *good* because no person is truly *good* except God. The point is, while we may look *good* in comparison to others, no one is good enough to be right before God when we compare ourselves to God. The second major point reinforces the first in that because we are not “good” enough to earn “eternal life” we are totally and utterly dependent on God to be “good” enough to right before God: *“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” When it comes to being “good” (right before God) we usually underestimate who God is and overestimate who we are.

We are to do the *good* things of which we know God approves of and calls us to do. Ephesians 2:10 tells us *"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* But in doing so we must always remember we do not become *good* by *doing* good or *being* good - and we cannot earn our salvation or God's approval by *doing* good or *being* good. It is a common belief among many in our culture – both Christians and non-Christians – that if we do more *good* than bad, we've earned our way into heaven. That's what the wealthy young man thought. But Jesus told him: "There's no way you can be good enough to get to heaven. Let me show you what I mean. Go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor – and then come and follow me." If it were truly possible for us to earn eternal life by being good, it would require a *perfect* willingness to do whatever Jesus asked us to do *without question*. The rich young man failed, and we will all fail too.

God's "*goodness*" and our fallen, human goodness are considerably divergent from one another. In terms of ethics and morality, the world around us clearly reflects numerous shades of supposed *good* based on objectivity and personal opinion. Our common understanding about the nature of "good" has been degraded to mean little more than kindness and friendliness, with little discrimination as to character. Whom some may call a "good person" for their attitude and actions may in fact be a very sinful person. "Goodness" is often carelessly applied to charming and physically attractive people in politics and athletics, and entertainment – almost always because of their professional skill or their ability to elicit a sense of admiration, even though their character may be exceedingly immoral.

The scriptural concept of "*goodness*" is immensely deeper, greater in scope and much more powerful in effect – but much more restricted. This fruit of the Spirit of "*goodness*" is rooted in the "*kindness*" of the gentle character of the heart of God expressing itself in generosity towards us, through the sacrificial love of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, actively and bearing the fruit of "*goodness*" in us and through us - touching on every thought, word and action towards others by the power of the Spirit for God. The spiritual fruit of "*goodness*" demands that our motives be right before we call any action good. This means our central and all-influencing motive is loving God and doing His will in all things. It means that a "*good*" man or woman are not "*good*" because of what they think, say or do - but rather they are "*good*" because they have a righteousness that flows out from their heartfelt devotion and love relationship with God, their joyful obedient faith in Jesus Christ and their humble submission to the Holy Spirit – all of which *causes* them to *do good*.

We do *good* only because our God is the source of all that can truly be called *good*. James 1:17 tells us: *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* Our good God created everything *good*. God's goodness is absolute. All others have degrees of goodness in all the universe are measured against the absolute standard of God's goodness. The goodness of God permeates His divine character and attributes – the most prominent being *the goodness of God's love*. In Psalm 136:1 the psalmist proclaims: *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."* The goodness of God's love can be seen most clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ towards sinners who deserve the harsh decisiveness of God's punishment. This sovereign redemptive love through Jesus Christ is the glorious kindness and generosity of God's goodness that touches all his creatures and ought to lead all sinners to repentance. Psalm 145:9 declares: *"The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."*

J.I. Packer writes this is the goodness of God's love we see in His "mercy and compassion that shows kindness to persons in distress by rescuing them out of trouble and the long-suffering, forbearance, and slowness to anger that continues to show kindness toward persons who have persisted in sinning. The supreme expression of God's goodness is still, however, the amazing grace and inexpressible love that shows kindness by saving sinners who deserve only condemnation: saving them, moreover, at the tremendous cost of Christ's death on Calvary. God's faithfulness to his purposes, promises, and people is a further aspect of his goodness and praiseworthiness. Humans lie and break their word; God does neither. In the worst of times it can still be said: *"His compassions never fail. Great is His faithfulness!"*

As we close we need to remember that the “*fruit of the Spirit*” Paul lists in Galatians 5 has to do with *humble character* that produces the *fruit of unity and service*. What does humble character that produces fruit of unity and service in “*goodness*” look like in our lives and in our church? Again, as has been my habit, I am going to let God’s Word speak to us about this. Today we will looking at event in the life of Jesus, who expressed spiritual fruit all throughout his ministry on earth - and continues to do so today often in our own lives, when our hearts are in harmony with His and with each other. This morning we are looking Mark 7:31-37 where as Jesus journeyed from the Mediterranean seacoast to Galilee he encountered a crowd of people who brought a deaf and mute man to him to be healed. Here we see Jesus reflect the spiritual fruit of “*goodness*” - as we who claim Christ should live it out.

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”* Mark 7:31-37

The first thing we see in this event is Jesus exhibiting the truth that the Spirit of “*goodness*” is rooted in the “*kindness*” of the gentle character of the heart of God expressing itself in generosity towards us. Jesus was asked to heal this deaf and mute man by a crowd of people, but he doesn't respond to the crowd; he responds directly and intimately, person to person, to the man. In the “*kindness*” of the gentle character of God’s heart Jesus took this man aside, away from the others. Jesus saw someone in great need; a wounded individual with a hard life and a painful past, a person with hurts and hopes. Jesus sees the man for who really he is, not how others saw him or even how he saw himself. And in that private moment, Jesus gently takes his fingers and places them in the man's ears, and then he tenderly touched his finger o his tongue – and in the “*kindness*” of the gentle character of God’s heart Jesus expressed the generosity of the goodness of God’s love towards the deaf and mute man. He spoke the words: “*Be opened*” *And the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*”

The second thing we see in this event is Jesus demonstrating that God is sovereignly the source of all “*goodness.*” Right before he heals the deaf and mute man Jesus did something that highly significant but easy to miss; *he looked up to heaven*. That simple upward look was an acknowledgement by Jesus to the man and to us that, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*” We do good only because our good God is the source of all that can truly be called good. Any, every and all kindness and goodness that we do in the world is not from within us. All things that are truly *good* find their source in God.

Paul, in writing to the church in Thessalonica, spoke of the Day of Judgment that will come when Jesus returns to take us home. And after first speaking of the pain, struggle and suffering that will occur for those who have rejected Christ, the apostle writes: “*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*” (2 Thessalonians 1:11). The word “*good*” in this verse is the word for “*goodness*” we have looked at today. In other words, considering that we are now 2000 years closer to the return of Jesus, Paul’s tells us today: “*To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve*’ to bear the spiritual fruit of goodness together through a generous character in uprightness of the heart expressing itself in active good towards each other.” John Wesley once said: “Do all the “good” you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.” That being said, we all know we can’t to any “*good*”– unless we do together so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen? Amen!

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Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church