

Fruit of the Spirit study 7: GOODNESS

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23

Once when Jesus was addressed as ‘Good teacher’, he replied ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone.’ (Luke 18:18–19)

But what do we mean when we say God is ‘good’? English uses ‘good’ in different ways but the Greeks had three word groups which they used for ‘good’ and which are used in the Greek OT and NT. It’s helpful to consider these as we start thinking about ‘goodness’.

- ‘good’ as in ‘fitting’, ‘useful’, ‘orderly’ (a good meal, a good job)
- ‘beautiful’, ‘free from defect’ (aesthetically good)
- ‘good’ referring to moral standards.

Thinking about these three concepts of ‘good’, what would be their opposites?

In biblical thinking, starting in the OT, the idea of goodness and ‘good’ cannot be separated from the concept of a personal God from whom come all good things. This idea of goodness is a moral one, but from it flow all other good/beautiful/fitting things.

“There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him.”

C S Lewis *The Great Divorce*

A number of psalms (106, 107, 118, 136) begin with God’s goodness by saying:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

and Psalm 23:6 says “surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life”. Notice the link between God’s goodness and his love.

Read Psalm 107.

- Verses 4–38 give five reasons to thank God. How was his goodness shown in these five instances?
- But notice what happened in verses 39–42. Is this part of God’s goodness as well? How can it be ‘good’ for people to suffer ‘calamity and sorrow’? How does this link to God’s enduring love?

Jesus told the rich ruler that ‘only God is good’. Jesus is the only human being who has ever perfectly kept God’s moral law and therefore the only one who is truly ‘good’. ‘Can any of you prove me guilty

of sin?' Jesus asked in **John 8:46**. And they could not. So if we want to reflect what goodness looks like in a human being, we need to read the Gospels.

Jesus also talked about good and bad fruit:

Luke 6:43–45

- What kind of 'good things' do you think Jesus meant?
- What kind of 'bad things'?
- How can our hearts become, and stay, 'good'?

In the New Testament 'goodness' is mentioned by Paul as fruit not just in Galatians but also in Ephesians (5:8–11).

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

By contrasting 'the fruit of the light' with 'fruitless deeds of darkness' Paul indicates that 'goodness' is something that should result in actions. There are many passages in the NT letters which talk about how we should live as children of God's kingdom. We'll look at just one.

Read Romans 12:9–21

Paul concludes his letter to the Romans with practical instructions about the outworking of their faith.

- List some of the practical things that Paul encourages his readers to do. How are these related to 'goodness'? For example, why is practising hospitality a 'good' thing to do? (If it helps, consider what doing the opposite of these things would be like.)
- "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." How from this passage does Paul expect his readers to do that?

Final questions to think about:

- Does showing goodness mean we should never rebuke or challenge people over what they've said or done? If not, how can this be 'good'?
- How can we show 'goodness' to others at the moment?