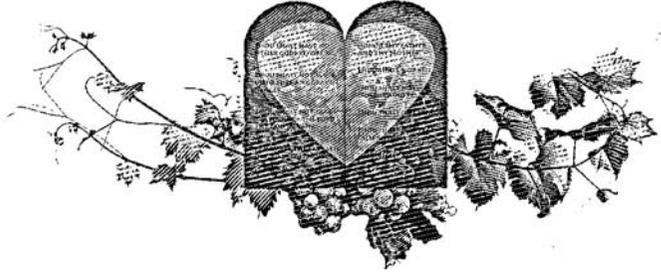


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness



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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Titus 2:11–14*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand how good works are inextricably bound up with the Incarnation, the sacrifice, and the return of Jesus.

Feel: Sense a need to receive the blessing that comes from doing good.

Do: Engage actively in helping others.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: How to Avoid the “Pitfalls” of Doing Good

A Doing good exposes us to two possible dangers: false pride and salvation by works.

1. How is taking false pride in the action of doing good a form of legalism and self-righteousness?
2. Good works do not save us. Yet, what place do they have in the Christian walk?
3. How does the Christian avoid both of these pitfalls? How may the answer be found in the contemplation of the sacrifice of Jesus to save us from our sinfulness?

II. Feel: The Positive Benefits of Doing Good

A How does selflessly doing good have a positive benefit upon the doer and the receiver?

III. Do: Actively Helping Others

A God is good. It is written that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and “went about doing good . . . because God was with him” (*Acts 10:38, NIV*).

1. What things can motivate us to do good?
2. How is obedience to the law a good work?
3. What degree of intelligence or education is required to act kindly?
4. What do giving a glass of water, visiting a lonely or ill person, or speaking encouragement to a child reveal and demonstrate about the giver of these good works?

► **Summary:** Good works demonstrate Christian living. Done unselfishly, they bless the doer and the recipient. Acts of goodness may be apparently small in the eyes of the world but large in God’s eyes when done for His honor and glory.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Goodness is a godly quality demonstrated by good deeds, which are necessary to glorify God. But since we are not good in ourselves, in order to do good deeds we must be united to Christ, as the branch is an outgrowth of the Vine.

Just for Teachers: Bring several things to class to demonstrate something good, such as a beautiful piece of fruit, flowers, a kitten, etc. Ask your class to identify what aspects about each item are good. Now hold up a mirror before other members of the class and ask them if they would describe themselves as good.

Consider This: Why do we have a problem describing ourselves as good? Jesus noted that only One was good (*see Luke 18:18, 19*). What has happened that God’s creation, such as the fruit, flowers, or kitten is good, but we are not good? What about us is good, and what about us is not good? Review Romans 3:12–20.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Prepare an outline of a large tree on poster board or on a chalkboard with cutouts of fruit. Tape the fruit to the tree. Also provide a picture of the Ten Commandments.

Bible Commentary

I. How Do We Know That God Is Good? (*Review Psalm 34:8 with your class.*)

The most important illustration of God’s goodness comes from Jesus’ life. Jesus came to show the radiance of God’s glory. However, He didn’t describe God through a showy, glitzy portrayal of all God’s power and wealth. Just the feeding of the thousands on the hillsides was enough to rouse the people to crown Him king, but Christ wasn’t looking for people who would follow Him for those reasons. The kingdom of heaven that Christ wanted His friends to experience and accept was a kingdom of the heart. “Come to Me,” Jesus says. “Take My yoke upon you. Eat My body, the bread of life, and drink My blood, My life poured out for you. Act on

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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 folks 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

My words. And I will give you rest and peace and the fullness of eternal life.” (See Matt. 11:28–30 and John 6:53–58.)

If we know of God and His good ways only by reputation, because we have heard or read about Him but never experienced what He can do to change our lives through His forgiveness and renewing grace, He can only say to us, “I never knew you.” All our knowledge, without experience, will not help us to become transformed by the healing power of God’s love and goodness.

Consider This: What about God is good? What did Jesus do to help people see how good His Father is?

■ *How does one have an experiential religion? What kinds of experiences with God change lives?*

II. Is the Law Good? (Review Psalm 19:7–14 with your class.)

Just for Teachers: Show your class a picture of the Ten Commandments as part of your discussion.

The Psalms are full of expressions of praise for God’s ways, His words, and His law. *The Message Bible* compares the law to the sun, signposts, life-maps, gold, a diamond set between emeralds, and strawberries in the spring. His law warms our hearts, pulls our lives together, and shows the pathway to joy. There aren’t enough superlatives to describe the wonder and the greatness of God’s law.

There are limitations to this wonderful law, however, as Romans 7 reminds us. It acts as a teacher, a mirror, illustrating what is good and righteous. It describes God’s character as good and perfect, but the law cannot make us good or righteous. However, God can save only those who are righteous; so human beings, who are all born with sinful natures and are unable to make ourselves righteous, are left in a dilemma. The law cannot save us. We need a Savior who can meet the requirements of the law for us and in us.

Consider This: How does Christ propose to save us? Why is He the only One who can?

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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 folks 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 can we do this?

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**III. God’s Goal for Us** (*Review John 15:1–7 with your class.*)

Like an apple tree, we were created to bear fruit. We were designed to do good works, but on our own we can’t do anything good, and we certainly can’t bear good fruit. Since we can’t do anything good by ourselves, we must remain in Christ. When we unite our weakness to Christ’s strength, our emptiness into His fullness, then we will have the mind of Christ. This isn’t an on-again, off-again connection. The communication to us of Christ’s life, His strength, and His power to produce fruit is as constant as the sap that flows continually from the roots to the tips of the branches.

Sometimes we are like trees that look healthy and leafy and should have plenty of fruit, but we don’t have any. This isn’t a simple “oops”; the barren fig tree is spoken of as flaunting its “pretentious branches in the face of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 614. There is a specific work God expects us to do, and He looks to us to do it. There can be no “Well, I meant to, I tried, I could have if . . .” God has made all the provision possible in heaven and on earth for us to bear fruit. If we don’t bear it, we must answer for the consequences, just as the fruitless fig tree was found wanting. It is a crucial matter to learn what God’s purpose is for our lives and fulfill it.

Just for Teachers: Display the drawing of the tree and pass out the outlines of fruit to members in your class. Ask them to write down the names of the spiritual fruits—in this case, the qualities of character—they long most to bear, and bring them up and tape them on the tree. Read the qualities of character written on the fruits of the tree.

Consider This: What is the individual work God has given you to perform for Him? How can you bear this fruit for Him?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Life Application: Compare and contrast Matthew 7:21–29 and Matthew 25. What makes the difference between those who do good works that God does not recognize and those who serve Christ through their good works to others? Consider this quote: “The Lord claims the strength of brain, bone, and muscle; but it is too often withheld from Him and

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

given to the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 613. What kinds of good works have we been doing that have been given to the world rather than to the service of God?

Witness:

How can you use your own experiences with God to help someone else understand what it means to taste and see that God is good?

► STEP 4—Create

1 Supply your class members with an outline of a tree on a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw pictures of fruit on the tree to represent the good deeds they believe God has created them to do.

2 Plan for an experiential relationship with God. What experiment can you undertake in the next week in order to experience the power of God in your life? The following list is gleaned from Ellen G. White’s *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 221, 222:

- a. Heed the warnings and instructions of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Put forth earnest efforts to claim your heavenly inheritance.
- c. Make any sacrifice necessary to obtain the character of Christ.
- d. Make peace with God.
- e. Act on God’s promises.
- f. Forsake the way that God has forbidden you to go.
- g. Avail yourself of the refuge God has offered.
- h. Apply God’s remedy for sin.
- i. Deny self and follow Christ’s example through difficult as well as good times.

3 Because Christ claims your brain, muscle, and time, how can you recognize the priorities of His claim this week in your work?

Closing Activity: Often when our hearts are full of God’s goodness to us, they overflow in psalms and songs. Close your Sabbath School lesson study with a psalm such as Psalm 8, 9, 23, or 34. Songs to use from *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* include “Now Thank We All Our God” (number 559) or “Let All Things Now Living” (number 560).

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:

- ❶ In class, read and discuss your answers to the question in Sunday’s study about how God has revealed to you His goodness.
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ The Bible says that God’s law is good. And we know that it is. How, though, can it be used as something bad? In what ways can the law be misused, and what are the sad consequences of such a misuse?
- ❹ 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?
- ❺ In class, discuss Luke 18:18, 19. What was Jesus saying here? How are we to understand His words?
- ❻ 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.