

9 Flavors 1 Fruit Goodness

Think of how we usually use the term good. What do we mean when we call something good? Often we mean that it meets our preferences, that we like it. I have a favorite salsa. I say that it is good salsa. It's got the perfect balance of flavor and spiciness. But if you ask my wife, she doesn't think it's good at all. "It's way to oniony," she says. My version of good and her version of good are two different things.

You all know that I'm a huge NASCAR fan. Every week after the race, there's a journalist that runs a "good race" poll. Was this race a good race? It always generates a lot of controversy, because everyone's idea of a good race is different. If your favorite driver won, it was a great race. If your favorite got wrecked out on the first lap, it was a bad race no matter what else happened. Some people want lots of crashes and carnage. Others think to be a good race, there must be lots of side by side action. Others love the drama of different strategies playing out and the nail biting suspense of a fuel mileage gamble where someone is running on fumes at the end.

Our version of good is what makes us happy- what gets us closer to our goal. What's good is what's good for me. A college girl gets up one sunny summer morning. She looks out her window, sees the sunshine, and checks the weather on her phone. It's a good day as she's planning on going to the lake to spend the day with her friends. That same day a farmer gets up hoping for rain after three weeks of no rain. It's not a good day.

Other times, people will ask us how we are doing, and we'll answer, "I'm good." What we really mean, is "I'm okay with that. That doesn't really bother me. I can live with it." Or it means, "Life is going alright at the moment. I've got no really big problems that are more than I can handle. I've got it all under control. I'm good."

Sometimes we'll call other people good. "They're a good person." That's someone you admire and respect. They're trustworthy and reliable. They've been nice us. They've treated us generously. We don't mean that they've never done anything wrong, or that they've never said anything that rubbed us the wrong way. When we say someone's a good person, what we're really saying is, "They're better than most."

But when we come to the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, one of the qualities the Apostle Paul says we should expect to find growing in the vineyard of the Lord in the soil of our hearts is goodness.

2 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

When Paul writes “the fruit of the Spirit is...goodness,” he has in mind something much richer, much deeper, and much fuller than we do when we say, “This is good cake, Today was a good day, I’m doing good. They’re good people.”

Goodness and Kindness

There is some overlap in the various qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit. To be patient requires equal parts gentleness and self-control. It is very hard to have peace that isn’t anchored to a real sense of joy. Kindness requires a gentle touch. Love is defined in large measure by being all of these things.

This overlap becomes obvious when we consider goodness, right after looking at kindness. These two virtues are closely associated. Kindness is to be good to others. Both words have the idea of excellence in their definitions. In English, we often use the words interchangeably.

Yet biblically, they are not the same thing, otherwise Paul isn’t saying the same thing twice in a row when describing the fruit of the Spirit. In the ancient world, kindness was widely seen as an admirable quality. As we saw last week, Kindness is to act in a way that is excellent and beneficial toward someone else. Philosophers of old, like Plato and Aristotle, saw kindness was one of the most admirable of virtues. Kindness was frequently found listed among virtues championed by Greek philosophy.

Anyone who grew up in the 1st Century Greco-Roman world would have been familiar with this idea, including the Apostle Paul. When Paul listed kindness among the fruit of the Spirit, he was taking an idea that was already well known, and recasting it from a Christian point of view.

Goodness Is Something Deep Inside

But Goodness was something new. It’s never found on their virtue lists. It is a rare word, something uniquely claimed by Christian philosophy, especially the apostle Paul. There’s a reason for this. Goodness refers to something that is intrinsically good. It is an inner reality. A state of being that is excellent, exceedingly good in and of itself, upright in being. Goodness is who you are before it is what you do. Timothy George writes, “We sometimes speak of a deed done ‘out of the goodness of one’s heart,’ which comes close to the meaning here.”

Jesus was really getting at the inner nature of goodness in Matthew 7 when he said,

Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Here’s another way of understanding the difference between kindness and goodness. I’ve got a banana. Kindness is the things we do on the outside. It’s the behavior we show others. We talked last week about some of the ways we can show kindness, so let me write some of those

on the outside. You can listen. You can say encouraging words. You forgive someone. You help someone move their piano. That's top of the line kindness there.

But if I peel the banana, you see none of those things on the inside. This is where goodness is. Goodness is what's on the inside. And it's possible to do all of those things on the outside, but not really have them on the inside. You can fake it. You can do it for ulterior motives. You ever gotten a piece of fruit that looks great on the outside, but it's nasty on the inside. It tastes flat. Or it's rotten?

Our Problem with Goodness

This is our problem with goodness. We are not intrinsically good on the inside. We are not morally excellent or upright on our own. Left to our own devices, without the threat of punishment, without the promise of reward, if done in secret, knowing that we won't get caught, people do the selfish thing. The me thing. We put ourselves first. The problem is our sinful nature. The Bible says the truth is every one of us is messed up on the inside. Paul writes in Romans 7:18, and he's talking about himself here, but this is true of all of us. *"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."* Even when I want to do what is good, I usually mess it up.

We lack that essential goodness. We're like the banana that you peel back and on the inside it's all nasty and rotten and brown. It doesn't matter how you decorate the outside, how bright and shiny the peel is, the fruit on the inside isn't good.

Here's the problem, and here's the point of what Jesus was saying in Matthew 7, that essential part of us that is sinful in nature will always work its way to the outside. No matter how hard we try. No matter how many good things we try to counteract it with. No matter how many rules we put into place, the bad always works its way from the inside out. We cannot make ourselves good from the outside in. Religion will always fail.

The Goodness of God

This is why goodness is a fruit of the Spirit. We can't dig down deep and find our own goodness. God has to grow it in us. Our goodness comes from him. It's not our innate goodness. It's his. Our goodness comes from God.

God's goodness comes from his very being. It's simply who He is by his very nature. He is a good God. As Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem for the final time, he is approached by a very religious wealthy young man. This was a young man who was convinced of his own inner goodness. He was devout and had been since his childhood. He strived to follow all of the commandments. In Jesus, he saw a good and wise teacher who could affirm his goodness, and assure him that he was on the right path. I really think that this young man fully expected a pat on the back when he approached Jesus.

In Mark 10, we read about where he kneels before Jesus, and in verse 17 he asks, *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

Now Jesus answers him with a rather curious question, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”* Jesus is not denying his own divinity here. He’s trying to get this rich young man to question his own assumptions about himself and who Jesus is. If God is truly our definition of goodness and Jesus is good, then how can he be just a teacher? And if God is truly good, then does this wealthy young man really measure up to that level of goodness?

The standard of what is good and what isn’t, isn’t the world around us. It isn’t what the media tells us. It isn’t what the latest opinion polls say. It isn’t the weight of your friends and family’s suggestions. God is THE definition of goodness, because he is the source of all that is good. We’ve got to quit looking out there for our ultimate measure of goodness. That might be okay, if you’re looking for a good car to buy, or a good rub recipe for pulled pork that smoked slow and low that has 3 and a half out of 4 stars with 1,396 ratings.

Our ultimate measure of goodness is the goodness of God and his rating is the only rating that matters. 4 out of 4 stars. Perfection! Everything else falls short.

All goodness is derived from God. Good is good because it either comes from God or is comparable to God and who He is and what he does in some way. James 1:17, *“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”*

1 Chronicles 16:24, *“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”*
Psalm 34:8 invites us *“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!”*

When I was in Bible college, I got to preach in all kinds of different churches. One time, I got to preach 4 weeks in a missionary Baptist church. It was a fun month of preaching because it was black church. I showed up that first Sunday and I was about the only white face there. But they welcomed me, and they were enthusiastic. They were a lot of fun to preach to because they would talk right back at me.

They loved call and response. One of the things they would do was this. The preacher would shout, “God is a good God” and the congregation would shout back, “Yes, he is!”

I think this is a biblical thing. Some of the Old Testament Psalms would work this way, where the worship leader would say one thing and the people would recite something in unison— to declare with one heart, with one voice something they knew to be true. Think of Psalm 136, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.” And the people would sing back, “His love endures forever.”

“Give thanks to the God of gods.” – “His love endures forever.”

“Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.”

You got the idea. So, let's affirm together this morning that God is good. We speak with one heart. One voice, a church united. I will shout, "God is a good God." And you will shout back, "Yes, he is!"

"God is a good God – Yes, He is!" Again.

"God is a good God – Yes, He is!" With conviction

"God is a good God – Yes, He is!" One more time

"God is a good God – Yes, He is!"

Good News About Goodness

Here's the good news. God, in his goodness, does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He changes us from the inside out. He forgives our sin. He puts his own righteous nature in us. He gives us His Spirit to will and do what is good. He gets us past the problem of our sinful nature, so that we can become truly good.

The follower of Jesus can have an essential goodness on the inside. This is not their own innate goodness, though. It is a gift of God. This goodness changes us inside and out. This process begins the moment you place your faith in Jesus and continues throughout your life as you follow Jesus. Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, "*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

Finding Good in a Bad World

But this work of goodness in you isn't just to make you good. It is to find the goodness that still exists in our world. God created the world and he said that it is very good. 1 Timothy 4:4 says "everything God created is good." It isn't just that there remains goodness in the world, but there is a spark of goodness that remains in each and every person. Yes, we are fallen and broken and have a sinful nature, but the truth is that each one of us is created in the image and likeness of God. We still bear his image, as flawed and cracked as that reflection may be.

You have never met an ordinary person. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, "You have never talked to a mere mortal." Every person you meet is an image bearer of the divine. A part of the Spirit's goodness in us is to find that spark of goodness in others, to fan its flame, and show them how it can only be fulfilled in Jesus. Here's how Eugene Peterson translates goodness in his Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, "*a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people.*"

But we aren't here just to find what little glimpses of goodness remain in this fallen world, God has put us here to bring about more goodness in the world. God intends us to be seeds of goodness that manifest more goodness in the world. Ultimately, this is our purpose. This is our reason for existence.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Even before sin entered the picture, our purpose on this planet was to make a good world better. And now, through Jesus, even in this fallen world, we have recovered that purpose, to make a fallen world good. Each one of us is a lighthouse shining forth the goodness of God who loves every soul, who gave his son that they might have an everlasting relationship with Him.

Romans 15:2

Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Galatians 6:10

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

He has placed His goodness in you, now we are to place his goodness in the world.