



# Bring the Goodness

## *The Fruit of the Spirit*

**August 2, 2020**

**Psalm 119:68**

Goodness presents a number of difficulties for us. It's difficult to define; difficult to be; difficult to do; even difficult to believe in doctrinally. After all, the great distinctive setting apart Christianity from all other religions is its insistence that people are saved by God's grace and not by their own good works. That fact almost makes us want to dismiss with exhortations to "be good" entirely.

But we can't do that. Yes, Ephesians 2:8-9 does declare salvation by grace alone, through faith alone—and definitely not by works. But the very next verse, Ephesians 2:10, says we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God ordained for us to walk in. So while goodness is not an ingredient in our salvation, it is an aftereffect. God wants us to be like him—and he is good! "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes," the psalmist writes. *God, you are good in every way—make me like you!* That's the heart of a true disciple.

### **On Being Good**

When Moses asked God to show him his glory (Exodus 33:18), God said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will declare my name in your presence." Moses asked to see God's glory; God let Moses hear his goodness. Two entirely different things? No. Glory and goodness are related like a boat and its wake, or like the sun and its rays. The one causes the other. The glory of God—his own personal weight and worth—overflow in goodness: his bounty and blessing to us.

But the wonder of the gospel is that God doesn't just cause his goodness to pass by us; he causes his Spirit to live within us—granting both the glory of his *presence* and the goodness of his *presents* and blessings. The Spirit of God restores our true humanity in Christ, and makes us truly good people.

### **On Doing Good**

With the Spirit of God within us, we overflow with goodness—just like God did with Moses; just like Jesus did with all who encountered him. "From his fullness we all have received grace upon grace" (John 1:16). In fact, just as God visited Moses with his glory and goodness; he will sometimes visit others through our expressions of his goodness. That's the wonder of 1 Peter 2:12: "Live such good lives among the pagans that although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day he visits us." The idea seems to be that just as God's glory overflowed in goodness to Moses, so our goodness can point back to God's glory for those who experience him through us. God reveals himself to people through our good works. Every good gift ultimately comes from God (James 1:17), and he causes people to grasp that fact through our good works!

That's why we always seek to do good—whether that costs us significant time and effort, like the Good Samaritan caring for the half-dead traveler he met; or whether it only requires a cup of cold water in Jesus' name. We give to all who ask; we withhold from no one; we always seek to do good to each other in the body of Christ and to everyone else too (1 Thess. 5:15).

# Discussion Questions

1. The introduction to today's teaching suggested that goodness is often a problem for us. Does it present problems for you? How so? To what degree are you suspicious of any call from pastors or spiritual authorities to "be good"?
2. Process Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 33—34.
  - What do you learn about God from his name: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not clear the guilty, but visits the iniquity of the fathers on their children and their children's children to the third and fourth generation." How does this reveal the goodness of God?
  - J.I. Packer said this about God's goodness:

"When the biblical writers call God *good*, they are thinking of all those moral qualities which prompt his people to call him *perfect*, and in particular, the generosity which moves them to call him *merciful* and *gracious* and *loving*. Generosity is, so to speak, the focal point of God's moral perfection; it is the quality which determines how all his other excellences are displayed. God is abundant in goodness, overflowing with generosity."
  - Unpack these thoughts. What do they say to you? What insights do you glean from this?
  - What do you make of the glow on Moses' face that resulted from his encounter with God? What does it mean?
  - In what ways does this story illustrate greater, more profound realities about how we relate to God in this new covenant era? (See John 1:14-16; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:6; etc.)
3. In Matthew 5:14-16 and 1 Peter 2:12, we are urged to live good lives, and do good works in the world. In fact, we're told to be so good that we cause people to glorify God because of what they see in us.
  - Why do Christians so often have the opposite effect on people?
  - What distinguishes self-righteousness (which turns people off) from good works which point people to God?
  - The sermon contained a few stories of Christians interacting with people who were initially hostile to them, and winning their respect, if not their full conversion. Has this ever happened to you? Did a Christian ever impress you so much that it led to your giving credence to their faith—or has God ever used you to "open a door" to Christ for someone who discounted him? Share your stories.
4. What is one take-away from this sermon for you? Is God calling you to "be good" to someone, in prayerful hope of revealing his goodness and glory through your service? Is God encouraging you to not give up or grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9)—to persevere in the good work you're already doing? What's the application of this sermon to your life?