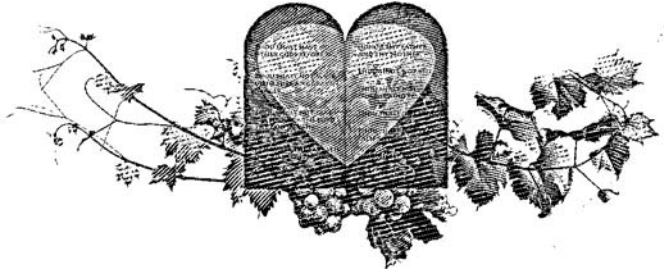


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 51:10, 11; John 14:9; Rom. 3:12–20; 7:7–12; Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:2, 3.*

Memory Text: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (*Ephesians 2:10, NKJV*).

In Scripture, “goodness” involves not only exhibiting right behavior but also avoiding its opposite, evil. Goodness is holiness put into practice. Goodness is what we do; otherwise, it’s not “goodness” at all.

The word translated “goodness” (*agathosune*) in Galatians 5:22 denotes an active, even aggressive, goodness. More than an excellence of character, it is character energized, expressing itself in good deeds.

We often hear that someone has a “good heart” or that someone is a “good soul.” However problematic that idea is theologically (*see Jer. 17:9*), it’s even more so in reality. A “good heart” or a “good soul” in and of itself means nothing. Instead, a “good heart” is revealed in good actions, good deeds, in concrete, practical acts of goodness that benefit others. Good intentions, good thoughts, good motives are fine and have their role, but in the end, goodness is to do good. We fool ourselves into thinking otherwise.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 13.*

God Is Good

In the Bible the most profound and absolute sense of “good” is predicated on God alone. Thus, although the term *good* is used freely in many circumstances, although there are good and bad individuals (*Matt. 5:45*), although it is possible for Christians to do good works (*Eph. 2:10*), although everything that God created He pronounced very “good” (*Gen. 1:31*), Jesus declares that God alone is “good” (*Mark 10:18*). Only God’s goodness is absolute. All others have degrees of goodness as measured against this absolute standard.

What do the following texts reveal about how the goodness of God can be revealed in our lives? *Exod. 33:19, Pss. 25:8, 86:5, 107:21, Nah. 1:7, Rom. 8:28.*

God, however, doesn’t just tell us that He is good; He has revealed that goodness to us in numerous ways.

We can see the goodness and love of God in creation. Even in a fallen world, even with sickness, pestilence, and natural disasters, the goodness of God is still revealed in nature.

Think of human relationships, love, concern, caring for others. We are capable of these wonderful and good things only because God created us with the potential for this, and He did so because He is good.

Human sexuality, though, of course, having been perverted in horrific and unimaginable ways, nevertheless at the core reveals the goodness of God and His love for human beings.

What is the greatest revelation of God’s goodness given to humanity? *John 14:9; Heb. 1:2, 3.*

Write down all the ways in which you yourself have come to understand the goodness of God. That is, despite whatever trials you have gone through, how have you come to know for yourself the goodness of our Lord? How can God’s goodness be reflected in your own life? Share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

All Have Sinned

Read Romans 3:12–20. How do we see the reality of these words manifested all around us? How do you see it manifested in your own life?

One of the sad facts of life is that there can be some very gifted and talented people, charming people, charismatic people, people of great skill and insight whom we often label as “good” when, in fact, they are rotten to the core. The word *good* can, like the word *love*, be so readily and cheaply thrown around that it loses its true meaning. When we keep the idea of God’s goodness before us, we can much better understand what human goodness is really, and ideally, about.

How often we hear non-Christians say that they don’t understand all this Christian talk about humans being naturally sinful and so forth. Aren’t there, after all, people who do good things, who express kindness, selflessness, and unconditional love? Haven’t we all seen people who are like that? How would you respond to this kind of argument?

Years ago, Russian writer Feodor Dostoevsky wrote a book about his time in a Siberian prison camp, where some of Russia’s worst criminals were incarcerated. Among the prisoners were those who had committed some of the most vile and heinous crimes imaginable. Yet Dostoevsky wrote about how, at times, these men were capable of doing some of the gentlest and kindest acts. The point is that even the worst people can do kind deeds. And at the same time, who hasn’t seen really good people, when pushed, do some pretty bad things?

What about yourself? Are you not capable of doing some very kind and loving deeds? Are you not capable of doing some very cruel and evil ones too? What do your answers tell you about yourself and your need of Jesus?

God's Law and Goodness

Read Romans 7:7–12. What point is Paul making about the law here? Why does he stress that the law is good?

The problem some have with the law of God is a misunderstanding of its role in the plan of salvation. When we go to the doctor with an ailment, there must first be a diagnosis before there can be a treatment. The problem comes when folk confuse the diagnosis with the treatment. The law of God not only serves as the standard, it also occupies a diagnostic role in the salvation process. Paul states simply that without the law he would not have known what sin was. The law, then, diagnoses us all as sinners. Without this diagnosis, there is little incentive to come to Jesus for healing.

In the plan of salvation, the law of God is indispensable, because without the law there is no sin, and without sin there is no need for a Savior.

In Psalm 40:8, David writes, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (NKJV). Why, then, might some people believe that keeping the law is a burden?

We sometimes think of law as a prohibition—a “thou shalt not.” And there is some truth to that. Yet, at the same time, there are infinitely more things that we can do than we cannot do. Think, too, of all the practical benefits of keeping God's law. Think of the ways it improves the quality of our lives here and now. Shouldn't we trust in God's goodness enough to know that if He forbids it, then it must not be good for us?

Do you find keeping the law to be a burden? If so, why? If the Bible says that keeping the law is a delight, what are we doing wrong if it's a burden to us?

Walking in Goodness

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (*Jer. 13:23*).

The text above makes a simple point about human nature, which is that we don't change easily, especially the bad aspects of our character. (Ask most married folk about how easy it is to change a spouse!) With this thought in mind, we can perhaps better understand why the scriptural concept of goodness is immensely deeper and its use much more restricted than is commonly used in the world. The fruit of the Spirit that is goodness is more inward, touching on every thought, word, and action of the godly person. This demands that motives be right before we call any action “good.” It means that the good person is one from whom righteousness (right doing) flows from inward devotion and love toward God.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (*Ps. 51:10, NKJV*). **“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word”** (*Ps. 119:9, NKJV*). **What is the message of these texts in regard to how we can become “good”?**

Compare those texts to what Paul says in Romans 7:18. How are all these texts related?

In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul expresses his disappointment that in spite of his best intentions he has no strength within himself to do good (*vss. 18, 19*). But in chapter 8, verses 1–4, he reveals the Christian's secret to overcoming this dilemma. What is the secret? Discuss what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” How is this done?

It's one thing to acknowledge that we are sinners, in need of grace, and that our good works cannot save us. At the same time, why must we be careful not to use this teaching as an excuse to live in the flesh? Do you find yourself doing just that? If so, why is that attitude treading on very dangerous ground?

Goodness Expressed

While it cannot be said that we are saved by works, it can be said that, as blood-bought sons and daughters of God, we are saved in order that our lives might manifest good works. Jesus pointed out that as a tree is known by its fruit, we will be known by the kind of lives we live. Jesus carries the importance of good works a step further when He declares that those whose lives lack in good works will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven (*see Matt. 25:41–46*).

Read Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:14. What common message exists in both these texts, and why is that message so important for anyone who professes the name of Christ?

As human beings we are sinners; we have violated God’s law; we all need a Savior. But at the same time, we have been given promises in the Bible that if we surrender to Jesus, if we choose to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh, we can overcome and live a life that reflects the goodness of God. We can live in what Paul calls the “newness of life” (*Rom. 6:4*), because just as we have been by faith “buried with” Christ “by baptism into death” (*vs. 4*), we can “likewise reckon” ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (*vs. 11*).

We can be “good” in the biblical sense of the word, not “good” as if we deserve salvation but “good” in the sense that our hearts, our motives, our deeds reveal to the world the reality of the God whom we profess to serve. Sure, it will take dying to self, it will take a willingness to serve others, it will take a daily struggle with the flesh, and it will take a humble heart of contrition and repentance when we fail, but we can and must live out the faith that we confess.

How well are you availing yourself of all the promises of a victorious Christian life? What is holding you back from claiming what’s yours, what’s been offered to you at such a great price?

Further Study: “It is not only by preaching the truth, not only by distributing literature, that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling.”
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21.

“The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, read and discuss your answers to the question in Sunday’s study about how God has revealed to you His goodness.
- 2** What are some practical ways in which we as individuals or as a church can express and reveal the goodness of God to others? Is your church doing good in the community where it is located? If your church were to move, would the neighbors miss it?
- 3** The Bible says that God’s law is good. And we know that it is. How, though, can it be used as something bad? What are ways that the law can be misused, and what are the sad consequences of such a misuse?
- 4** Ponder this age-old philosophical question: Is something deemed good because God says it’s good? Or does God deem it good because it already is good?
- 5** In class, discuss Luke 18:18, 19. What was Jesus saying here? How are we to understand His words?
- 6** In class, stage a discussion. Have half the class argue the point that human beings are basically good at heart; let the other half take the position that humans are basically bad. Argue your positions, not from the Bible but from what you see in the world as a whole.

Turning Tragedy to Joy

An interview with MARLENE AND ENRIQUE TAVARES DA SILVA

“We were devastated when we received word that our son, Emerson, a medical student in Bolivia, was diagnosed with schizophrenia,” his mother, Marlene, said. “We brought him back to Brazil and took him to the best doctors, who confirmed that Emerson has the most serious type of schizophrenia. The doctors explained that even with medicines, Emerson never would lead a normal life.

“Our son was a promising medical student, but now he can hardly be left alone,” his father said. “He worries about us when we are gone, even for a little while, and he doesn’t do well in public places. His life is largely confined to home except for Sabbath morning when we take him to church.”

The couple had looked forward to a retirement filled with ministry, but when Emerson became ill, Marlene took early retirement from her career as a teacher to care for him. “I prayed that God would show me how He could use our son’s illness to bring glory to His name,” Marlene said. “And God has answered that prayer in marvelous ways.

“Emerson has always loved God,” she adds. “He loved to lead out in worship, and I decided to invite people into our home for small-group worships and Bible study. Most of the people are doctors from the nearby hospital; some are teachers, and others are neighbors. It’s working. Emerson is blessed by these small gatherings, and we can reach out to people who don’t know Christ. We’ve lost count of how many people have been led to Christ through our small-group ministry.”

“We know that God didn’t make my son sick. But He turned our tragedy into a blessing by giving us a ministry at home. Currently we host two groups—one on Sabbath afternoon and one Monday night,” Enrique says.

Enrique prefers to let Marlene lead out in the Bible studies. He feels that her years of teaching experience make this her special gift. He focuses on making people feel welcome and contributing to the conversation.

“People don’t stop coming once they are baptized,” Marlene explains. “They continue to come and help lead out in the group. They bring their friends who are having problems or who don’t know Christ. It’s a busy and happy place.”

Enrique and Marlene urge everyone to find a ministry that suits their life and their talents. Small groups are an effective and important ministry in many countries.

MARLENE AND ENRIQUE TAVARES DA SILVA *share their faith in Belen, Brazil.*