

Increasing in Holiness The Holiness of Goodness

Intro: Paul in Gal. 5:22-23 gives us a beautiful summary of the Christian's character. He shows us the holy character of God which the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in us to make us holy people.

Already we've talked about the holiness of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and kindness. The sixth term in Paul's list is "goodness." The Greek word Paul uses is *agathosune*. It is found only four times in the NT; but it is the noun form of the adjective "agathos" which found many times in the NT, usually translated "good."

One could hardly imagine anyone who is a Christian who does not know that God wants his people pursue "goodness" or be "good;" but in what sense? How is "goodness" to be distinguished from other terms found in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit?

Goodness is the spirit of generosity toward others that is benevolent toward their needs and generous in dealing with them.

William Barclay, in his excellent work, "Flesh and Spirit" speaks of how the Greeks compared the word "agathosune" (goodness) with word "dikaiosune" meaning "justice."

"Justice, they say, is the quality which gives a man what is due him; but goodness is the quality which is out to do far more than that, and which desires to give a man all that is to his benefit and help."

"The man who is just, sticks to the letter of his bond; the man who is good goes far beyond it."

This suggests that a suitable synonym for "goodness" might be "liberality" or "generosity." Interestingly, BDAG suggests this very meaning for "agathosune" in Gal. 5:22.

In the NT, the word from which "goodness" comes is often contrasted with "evil"...but not in the general moral sense.

In the parable of the landowner (Mt 20:15), the landowner paid all his workers the same wage even though they had worked different lengths of time. Some of the laborers resented this act. He responded to them, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous (Gr. *agathos*)?" (Mt. 20:15) Here "agathos" is used in the more specific sense of generous. From this passage we may see how "goodness" is used in the context of other specific manifestations of "goodness" as "generous".

The person who displays goodness is not like the person who is simply just.

The person who is simply just gives to another only what he has earned or deserves.

The person who is good gives more than what was deserved.

So then, we might define Paul's term as the spirit of generosity toward others that is benevolent toward their needs and generous in dealing with them. It was this spirit of generosity that was enjoined in Jesus famous statements from the Sermon on the Mount:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Mt. 5:38-42)

In general Jesus' words apply the principle generosity in two ways:

Generosity toward those who wrong or mistreat us

Generosity toward those who are in need

These exhortations are helpful and specific; but there is one man in Scripture who I think repeatedly shows this goodness or generosity in action.

Barnabas, goodness in action

Luke speaks of him as a "good man."

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. (Ac. 11:24)

No wonder; for he is repeatedly said to be "full of the Holy Spirit." In other words, in him one could see the "fruit of the Spirit" flourishing.

He manifested his goodness by encouraging others

And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), (Acts 4:36-37)

Barnabas' name which means "son of prophecy" got his nickname because he used the prophetic word to "console" or "encourage" others.

He manifested his goodness by helping the needy

And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37)

Barnabas was willing to give generously to help the needy in the Jerusalem church. Not surprisingly, he would later be chosen to serve those widows who needed daily help.

He manifested his goodness by giving accepting Saul's testimony of conversion

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. (Ac. 9:26-27)

The reactions of the church are understandable enough. Saul had caused some serious damage in Jerusalem; but someone had to give him the benefit of the doubt when he said he had changed. Barnabas led the way.

He manifested his goodness by teaching new converts

And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. (Acts 11:22)

Barnabas was the man of choice when these new Christians needed someone to teach them.

He manifested his goodness by taking the gospel to other lands.

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2)

Barnabas was willing to leave the comforts of home and journey for many months, often facing great danger and hardship to teach others.

He manifested his goodness by giving John Mark a second chance to prove himself.

And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. (Ac. 15:36-39)

Barnabas' generosity is seen here in his willingness to give a younger man a second chance to prove himself.

Barnabas' sterling "goodness" shines forth again and again. But then I must finally ask...

How will we prove our goodness?

CONCLUSION: The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."

What level of generosity is more suitable to you as a person? Just what is just? Or what is generous? Paul was confident such was true of the brethren in Rome. And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. (Romans 15:14)