

The Fruit of Goodness

“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye are full of goodness” (Romans 15:14).

What is goodness? The word in English has been so broadly applied as to mean everything and nothing. How often people have responded with the word, “good,” when they have hardly heard what one has said. Again, as with so many words in Scripture, we must get back to the original meanings if we are to understand what is being said.

The old English word, “good,” evolves out of the word for God. The expression, “goodbye,” is actually a contraction of the phrase—“God be with you.” So, we have a basic association of God and “good.” That, of course, gives us the parameters of the word—goodness is originally from God. In today’s world, not all that we call good is “godly.” Good luck at the casino is hardly from God, nor is a good haul by a thief, nor is landing a good punch by a boxer. The word has obviously broadened to include that which is acceptable to one, personally, whatever it may mean to God or others.

In the Scripture, good is set over against evil—“whatever is of God versus whatever is of Satan.” Generally speaking, but not precisely, the Greek word *agathos* is applied to matters of morality, virtue, uprightness, or the things that have issued from God such as creation, prior to its corruption by sin. All other kinds of good, such as might be applied to “good books,” “good music,” “good manners,” *et al*, would be expressed by the word *kalos*, as well as things that are attractive and beautiful. We see that word in such English words as “calligraphy,” which is the art of fancy or embellished writing.

The opposite of *agathos* is *poneros*—the general word for evil as a satanic force in the world. Thus *agathos* and *poneros* describe the ultimate cosmic conflict between the Divine purposes in the world and the determination of His archenemy to frustrate those purposes. Original sin, the human heritage of corruption after the fall is referred to as *poneros*. On the other hand, things that are bad in terms of human frailty are designated by *kakos*. We hear it in English in such words as “cacophony”—“confused sounds,” as might be heard in the tuning of an orchestra or simply “clatter.” It also refers to unsound practices. Thus Paul says, “*The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, I do*” (Romans 7:19). The word translated “evil” in the King James, is *kakos*—“unsound” or “faulty,” not *poneros*—satanic evil. Thus, Paul is delivered from evil by the blood of Christ, but still experiences human frailty in the flesh. Paul says, “*For I know that in me (that is, that in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing...*” (Romans 7:18). So if we expect to become good in the flesh as a result of salvation, we will be disappointed. That does not mean that we ought not to behave ourselves, but rather that the goodness of Christ does not permeate our flesh.

The presence of Christ which does permeate our spirit motivates and affects our conduct in the flesh. Jesus said to His disciples, “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” This was in connection with His Gethsemane experience where He wrestled with the prospect of His crucifixion. Paul said also that “*The body*

is dead, because of sin but the Spirit is alive because of righteousness.” Christ is our righteousness. Thus Paul says to the Corinthians—*“But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (I Corinthians 1:30). The presence of Christ within us makes our spirit righteous. That is it puts us on the way of life rather than the way of death. Our spirits are made alive in Christ—they are filled with His goodness and grace. To the Romans, who came in for some serious charges, Paul said, nevertheless, *“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye are full of goodness...”* (Romans 15:14). But the flesh is still faulty. It is faultless, but not flawless. The Christian, filled with the Spirit of Christ, wants to do good, as Paul suggested, but there is a warfare going on. *“The flesh lusteth [has its desires] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one against the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would”* (Galatians 5:17). The spirit within desires to do what is good, but is constantly hindered by the weakness of the flesh. Paul had a certain weakness which he called a “thorn in the flesh.” This was not just an illness, as some suppose, but a demonic presence—“a messenger of Satan”—constantly aggravating him like a thorn in the thumb. It could be anything that reflects the weakness of the flesh—illness, weariness, pain, failure, personality conflicts—anything to wear one down. In the book of Revelation John speaks of Satan “seeking to wear out the saints.” The earthly scene is a gauntlet that we must run. It is not that we don’t get battered, but that we keep going. It is not that we escape affliction, but that we have the grace to endure. So when Paul pleaded for the removal of this thorn, Christ said to him, *“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

Because of the presence of Christ in our spirits, the whole process of human weakness takes place in the matrix of God’s goodness. The believer may be involved in deeds that are not good, but they are not the norm and are still within the framework of God’s grace. The occasional good deed (*kalos*) of the unbeliever no more reflects the Spirit of Christ than the occasional bad deed (*kakos*) of the believer would reflect the spirit of Satan.

Jesus said, *“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit”* (Matthew 7:18). But here He is distinguishing not between poor figs, for example, and good figs, but between figs and thistles. The most perfect thistle in the world does not compare with the poorest fig. The most noble deeds of the non-Christian do not compare with the most meagerly efforts of the believer. A corpse can be impeccably attired. The widow’s mite had more impact than the grandiose gifts of the godless.

To the rich young ruler, casually (as it turns out) seeking the way to eternal life, Jesus asks, *“Why do you call me good?”* This was not because Jesus was not good, as all who are connected with God, but because He wanted to know what the young man meant by “good.” He found out. Goodness meant to him abiding by the rules, but even evil men follow the rules when it suits their purposes to do so.

Paul said that when he was a Pharisee he was, *“as touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless”* (Philippians 3:6). But later, after he had met Christ, he realized that his own goodness, which was of the law, was a total loss

to him. He spelled this out in Philippians 3, where he exchanged his own goodness for the righteousness of Christ. Thereafter, he saw that in his flesh there was no good thing. His final judgment of the matter was, *“We are they who worship God in the spirit, make our boast [have our brightness] in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (v.3). That was not to say that he was indifferent to standards of human conduct, but that he realized that he could never be good enough in the flesh to satisfy the “righteous requirement” of God.

So goodness, as the New Testament defines it, is the state of those who have received the righteousness of Christ and have thus become part of the Kingdom of God. In Galatians 2:20 Paul sees his own flesh as crucified with Christ—partaking of the death that was the ultimate end of the corruption of sin which had been spawned in the rebellion of the “Garden of Eden.” And, since his own flesh was dead with Christ in the crucifixion, his spirit became alive with Christ in the resurrection. Paul never retracted the idea that his flesh was dead because of sin. His real life was in the spirit, which had been made alive in Christ and which possessed the righteousness of Christ. Paul makes it very clear to the Corinthians that Christ is our righteousness. To the Philippians he said that our righteousness is not our own, but the righteousness that is of God by faith. In Galatians 2:20—*“the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who gave himself for me.”*

“The fruit of the Spirit is goodness.” Upon Our acceptance of Christ, we are admitted into the Kingdom of God—a kingdom wherein there can be no evil; a kingdom where there can only be the goodness of God. Remember now this is a spiritual kingdom. Our spirits are part of it, but our bodies are not. We are in the body, but not of it, as we are in the world but not of it. The body is no more an integral part of the spirit than our house is an integral pan of our inner self.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). The last part of the verse merely clarifies the position of those that are in Christ Jesus—those who belong to the realm of the Spirit and not the realm of the flesh. Later Paul says that if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (v.9). Thus, he is not comparing “carnal” Christians with “spiritual” Christians, but Christians with non-Christians. It is popular to assume that some Christians are described in Romans 8 and some Christians in Romans 7. The truth of the matter is that Christians are described in both chapters. In chapter 7 Paul declares the status of the flesh in which he must contend in this world. In Romans 8 he declares the triumph of the spirit over the flesh—that in spite of his fleshy struggles, the believer, possessed by the Spirit of Christ, is secure in his spiritual kingdom of God’s goodness.

Remember Paul’s words to the Romans—***“I am persuaded that you are full of goodness.”***

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