

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness (Being Good)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 51:10, 11; John 14:9; Romans 3:12–20; Romans 7:7–12; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 1:2, 3.

MEMORY VERSE: “God made us. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good things. Long ago God prepared them for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

IN THE BIBLE, “GOODNESS” (BEING GOOD) MEANS SHOWING RIGHT BEHAVIOR. But it also means avoiding evil. Goodness is holiness in action. Goodness is what we do. If not, it is not “goodness” at all.

The word translated “goodness” (*agathosune*) in Galatians 5:22 shows an active goodness. It is more than just having good character.¹ It is character that shows itself in good deeds (actions).

We often hear that someone has a “good heart” or that someone is a “good soul.” In the Bible, it may be difficult to describe what is good. We are all sinners (read Jeremiah 17:9). It is even more difficult to describe in real life. A “good heart” or a “good soul” itself means nothing. Instead, a “good heart” is shown in good actions and good deeds that benefit others. Good thoughts and good reasons are fine. But goodness really means doing good. We only fool ourselves if we think differently.

1. character—who someone is; all that a person does, feels, and thinks are what people are made of.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 7**GOD IS GOOD (Exodus 33:19)**

In the Bible the deepest sense of “good” begins with God alone. The word *good* often is used in many examples. There may be good and bad individuals (persons) (Matthew 5:45). It may be possible for Christians to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Everything that God created He said was very “good” (Genesis 1:31). But Jesus announces that God alone is “good” (Mark 10:18). Only God’s goodness is perfect.

What do Exodus 33:19; Psalm 25:8; Psalm 86:5; Psalm 107:21; Nahum 1:7; and Romans 8:28 tell us about how the goodness of God can be shown in our lives?

God does not just tell us He is good. He has shown goodness to us in many ways.

We can find the goodness and love of God in creation. The world is full of sin. There is sickness, disease, and bad things that happen in nature. But even so, the goodness of God still is shown in nature.

Think of human relationships, love, and caring for other people. We can have these wonderful and good things only because God created us to do good for people. And He did so because He is good.



Despite sin, God’s goodness still is shown in nature.

Some good things that God has given us have been used by people in horrible ways. Sex is one of them. But sex is a blessing when it honors God. And then it shows us God is good. And it shows His love for humans (men, women, and children).

According to John 14:9 and Hebrews 1:2, 3, what is the greatest example of God’s goodness given to the world?

Write down all the ways that you have come to understand the goodness of God. You may have gone through many troubles. But how have you come to know for yourself the goodness of our Lord? How can God’s goodness be shown in your own life? Share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 8**ALL HAVE SINNED
(Romans 3:12–20)**

How do we experience the truth of these words in the world around us? How are they shown in your own life?

One of the sad facts of life is people are not always what they seem on the outside. There can be some very gifted and talented people, people with beautiful and positive personalities, people of great skill and wisdom. We often call them “good.” But, in fact, they are very rotten. The word *good* can, like the word *love*, be so commonly used that it loses its true meaning. When we keep the idea of God’s goodness with us all the time, we much better can understand what human goodness really is.

Often we hear non-Christians say that they do not understand this Christian talk about humans being bad. They wonder, are there not people who do good things, who show kindness, selflessness, and unconditional² love? Have we all not known people who are like that? How would you answer this kind of argument?

2. unconditional—never changing; not dependent on our doing anything to make ourselves worthy to receive it; not asking for anything.

3. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

Years ago, a Russian writer named Feodor Dostoevsky wrote a book about his time in a prison camp in Siberia. Some of the prisoners had done the most terrible crimes in Russia. But Dostoevsky wrote about how, at times, these men could do some of the gentlest and kindest deeds. The point is that even the worst people can do kind deeds. And at the same time, there really are good people who do some pretty bad things.

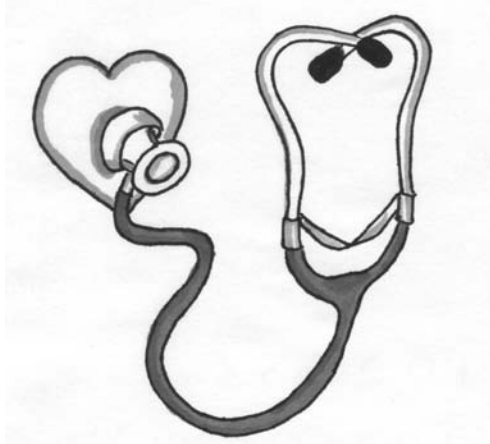
What about yourself? Can you do some very kind and loving deeds? Can you do some very cruel and evil ones too? What do your answers tell you about yourself and your need of Jesus?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 9**GOD’S LAW AND GOODNESS
(Romans 7:7–12)**

What point is Paul making about the law in Romans 7:7–12? Why does he say that the law is good?

Some people have a problem understanding that the law of God has an important part in the plan of salvation.³ When we go to the doctor with an illness, the doctor must first make a diagnosis (search for

the cause). Then the doctor can give a treatment (medicine). The problem comes when people confuse the diagnosis with the treatment. The law of God serves both as the standard and as the diagnosis for the salvation process.⁴ Paul says that without the law he would not have known what sin is. The law, then, points to us all as sinners. Without this diagnosis, there is no reason for coming to Jesus for healing.



The law of God is like a doctor that diagnoses (searches for the cause) the sin problem of the human heart.

In the plan of salvation, the law of God is a must! This is 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 have come to do what you want. Your law is in my heart” (NirV). Then why do some people believe that keeping the law is hard to do?

We sometimes think of law as a command—a “Thou shalt not.” And there is some truth to that. But at the same time, there are many more things we can do than we cannot do. Think, too, of how we can profit from keeping God’s law. Think of the ways that the law improves our lives here and now. Should we not trust in God’s goodness enough to know that if He says we should not do something, then it must not be good for us?

Do you find keeping the law too difficult? If so, why? If the Bible says that keeping the law is good, what are we doing wrong if it is difficult for us?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 10

WALKING IN GOODNESS (Jeremiah 13:23)

Jeremiah 13:23 makes a simple point about human nature.⁵ We do not change our human nature easily, especially the bad parts of our character. (Ask most married people about how easy it is to change a husband or wife!) With this thought in mind, we perhaps can better understand why the meaning in the Bible is much deeper than how worldly people understand it. The fruit of the Spirit shows that goodness is more inward, touching on every thought, word, and action of the godly person. This shows that people are doing good for right reasons. In other words, doing good

4. salvation process—how a person is being saved.

5. human nature—any of the qualities or aspects of humans (men, women, and children) that make us who we are. Without God our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

comes from the person's inward devotion and love toward God.

“God, create a pure heart in me. Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you” (Psalm 51:10, NlrV). “How can a young person keep his life pure? By living in keeping with your word” (Psalm 119:9, NlrV). What is the message of these verses about how we can become “good”?

Compare those verses to what Paul says in Romans 7:18. How are all these verses connected with one another?

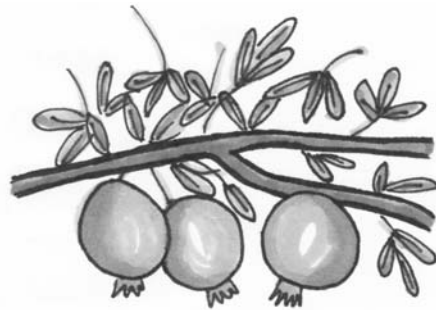
In Romans 7, Paul is disappointed that he has tried very hard to do good but has failed. He is not strong enough to do it on his own (verses 18, 19). But in chapter 8, verses 1–4, he shows the Christian's secret for overcoming the problem. What is the secret? Discuss what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” How is this done?

It is one thing to admit that we are sinners and need God's grace.⁶ And we need to say that our good works cannot save us. But at the same time, why must we be careful not to use this teaching as an excuse to live sinfully? Do you find yourself doing just that? If so, why is that attitude (feeling) very dangerous?

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 11

GOODNESS SHOWN (Ephesians 2:10)

We cannot say we are saved by works. But we can say that, as sons and daughters of God, we are saved so that our lives may show good works. Jesus pointed out that a tree is known by its fruit. In the same way, we will be known by the kind of lives we live. Jesus shows good works are very important. He says that those who fail to do good works will not enter the kingdom of heaven (read Matthew 25:41–46).



Just as a tree is known by its fruits, we will be known by the kind of lives we live.

What common message do Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:14 give? Why is that message so important for anyone who claims to be a Christian?

As human beings (men, women, and children), we are sinners. We have broken God's law. We all need a Savior. But at the same time, we

6. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

have received promises in the Bible that if we surrender⁷ to Jesus and live in the Spirit, we can overcome and live a life that shows the goodness of God. We can live in what Paul calls the “newness of life” (Romans 6:4). We have been by faith “buried with” Christ “by baptism⁸ into death” (Romans 6:4). For this reason we can “consider” ourselves “to be dead as far as sin is concerned. Now that [we] believe in Christ Jesus, consider [ourselves] to be alive as far as God is concerned” (Romans 6:11, NIV).

We can be “good” according to the Bible. Not “good” as if we deserve salvation but “good” because our hearts, our reasons, our actions show the world that God is real in our lives. Sure, we need to die to self, but we need to be willing to serve others. We also will need to struggle daily with the flesh. And it will take a humble heart



We need to die to self and be willing to serve others.

7. surrender—to give one’s self completely.

8. baptism—when a person is put completely under water and brought back up out of it. This means that Jesus has forgiven this person’s sins and has given him or her new life.

9. repentance—the act of being sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

10. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

11. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

of true sorrow and repentance⁹ when we fail. But we can and must live out the faith that we claim to have.

How well are you claiming the promises from the Bible of a victorious (successful) Christian life? What is stopping you from claiming what is yours after all that Jesus did on the cross for you at such a great cost to Himself?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 12

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “It is not only by preaching the truth or passing out Christian tracts that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful Christian witness. A cheap Christian character does more harm in the world than the character of a worldly person.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹⁰ for the Church, volume 9, page 21.

“The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign. It is not the wearing of a cross or a crown. But it is showing the close connection between people and God. The power of God’s grace will be shown through the change of a Christian’s character. This will show the world that God has sent His Son as its Savior. No other influence¹¹ of the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The

strongest argument in favor of the gospel¹² is a loving and lovable Christian.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry*¹³ of Healing, page 470.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In class, read and discuss your answers to the question on Sunday’s study about how God has shown you His goodness.

❷ What are some useful ways we as Christians can show the goodness of God to others? Is your church doing good in the community¹⁴ 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. But how can it be used as something bad? What are ways the law can be used wrongly? What are the sad results of such a wrong use?

❹ Think over this age-old philosophical¹⁵ question: is something good because God says it is good? Or does God say it is good because it already is good? What difference to your life does your answer make?

❺ What was Jesus saying in Luke 18:18, 19? How are we to understand His words?

In class, start a discussion about being good. Have half the class argue the point that humans are good at heart. Let the other half take the position that humans are bad. Argue your positions not from the Bible but from what you see in the world as a whole. At the end of the discussion, compare¹⁶ the reasons you came up with as a class to the reasons the Bible gives for being good. What are the differences, and why must the Bible be our only standard for goodness?

12. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

13. *Ministry*—God’s work in all areas; preaching, giving Bible studies, healing, helping the poor, the work of a pastor or an evangelist.

14. community—a group of people living, working, or worshiping together.

15. philosophical—having to do with study of human thought about the meaning of life, how mind relates to matter, and the problems of right and wrong.

16. compare—to show how two or more things are the same.