

# **The Goodness of God Has Been Hijacked By The World**

Galatians 5:22; Matthew 19:17

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There was a time when a “good” man or a “good” woman was highly esteemed in society. Now the definition of “good” or “goodness” has been so completely high-jacked by a worldly, self-centered culture that almost everyone considers themselves to be a “good” person (“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes” Proverbs 12:15). For to most people a “good” person is usually conceived as being one who does not hurt others or commit “big” sins (does not perform satanic sacrifices, does not commit a mass murder, does not terrorize with bombs, or does not rob banks). If you survey most people in our culture and ask them if they are a “good” person, most would likely respond that they believe they are good. They believe they do more good things than they do bad things (and there are more good than bad). And because most people believe they are good (or mostly good), most people have deluded themselves into believing that a good God will surely usher good people (like themselves) into heaven at death rather than cast them into hell (if they even believe in hell).

Whereas the Bible teaches that God alone is perfectly good as to His very nature and can only do that which is good and that no mere human being upon earth does what is good by nature (“there is none that doeth good, no, not one” Romans 3:12), the worldly skeptics of this age proudly and foolishly invert and assert that man is good by nature and that God (if there is a God) cannot be good if He permits the pain and suffering in this world to continue when He could stop it.

Perhaps there is not a fruit of the Spirit that is more misunderstood than the fruit of goodness. I dare say that we will not understand (let alone

grow in) the fruit of goodness, unless we put aside our own childish wisdom and bow prostrate before the wisdom of God revealed to us in Holy Scripture. Remember Job? He challenged the goodness and wisdom of God in ordaining the pain and suffering that he endured, but God revealed to him his pride and ignorance, with the outcome that Job confessed the audacity of his foolishness in challenging the infinitely sovereign, infinitely good, and infinitely wise God (Job 42:1-6). That alone is the heart that will be taught and will learn the good treasures of the Lord's wisdom concerning the fruit of goodness.

The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) What Is Goodness (Galatians 5:22)? and (2) What Is the Goodness of God (Matthew 19:17)?

## **I. What Is Goodness (Galatians 5:22)?**

A. The fruit of goodness is often viewed as a twin-fruit together with the fruit of gentleness/kindness (which was previously considered). And though the concepts and applications of the fruit of gentleness and the fruit of goodness may overlap at various points, the Holy Spirit has listed goodness as a separate and distinct fruit from that of gentleness/kindness. Let us consider some distinctions between the fruit of goodness and the fruit of gentleness.

1. First, goodness is broader and more comprehensive in its scope than is gentleness. In fact, it might be said that goodness encompasses gentleness. A child of God (through faith alone in Christ alone) manifests the fruit of gentleness because he/she is good.

a. For example, when the Lord tells Moses that He will manifest to Moses His glory there upon Mt. Sinai, God describes His glory as a manifestation of "all my goodness" (*tov*) in Exodus 33:19, and what attributes of God are included in God's goodness? According to Exodus 34:6, they are mercy, grace, long-suffering, loving-kindness (translated

“goodness” from *chesed*), and truth (i.e. trustworthiness in keeping His promises).

b. Thus, under the umbrella of God’s goodness one will find all the attributes of God as just mentioned. God’s loving-kindness (or gentleness) is comprehended under His goodness (likewise in Micah 6:8).

2. Second, whereas **gentleness** refers to kindness and mildness (rather than a harshness) shown to others (even to those who provoke us), **goodness** refers to primarily two complementary ideas.

a. First, goodness in Scripture refers to **moral goodness**, integrity, and uprightness of character—as when we speak of a “good man” as opposed to “an evil man” (Proverbs 12:2; Matthew 12:35), or “good works” rather than “evil works” (John 5:29; 3 John 11), or God being good and not evil (Psalm 25:8; Matthew 19:17).

b. Second, goodness in Scripture refers to **generous goodness** or bountiful goodness in benefitting or supplying others with what is useful or needful—as when we speak of one who gives out of the “goodness” of his/her heart, not begrudgingly, but out of the generosity and liberality of his/her heart to the benefit and help of others (Luke 6:35; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; just as God does Psalm 107:8-9). Thus, we might say that these two primary nuances of the word “goodness” speak of the godly man (that’s moral goodness) and the giving man (that’s generous goodness), or when applied to God speak of God as a Righteous King (that’s moral goodness) and as a Giving Benefactor (that generous goodness).

3. Third, before moving to the next main point, I must emphasize (contrary to the notions and worldly wisdom of the world) the following about the biblical concept of goodness.

a. Goodness is not simply avoiding certain bad habits, but is positively manifested in doing that which is pleasing to God out of faith in Christ and love to Christ, in accordance with the Scripture, to the supreme glory of God. We’ll be talking more about what are “good

works” in a future sermon on the fruit of goodness (but that is a brief definition of a good work). Because no unregenerate person can do or even desires to do such good works, it confirms what Scripture teaches about man apart from Christ (Romans 3:10-12).

b. Dear ones, we cannot be good (as God defines it) until we truly recognize and confess that we are not good by nature (in fact, that we are ungodly and wicked by nature). The first step to become a “good man” or a “good woman” is to confess that God alone is truly good, and apart from God’s goodness, no man or woman or child can become good. For, beloved, God does not justify and declare those righteous who are good, but those who are ungodly—i.e. those who know themselves to be ungodly (Romans 4:5). Christ did not come to save the good but came to save sinners—i.e. those who know themselves to be sinners (Matthew 9:13).

c. Thus, doing certain “good” things to others does not make you or me a good person (for true “goodness” comes from God alone). There is no self-help program (or 12 step program) to make a person good. One is not born with the temperament of biblical goodness. It is not a personality trait—it is a gift of God and fruit of the sovereign and good Spirit of God. Only the God of goodness can bestow His goodness upon us and make us good. And this fruit of goodness is implanted into the heart of every Christian (without exception) at his/her regeneration. Partaking of this fruit of goodness is partaking of the DNA of Jesus Christ—it is a family trait of all members of the family of God—it is an attribute of God and is the character of Jesus Christ. Dear ones, the goodness of god (both the moral goodness and the generous goodness of God) is another one of the family resemblances that the Spirit of God is growing in the life of every child of God (who trust alone in Christ alone for his/her eternal salvation).

## **II. What Is the Goodness of God (Matthew 19:17)?**

A. Because the quality of being good or the concept of goodness must be directly and originally tracked back to God Himself (who alone is perfectly and originally good), we will focus our attention upon the goodness of God for the remainder of this sermon (as we consider our text in Matthew 19:17).

1. Our text narrates the historical account of a man (whom Luke calls “a certain ruler” in Luke 18:18) who is said according to Mark’s Gospel (Mark 10:17) to have run to Christ and to have knelt before Christ out of honor for the Lord. What was so urgent? Why the hurry to meet with Christ? He had a question of eternal consequence that was weighing so heavily upon his heart: namely, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life” (Matthew 19:16)?

2. This Jewish ruler imagined that eternal life would be secured by his good works and obedience to the Law of God. But Jesus ultimately demonstrates to him that no one can gain eternal life by good works or keeping the Law of God, because all people (except Jesus Himself) fail to keep God’s Law perfectly (as did this sincere ruler of the Jews, who was rich and had made His wealth his god, and would therefore not obey the specific commandment of Christ to give away his riches to the poor and follow Christ). And since God as a righteous Judge does not grade on a curve (or weigh one’s good works against one’s wicked works), all people fall under God’s just and morally good condemnation.

3. The Lord Jesus brought this rich ruler to see that eternal life comes not from our good works (which do not meet the standard of God’s goodness), but come from the good works of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep (from that follow the good works of the Christian). Dear ones, there is no other way to have eternal life; for there is no other name given under heaven whereby man must be saved (Acts 4:12).

4. As urgent and necessary as that truth is, I want to

emphasize another truth about this text. It is the truth that Jesus declares that “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17).

a. The rich Jewish ruler had called Jesus, “Good Master” (Matthew 19:16). Now Jesus uses the words of the Jewish ruler to infer that He, Jesus, is the one true good God. For Christ states the unequivocal truth that only God is truly good. Though the conclusion is not specifically stated by Christ, the conclusion is, “Therefore, I am the good God.” “If God is alone good, and if I am good (as you have correctly called me), I must be the good God.” This is (in fact) the right conclusion to draw from the words of Christ.

b. This is a powerful inferential argument from Scripture to demonstrate Christ’s Deity. But don’t miss this truth—it is also clear declaration from the lips of Jesus Christ that God alone is truly good (as to His nature, and as to all His acts which He performs in creation, providence, and redemption). Thus, let the skeptics hurl their foolish arguments against the goodness of God in all that He is and in all that He does, they are all lies; for “there is none good but one, that is, God.” The Lord laughs at them and holds them in derision, and will bring His good and righteous judgment upon all the unbelieving and unrepentant (Psalm 2:4,9-12).

B. I would now like to further unpack the attribute of God’s goodness briefly.

1. The Scripture does not set up some kind of apologetical argument to defend the infinite goodness of God, any more than Scripture gives us a step by step defense of the existence of God (“In the beginning God” Genesis 1:1). So likewise, the goodness of God is clearly placed before us to admire from the very beginning of creation, so that we might worship the Lord God Almighty for His goodness (“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold it was very good” Genesis 1:31). If you want to know why God blesses this world and mankind with

material and spiritual blessings (in creation, providence, and redemption), it is because He is good (Psalm 145:9-10; Matthew 5:45; Acts 10:38).

2. As one of God's attributes, God's goodness is **infinite** (and knows no boundaries). God's goodness is **morally perfect** (without the least stain of unrighteousness). God's goodness is **eternal** (God was from all eternity to eternity absolutely good). And God's goodness is **immutable** (God is always in His nature and in all His purposes and acts absolutely and unfailingly good—even when He judges—even in the suffering, pain, war, pestilences, famines, natural calamities, or murder in the world, God never ceases to be good in His sovereign ordination and control of all such miseries in the world—in other words, the goodness of God never changes, it never increases or decreases).

3. Perhaps what the world finds so objectionable about the good God of the Bible (God's own revelation of Himself) is that He does not exist to give them whatever they want (as a celestial Santa Claus). The worldly view of good is determined by what pleases the world; whereas the biblical view of good is determined by what pleases God (as revealed in God's holy commandments and the gospel of Jesus Christ). Dear ones, the good God of the Bible first and foremost glorifies Himself and exhibits His goodness in the world for His own glory without apology and without the counsel from any man ("Who hath been his [God's] counselor?" Romans 11:34).

4. The worldly wisdom of man foolishly states that God cannot be sovereign and good at the same time. If He is good, then He cannot be sovereign, because a good God who is sovereign would not allow all of the evil in the world, but would intervene and prevent it. In a sermon to come, we shall see that God is both sovereign and good, and ordains and controls all things to bring about the good ends that He has eternally purposed ("who worketh all things after the counsel of his will" Ephesians 1:11; and works "all things together for good to them that love

God, to them that are called according to his purpose” Romans 8:28).

5. Dear ones, the world (and unfortunately many who profess Christ) want a Santa Claus for their god, but the good God gives His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). However, the world does not want this most precious gift of a good God; it hates this good gift of God. And yet the world is bathed moment by moment in the goodness of God, and yet will not give Him the glory He rightly deserves. The world calls God’s goodness and generosity their own works, their own accomplishments, their own possessions, their own gifts, their own wealth, and their own knowledge. They rob God of the glory of His goodness. And yet the Lord continues to send rain and sunshine (and every other material benefit) despite the sin and rebellion of this world. But the good God will one day issue forth His good judgment upon those who denied His goodness, rejected His goodness, and abused His goodness for their own pleasure in unbelief.

6. Dear ones, we need never apologize for God’s goodness displayed in creation, providence (whether the miseries of this life, the judgments of God in this life, or the eternal suffering of hell itself). We need never apologize for God’s goodness displayed in redemption (whether the election of sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, or the reprobation of sinners not chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world). God is good in who He is and in all that He does (in creation, providence, and redemption). Let us listen to the words of Paul after such a discussion (Romans 11:33-36).

Dear ones, never forget that the God of the Bible delights in His goodness to you, His dear children, whom He has purchased by the precious blood of His own dear Son. God gives to you out of His goodness with joy and gladness—He rejoices in all His works (Psalm 104:31).



The Lord would not bestow His bounty in His gifts to men (and particularly in the gift of His Son) if He did not delight in His own goodness. The goodness of God is your warrant to come to Christ today. If there no goodness of God, there would be no salvation through Christ or no hope in this world at all. There is no merit in your works, your faith, or your repentance. All of the merit is in Christ, and His good work of salvation. God withheld not even His only begotten Son in bestowing the goodness of His salvation upon undeserving sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. And if in God's goodness, He withheld not His only begotten Son to save you, will He withhold any good gift from you in order to sanctify you?

What He sends your way may be in your opinion a thorn in the flesh. It may not be what you asked Him to send. But do you trust in His goodness (whether it be life or death, misery or blessing) that He can only give you, His dear children, what is good and not what is evil (Luke 11:13)? Whatever the grace you need, whatever the fruit of the Spirit that is in need of growth in your life, your good Shepherd is not wearied by your many solicitations and pleadings. He is pleased to give to you always what is good (even when He withholds from you what you have specifically asked). Are you willing to rest in the goodness of God no matter what trial, tribulation, or suffering assails you? Herein, dear child of God, is your only place of comfort and rest—your good God and Savior has ordained it (prosperity or poverty, healing or illness, success or failure) for your good (as He did with Joseph in Genesis 50:20).

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