

April 7, 2021 | Wholly Living

Week 7 | Gal. 5:22-26 | Goodness

As we know, the 'Fruits of the Spirit' are virtues that correspond to the vices of the flesh Paul had indexed just a few verses prior in our passage. Paul's reasoning was that when the God of the universe takes up residence in a person's heart, some significant/obvious/undeniable changes will occur. And those specific changes are as follows:

READ: Galatians 5:22-26 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Now, as I've said each week in this study, we cannot cultivate nor can we produce these virtues on our own. Paul is insistent that each of these divine attributes *already* indwells the believer as they keep "in step" with the Spirit. They do not need to be worked on; instead, they need to be discovered.

In week 2, we tackled the first attribute of the Spirit: love. Love is that place from which all of the other graces flow. Without love, there are no fruits of the Spirit.

In week 3, we studied joy. Joy cannot exist without grace. The believer has joy and can rejoice precisely because they do not have to earn their way into God's good graces. God's graces are freely offered, and this truth, in turn, makes our hearts glad.

In week 4, Bob was kind enough to tackle peace. And as he eloquently pointed out, "No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace."

In week 5, we dove into the concept of patience. Patience is simply the capacity to accept delay without losing one's temper; or, as one commentator put it, patience is "waiting with the *right* attitude."¹ In fact, James told us that to lack patience means to lack peace, and to an abundance of patience leads to an abundance of praise. And what sustains our patience is a known end. Since we know how it'll all end, we can patiently wait for God to fulfill his plans.

¹ Guthrie, George E., *James*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, editors Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2006), p. 266.

Last week, we looked at the word kindness. Aesop famously said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” More than any other, the Christian ought to be kind because we, more than any other, have been shown the kindness of God. Kindness denotes the quality of one's character as tender, compassionate, and meek.

Today, we'll dive into what Paul called “goodness.” The Greek word Paul uses is **ἀγαθωσύνη** (aga-tho-soo'-nay). And while it is a rare word in the NT (it only shows up four times and only used by Paul), like kindness, it's also an extremely broad term and even more generic than “kindness” is.² However, the only real discrepancy that can be made between it and kindness is that “goodness” seems to carry the idea of benevolence or generosity toward others. But even that distinction is at best tenuous. Our modern-day expression “out of the goodness of one's heart” may hit as close to the meaning of *agathosoonay* as any other.³

Given that "goodness" is such a nonspecific term, we may struggle somewhat today to really nail down what Paul was talking about. As we've seen throughout this study, Paul can be exact in his meaning, but sometimes he's frustratingly inexact. However, ambiguity may have been his point exactly. Like a painter, Paul not only drew fine lines and added intricate details to his canvas when he painted the fruits of the Spirit, he also used a wide brush with broad strokes to fill in the majority of the landscape and define the outer edges of his work.

<INSERT Bob Ross Picture>

Now, it's essential to understand that "goodness" is not the absence of "badness." Instead, it's the addition of a good thing into a bad situation (cf. “Good Friday”). In the beginning, there was nothing, and then God created something. After each day, he would end his creative work by thinking of it as good. What's more, when he was totally finished, he called all that he had made “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The work of God in our world from the beginning was always a good word; light shining into the darkness, land dividing the sea, the breath of life where there was only vacuum. Similarly, the Holy Spirit moves and works in us to produce the broad strokes of good in this very imperfect world.

This is precisely Paul's point when he says later in Gal 6

READ: Galatians 6:7-10 (ESV)

² Keener, Craig S., *Galatians: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2019), p. 521.

³ George, Timothy, *Galatians*, The Christian Standard Commentary Series, (Holman Publishers, 2020), p. 449.

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Like the creative works of God in Genesis, the believer's works today ought to be "good." They ought to be for the benefit of all, but especially for those who are of the household of faith. Meaning, while we are to be passively good to every image-bearer on this little blue marble we call "earth," we ought to be actively good to our fellow brothers and sisters within the community of believers we call "the church." We should bring good where there was none before.

In fact, even plans that may go awry can be used for the good of all when they're motivated by a love for God.

READ: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Goodness is guaranteed for those who follow God's good plan.

Keep in step with the Spirit, and you will have a good ending.

Nowhere better is this principle illustrated than in the twenty-third Psalm.

READ: Psalm 23 (ESV)

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Goodness is guaranteed for those who follow God's good plan.

I don't know what God is doing, but I know whatever He's doing is good.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Wholly Living | Week 7

TITLE: Goodness

TEXT: Galatians 5:22-26

"Goodness" is not the absence of "badness." Instead, it's the addition of a good thing into a bad situation (e.g., "Good Friday"). In the beginning, there was nothing, and then God created something. After each day, he would end his creative work by thinking of it as good. What's more, when he was completely finished, he called all that he had made "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The work of God in our world from the beginning was always a good word; light shining into the darkness, land dividing the sea, the breath of life where there was only vacuum. Similarly, the Holy Spirit moves and works in us to produce the broad strokes of good in the sea of bad that surrounds us.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: