

Goodness



Fruit of the Spirit (Part 7)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you concerning one of the most beautiful themes of all Scripture, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In my talk yesterday, I dealt with the fruit of kindness. I explained that, in essence, kindness is living in harmony with the laws that govern the universe, especially the laws that govern conduct and relationship. It is sowing what we want to reap, treating others as we want them to treat us.

Today I'm going to speak about the fruit of goodness. First of all, we need to say a little about the word "good" itself. This is one of the commonest words in the English language. But in our contemporary speech, unfortunately, we have watered the word down a great deal and we have used it very cheaply and very carelessly. We have applied the word "good" both to people and to things that do not really merit that word at all.

Now, in Scripture the word "good" denotes excellence, especially moral excellence. In its strictest use, it applies only to God Himself. This is brought out by something that Jesus said in Mark 10:17–18:

> And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.'" (NAS)

That's a very strong statement. "No one is good except God alone." And, of course, if that young man did not recognize the deity of Jesus then he was not really entitled to call Jesus good.

So goodness, actually, is based on a very high standard. It's based on God's standard, the standard of who God is and what God does. That's true goodness, moral excellence, complete uprightness, perfect honesty, perfect justice. If we are to be good in any sense that relates to that, there's only one way that we can do it. The only thing we can do is to become vessels of the life and nature of God. Then God's goodness is manifested in us. When we do that, then we show forth, in this world, what God is really like. Being good in this sense means living a life that bears witness to the

existence of God. This has been beautifully summed up in some words that I read by Cardinal Suhard. He says this:

> "To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist."

You see, to be good is to be a living mystery. It's to be something that people of this world just cannot comprehend. But, on the other hand, they cannot deny it and so the life of goodness, God's goodness, lived out in one of His believing people, confronts the world with the existence of God.

I remember once hearing the testimony of a man who had served some years in the British Navy. He had gone into the navy a confirmed atheist. He didn't believe in God, he had nothing but contempt for all forms of religion, he never intended to get involved in religion. But for some months, he was on a rather small ship, only a few men in the crew, and one of the other men on the crew, whom he met every day and shared his meals with and could not escape from, was a committed Christian. This committed Christian did not preach to him, did not quote the Bible to him, but just lived a life of goodness in front of his eyes, day after day, week after week, month after month. This atheist saw in this fellow crew member something that he couldn't account for. It was a kind of life he hadn't seen. His final comment was this: "I would never have opened a Bible but I could not help reading the life of this man. Eventually, his life convinced me that there must be a God."

And so that man came out of the British Navy a confirmed believer in Jesus Christ. What was the Bible that convinced him? Not a Bible printed with black marks on white paper but a Bible of flesh and blood. The life of a man who lived out his faith without too much religiosity, without too much preaching—just being good.

Each time that I heard that testimony and every time I meditate upon it, it really confronts me with a sense of my own duty. I say to myself, "Remember, your life may be the only Bible that someone will ever read." Almost surely, in your life as a Christian, you are going to come up with a person like that atheist. A person who wouldn't go to church, wouldn't read his Bible, doesn't believe in God. How can God reach such a person? Probably your life will be the only Bible that someone will ever read. What will they read on the pages of your life if they were to read it today?

I've said that goodness is really letting your life become a vessel for God's goodness. Then you may ask me, "Well, how can this be achieved?" My answer is: by yielding to God and allowing Him to live out His life through us. I really believe the key is in the world "yielding." I want you to hear what Paul says about his own Christian experience in Galatians 2:20:

> "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." (NAS)

So Paul says, "How do I live the Christian life? Well," he says, "if I were left to do it in my own strength and ability, I just couldn't do it. But," he said, "my secret is that I have come to the end of myself. I see Jesus there on the cross and I realize it was really I who died. And now I'm dead but there is a new person living in me and that's the resurrected Christ. And so the life that I now live in this mortal body of mine, right here in time and space—in the kitchen, in the office, in the factory, on the highway—the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me."

And then again in Philippians 1:21, Paul says:

> "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (NAS)

So Paul's life was not his own, it was Christ's life lived out through him. He had come to the end of himself and he just handed it over to Jesus.

I'm reminded of the testimony of a little old lady once, a good many years back, who led a life of exemplary goodness. She didn't do much preaching, she just lived. One day, somebody said to her, "Sister so-and-so, what do you do when you're tempted?"

And she gave a very characteristic answer. She said, "When the devil knocks at the door, I let Jesus answer."

That's handing it over to Jesus. That's not trying to meet the devil in your own strength, not trying to face temptation in your own ability or righteousness. It's letting God live out His life through you.

Listen again to what Paul says in Romans 6:11–14:

> "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members

> as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." (NAS)

That's a glorious statement. "Sin shall not be master over you." How is it accomplished? Well, first of all, we have to understand that it's not accomplished through the works of the law. When Christ died, He died for the sins that were under the law. He set us free from the obligation of being made righteous by keeping the law. He brought us into a new kind of righteousness. Not on a lower standard but operating through a different means: the righteousness of God's grace. And this righteousness is achieved by yielding to God.

One more thing I need to say: Goodness of this kind does not compromise with evil. It's not a milk-and-water Christianity that yields to every kind of pressure. On the contrary, there's no compromise between good and evil. In Psalm 45:7, the psalmist says, and these are prophetic words that picture the Lord Jesus:

> "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee With the oil of joy above Thy fellows." (NAS)

Notice, to love righteousness also requires that we hate wickedness. There cannot be any compromise. And in Psalm 97:10, the psalmist says:

> "Hate evil, you who love the Lord..." (NAS)

Ultimately, the only power strong enough to overcome evil is good. There is no other way to meet evil and to overcome it but by good. But good is strong enough to overcome evil. This is what Paul says in Romans 12:21:

> "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (NAS)

Remember, goodness is God's life lived out in you. And the life of God is greater and stronger than all the forces of evil. Goodness is yielding to God and letting Him manifest His life in you and through you.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow, I'll be speaking on the next form of spiritual fruit, the fruit of faithfulness.

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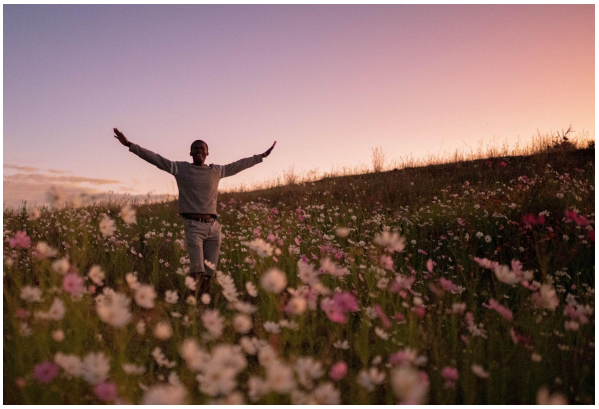

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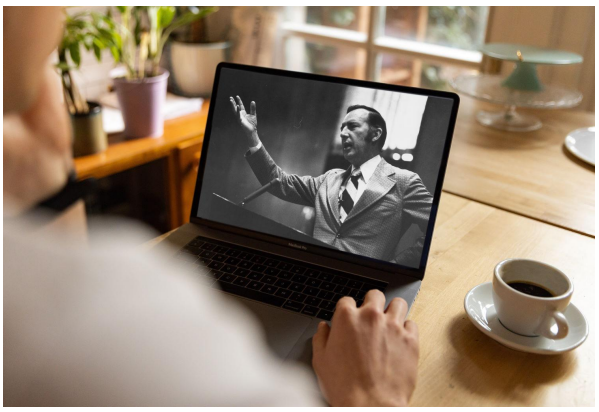

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