



“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).

A Generous Spirit

Central Truth: Kindness of heart produces acts of benevolence.

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Topic: Holy Spirit: Fruit Of; Giving: Of Oneself.

“The fruit of the Spirit is . . . goodness” (Galatians 5:22).

Two men were discussing a mutual acquaintance. One said, “He is a good man.” The other replied, “Really? What is he good for?”

That little incident underscores a Bible truth. It is not enough to be good; you must be good for something. The Bible promises a special grace upon the good man, saying, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand”* (Psalm 37:23, 24). That makes one want to be a good person, doesn't it?

But the goodness that the Bible requires is not the product of man's, own merit. Jesus said, *“There is none good but one, that is, God”* (Matthew 19:17). The goodness which is spoken of as the fruit of the Spirit, therefore, is the consequence of God's ministry within the believer.

Please pursue this study with your attention upon yourself. Do not estimate the goodness of others, but that of your own spirit. Do not be content to be as good as another, for that is not God's standard. Measure yourself by Jesus, and ask God to make you good as He is good. That will challenge your heart, humble your spirit, and make you available to God.

I. GOODNESS DEFINED

Your dictionary will probably define *good* in relation to personal

character. To be good is to be of a favorable character, suitable, and conforming to a standard. That definition is satisfactory as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. There is another element to being good.

Your peers would probably think of good as being the opposite of bad, as it relates to persons. If one does not do bad things, he is called a good person. If he pays taxes, votes, and obeys the laws, he is called a good citizen. If he joins the church, attends regularly, and supports the work with his offerings, he is called a good church member. There is more to being good than has been mentioned thus far.

The Bible concept of good relates to service as well as to character. It deals with what a person does as well as what he is. Biblically, to be good is to be helpful, beneficial, expressing good will by actions even at personal cost. Many people would like to be good without it costing them anything. Jesus taught that that was an impossibility. Goodness necessitates involvement in service to God and people.

II. GOODNESS DEMONSTRATED (Luke 10:30-37)

Here is the familiar parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus told the story in response to a “good” man who sought to justify his failure to help people. The man had quoted God's two greatest commandments: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself”* (Luke 10:27). Jesus challenged him to do that. But knowing that he was not doing it and having no desire to do it in the future, the man sought to justify himself by asking, *“Who is my neighbour?”* (Luke 10:29). The parable of the good Samaritan came from Jesus' lips in response to that question and that attitude. Here is how the account may be interpreted in view of the subject of goodness.

A. A good person is needed when someone is in need (verse 30). The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho is approximately twenty miles. The road extends eastward from Jerusalem through a territory known as the wilderness of Judea. That area is a barren desert, except when an occasional rain permits vegetation to spring up for a brief time. In New Testament times it was a haunt for highwaymen, who would rob those who were traveling alone from Jerusalem to Jericho. Such was the fate of the poor man of whom Jesus spoke. Bandits came upon him, robbed him, stripped his clothes from him, beat him, and left him to die. He needed a good man to come to him.

Good people are still needed when someone is in trouble. Who goes to the rescue of the victims of an automobile wreck, the sufferers from a house

fire, the destitute after a severe flood, or those suffering from sorrows of death? Wherever there are humans who are hurting, there is a need for good people.

B. A good person can be identified by his attitude and actions. (1)

He does not simply shun the need. A certain priest came by and knowing that a stranger had fallen injured by the wayside, passed on the other side of the road without attempting to help. He was religious, but he was not a good man that day.

(2) He is not simply curious about the situation. A Levite (one of the tribe of Levi who was set apart for the service of God just as the priests were) came that way. He was curious enough to go to where the man lay and look at him, but he passed on without helping him. That is like people driving slowly by an automobile accident but not stopping to help. The good person is more than curious; he is ready to help. .

(3) He is willing to meet the need. The story Jesus told held an insult to His Jewish hearers. The priest and the Levite were evidently Jews. They did nothing to help the sufferer. The man who helped him was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were a mixed-blood people (part Jew and part Gentile) which developed from intermarriage after Israel's deportation into Assyrian captivity (722 B.C.). The Jews hated the Samaritans and had nothing to do with them. The woman from the village of Sychar was amazed that Jesus would even speak to her, since He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan (John 4). But in Jesus' story two Jews passed without helping, while a Samaritan rendered aid. Of the three, who was the "good" man?

C. A good person can be identified by his work. (1) His motive is compassion. The Samaritan was not moved by unconcern or by curiosity but by compassion. (To have *compassion* means to suffer with, to feel the hurt of another.) So the stranger responded to the sympathy that he felt for the suffering traveler, and his compassion motivated his assistance.

(2) His method is personal involvement. It appears from Jesus' story that the Samaritan was traveling alone. If so, he was in danger from the robbers when he stopped to help the sufferer. Jesus is careful to point out the personal involvement of the Samaritan: he came, he saw, he had compassion, he went to him, he bound up his wounds, he set him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn, he took care of him, he paid the cost, and he promised to cover any future expenses. Count the number of times the personal pronoun he is used of the Samaritan. That is involvement!

People can tell how sincere a person is by how much he is willing to invest. The Samaritan invested time; he stopped to render aid. He invested effort; he walked while the wounded man rode. He invested money; he paid

an estimated cost for care and promised more if the price was higher. That is true sincerity and the mark of a truly good person.

Learn from this account that God's standard of goodness differs from man's. A good person does what profits others and answers their needs. Are you good according to this standard?

III. GOODNESS PRACTICED (Acts 4:32-37)

Jesus illustrated goodness in the account of the work of one good man. But God intends for all His people to be good in the same way. Jesus says to us all, *“Go, and do thou likewise”* (Luke 10:37). That was a mark of the earliest Christians according to the record in the Acts of the Apostles. Pause at this point and read Acts 4:32-37. There is the account of a good church at work in evangelism and benevolence, meeting spiritual and material needs.

A. Share a common bond. The church in Jerusalem had a blessed unity *“of one heart and of one soul”* (Acts 4:32). (What if it could be said of every church that she is one, heart and soul?) It was as if the Jerusalem church was animated by one spirit — the Holy Spirit. Out of such a unity there flowed a compassion which gladly reached out to those in need. So that church was known for her benevolence and her evangelism.

B. Have a common availability. *“Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”* (Acts 4:32). Be careful here. Some have called this “Christian Communism,” but that is not true. Neither the state nor the church held property which belonged to those Christians. They still retained private ownership. There were things which each one *“possessed.”* When the need arose, *“as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, . . . and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”* (Acts 4:34, 35). Each one retained ownership of his property but held it ready for disposal when a need arose. That is a mark of a “good” church.

C. Give a common witness. The work of the church can never become benevolence alone. Her commission is to a world ministry of missionary evangelism. The gospel witness did not lessen as the work of benevolence continued in Jerusalem. On the contrary, *“with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all”* (Acts 4:33). The gospel witness is the life breath of a New Testament church. She must never become so involved in good things that she neglects the best.

D. Use a common fund. Benevolence was distributed by the apostles

at first. But the number of believers increased so drastically that twelve apostles could not carry on the daily benevolent ministry without it hindering their gospel ministry (Acts 6). So seven men were selected by the church and set over the benevolent work of the church, visiting and distributing daily according to the needs of each person. Out of a common fund the needs were met.

Have you learned how to transfer ownership of all you have to God? Do it. Then, keep it available for His use at His call. That is the true nature of Christian stewardship.

E. Follow a good example. Verses 36 and 37 introduce us to Barnabas (the surname of a man named Joses). He was a Levite who was to live from the tithes paid by the people. He had no financial obligation except to tithe his income to the priests. But instead, he joined the church in her benevolent ministry. He sold certain possessions and gave the money to the church for her ministry. And his home was on the island of Cyprus, not even in Jerusalem or anywhere else in the land of Palestine. His example provoked others to liberality.

This study is not dealing with financial stewardship or even the grace of benevolence. It is dealing with the grace of goodness. Money comes into consideration because it is a way that one can show the goodness in his heart.

A good person is one who is ready to help someone in need. He is God's agent in ministry. *"Go, and do thou likewise"* (Luke 10:37).

1. What does it mean to be good?
2. How is goodness a fruit of the Holy Spirit?
3. Why does Jesus say that there is none good but God?
4. What shows that the priest and Levite were not good?
5. What shows that the Samaritan was a good man?
6. Why does it often cost you something to be good?
7. What shows a church to be good in this sense?
8. How are evangelism and benevolence involved in church work?
9. What example did Barnabas set?
10. What good can you do this week that you would not do if you were not a Christian?