

The Mystery Of Goodness

Goodness as an Inherent Attribute of God

Martin G. Collins

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Do you consider yourself a good person? Do your actions appear good to others? Does your attitude support your "good" image? Is goodness produced in your life? Or is your goodness the type of goodness that the mass murderer in Wisconsin had where it was just an appearance on the surface.

As we approach Passover each year we search our hearts and minds with concern as to whether we are worthy to take the Passover. We are all very familiar with the apostle Paul's admonishment to examine ourselves to make sure we do not keep the Passover in an unworthy manner.

I Corinthians 11:27-32 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

A common mistake and a wrong emphasis made by many in the church is that they think they are not good enough to take the Passover. Of course we are not good enough. None of us is good enough when compared to God's standard of righteousness. Only God the Father and Jesus Christ are good enough. Only God is intrinsically good. But sometimes we hear someone say he should not keep the Passover because he is not good enough. That person is missing the point.

Worthiness to keep the Passover involves the true attitude of the heart. It requires repentance, humility, sacrifice, forgiveness and love. Goodness is involved only in its reflection of the uprightness of our hearts or the righteousness of our lives. A person may be able to appear good but may have a bad attitude at the same time.

God is good in His very being. Jesus asserts in Luke 18:19 that "no one is good but God alone."

This is not to say that human beings cannot be good in a limited way. The Psalmist sang, in Psalm 125:4 "Do good, O LOORD, to those who are good, And to those who are upright in their hearts."

So, obviously a person can be good. But, we certainly want to know how?

Psalm 125:4 reveals a key element connected to goodness—being upright—or righteous in our hearts. Not just visibly but in our hearts and minds, at the very core of our being. This is the goodness that is missing in these individuals that commit such atrocities and tragedies.

Most religious people directly or indirectly associate "goodness" with God as one of His main attributes. According to Webster's New Universal Dictionary, "goodness" is a euphemism for 'God'.

In a non-euphemistic sense the term "goodness" refers to the state or quality of being good; specifically with regard to virtue and excellence. It can be equated to such virtues as kindness, generosity, and benevolence. It also refers to the best part, the essence, or valuable element of something.

The words good and goodness appear more than 600 times in the Bible. Obviously, it is a very important term to understand!

Goodness is also a term that communicates a sense of joy and immeasurable results. Even a brief analysis of the words "goodness" and "good" as found in the Bible quickly reveals the reason for this. Goodness in the Bible is God himself. He is the epitome of goodness and the standard by which it is determined. The Father and the Son are good, and They do good and They create good.

Acts 10:38 records that Jesus "went about doing good." That is what He does, that is what He did when He was on earth!

We, as God's people, are not good in and of ourselves in the way God is. With God's help we have the potential for doing good and being good through the empowerment of His Holy Spirit and the presence of God in our lives through Jesus Christ we can attain this attribute. In this way, we are able to reflect God's goodness in our own lives and not just have it as the surface appearance that so many have.

Goodness is an admired quality that radiates many virtues. It is reliable, kind, and genuine. It is excellence of character, morality and attitude seen in a person's behavior.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul admonished them to avoid being idle, commanding them that, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat". That sounds like a harsh command from God, but there is a good reason for it. This is a principle with physical, and especially spiritual ramifications.

If a person is unwilling to work to support himself and his family why should anyone else have to take care of him when he is fully capable of work himself? That is not a politically correct statement today in this society. When he willfully refuses to work he becomes little more than a parasite that takes, but gives nothing and does nothing for anyone else.

The same holds true for anyone who is called by God, but is unwilling to put forth any effort to work for the spiritual food and drink God provides through Jesus Christ and His Church by way of His Holy Spirit.

Prayer, praise, Bible study, as well as service and support for the church of God (the Body of Christ) are some of the things that constitute the work that God expects in order for us to be counted worthy of this calling. Goodness takes a lot of work with the right attitude.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word "goodness" there is the Greek word *agathosune* and it is hard to define in the Greek, just as in English. On the surface, the Greek word, *agathosune*, seems to indicate the same meaning as *chrestotes*, the Greek word that represents kindness. But, the Greek word *agathosune* indicates one specific quality that is above and beyond *chrestotes*—that word used for kindness.

It signifies an energized excellence of character that manifests itself in active good. That word active is a key word. It differs from kindness in that it is a more openly active fruit of the spirit. Goodness is more often directed toward those who do not deserve benevolence. It is enthusiastic action in doing the right thing—it is active righteousness, whereas, *chrestotes* (kindness) is more passive and limited in its scope.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words describes the difference between the

words *chrestotes* (kindness) and *agathosune* (goodness). I think that this clarification helps our understanding.

"Trench, following Jerome, distinguishes between *chrestotes* and *agathosune* in that the former describes the kindlier aspects of "goodness," the latter includes also the sterner qualities by which doing "good" to others is not necessarily by gentle means. He illustrates the latter by the act of Christ in cleansing the temple, Matthew 21:12-13, and in denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 23:13-29; but *chrestotes* by His dealings with the penitent woman, Luke 7:37-50. Lightfoot regards *chrestotes* as a kindly disposition towards others; *agathosune* as a kindly activity on their behalf."

We cannot be good without there being something produced.

Goodness is not defined in terms of what man is, but what God is. It is an essential attribute of God's nature. God is good.

God, Himself, is good! It is what He is, what He creates, gives and commands. 'Good' is defined in terms of 'God' not vice versa. God, and God alone, is good without qualification. He is the judge, the norm, and the only standard of righteousness. That is pretty much the opposite of what the society uses as a determination or standard for goodness.

He is good because He is morally perfect, gloriously generous and the standard of excellence and righteousness. Every attribute and every action of God is good and produces only good fruit.

David wrote in Psalms 16:2, "O my soul, you have said to the LOORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."

We can understand this in a physical sense by noting that it is the essential natural characteristic of water to be wet, and the essential natural characteristic of fire to be hot. It is the essential spiritual characteristic of God to be good. This characteristic is not changeable or diminishing, nor does it have a beginning or an end.

When Moses asked to see the glory of God, notice God's reply:

Exodus 33:19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you,

and I will proclaim the name of the LOORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

God's goodness in this reference is beyond our human comprehension. Our minds are too small to understand it. "Goodness" here refers to His whole character and nature. God's glory is further revealed in the proclamation of His name. The name of God includes his nature, character, doctrine and standards of living.

In this context, it also refers to His mercy and compassion. The proclamation of His name is also a proclamation of His goodness.

During the same encounter, when God passed before Moses He specified that the quantity of His goodness flourishes.

Exodus 34:6-7 And the LOORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LOORD, the LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

All of these unchangeable qualities——mercy, grace, longsuffering, truth, love, forgiveness and righteousness are what it means for God to be good. Our gracious God bestows His unmerited favor on those who have no claim whatsoever on it. This means that we do not deserve it.

His graciousness is described as: slow to anger, excelling in goodness and truth, merciful, and forgiving.

But, as in all things, His grace is balanced because He still must punish the guilty. Equally, our merciful and loving God is justice and righteousness. His correction is felt to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him and those who disobey Him.

This sense of the goodness of God encompassing many things is repeated in the Psalms.

- Psalm 27:13 The goodness of God can be seen "in the land of the living,"

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implying that human life in this world is the setting within which we have access to God's goodness.

- Psalm 31:19 is a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance. The goodness of God can be seen in what He lays up for those who fear Him. The list includes His righteousness, steadfast love, compassion, faithfulness, grace and generosity.
- Psalm 45 is a praise psalm. It includes some of the same virtues as in Psalm 31. The goodness of God is abundant and it is linked with such moral and spiritual attributes as greatness, majesty, righteousness, mercy, steadfast love, compassion and providence.

God, being the standard of goodness, is unlimited in its description and its impact on the lives of everyone. The works of God are good because they reveal His attributes of wisdom and power.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Roman congregation with the confidence in Romans 8:28 that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." So, we see there such a strong contrast between what happens to those who hate Him and those who love Him.

The commands of God are good because they express the righteousness of His character, teaching us, and helping us to grow in understanding His goodness.

God's goodness is a fearful attribute, but that fear has a positive effect on us when we obey Him because it produces good spiritual fruit. Those who yield to God's commands profit by it. Paul told Titus to remind the church to maintain good works:

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

We do have a personal responsibility in what we do with the goodness that God sends toward us.

The goodness of God seems harsh to those who are disobedient, but the end result shows God's goodness as having either brought them to repentance or ended their suffering in sin. We can receive the gift of unlimited blessings from God's goodness if we fear and reverence our Creator, obeying Him with faithfulness and overcoming our sins with genuine repentance.

This seems like a tall order, but God, who is faithful and true, promises to help us with it. This too is part of His wonderful goodness.

Psalms 31:19 enlightens and encourages us this way:

Psalms 31:19 Oh, how great is your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear you, which you have prepared for those who trust in you in the presence of the sons of men!"

God's commands express the moral perfection of His character and show us how to please Him, while marking out the path of blessings. In our obedience to God's commands He bestows upon us blessings while teaching us how to be good like Him. Just as He loved us first He also showed goodness to us first.

The six declarations in the account of creation week are built around the theme of what is good. Six times it records that "God saw that it was good."

The account culminates in a seventh statement in Genesis 1:31 that says: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

The creation that God called into being and that continues to bless humanity, flows from God's goodness. God's creation, including people, who are created in His image, is an extension of His own goodness. The apostle Paul emphasizes in I Timothy 4:4 that "everything created by God is good."

Because of the link between God and His creation, human life in this world is viewed in the Bible as good in principle.

Two passages in the book of Jeremiah can be taken as a summary.

Jeremiah 31:12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, Streaming to the goodness of the LORD—For wheat and new wine and oil, For the young of the flock and the herd; Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, And they shall sorrow no more at all.

The second half of verse 12 paints a picture of God's goodness in the creation aspect, in the physical aspect, in mentioning wheat, wine, oil, flocks and herds.

Here, the goodness of God extends to the good things of this life. We see descriptions of human satisfaction as well as God's inherent goodness of character. It is a life so full that it is like a watered garden with people rejoicing in dance, happiness and the goodness that God will provide. God says that people blessed in this way will be satisfied with his goodness.

Jeremiah 31:13 "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together; For I will turn their mourning to joy, Will comfort them, And make them rejoice rather than sorrow.

God says that people blessed in this way will be satisfied with His goodness in verse 14:

Jeremiah 31:14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LOORD."

Here the goodness of God extends to the good things of this life. We see descriptions of human satisfaction as well as God's inherent goodness of character.

Two chapters later we see 'good' construed as the blessings of God on his creatures. The future of Israel and Judah will be so glorious that the other nations will stand in awe of them and tremble at their greatness. Jeremiah was inspired to write about this future time.

Jeremiah 33:9 Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.'

God does not just create things good and then walk away from it, but He continues to maintain it throughout its existence.

Goodness is used in this context to convey the pleasant, joyful, and overwhelmingly positive effect of blessings on the people of Israel after their exile and captivity.

Jeremiah 33:6 "Behold, I will bring it [Israel] health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth."

The word "health" in verse 6 is literally "new flesh" in the original Hebrew. Their exile will have a healing effect and the wounds of Israel will be wrapped in peace and security. It will not just be the healing of one specific part of a person it will be a complete overhaul. It will happen in a physical and spiritual sense.

A peaceful and secure life is the proverbial good life, with God and people in harmony and people rejoicing in both God and the human blessings that He bestows. The goodness of God is not isolated from life but is the basis for what is good in it.

The attribute and principle of goodness along with the adjective 'good', are the most frequently used biblical terms to represent what is positive in human experience. Some of its existence becomes apparent if we simply scan the range of things that various biblical writers state are good.

Some of the good things that are mentioned are obviously moral and spiritual phenomena:

Giving thanks to God, being near to God, the hand of God upon a person, God's statutes and commandments, the promise of God, the godly life, doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. These are all items mentioned throughout scripture as being good.

The list of things keeps expanding into less obviously spiritual areas of life. A pasture can be good, for example. So can the work of building a wall and finding a wife. I do not know why there is that comparison, but somehow in scripture they seem to be closely related. Brethren, dwelling together in unity is good and a word spoken in season. So are eating, drinking and finding enjoyment in work; wisdom and a conscience free from guilt. So, we see there that the word goodness, the adjective 'good', covers a wide spectrum of areas of life. Any area that God has an impact, which is everything, is impacted by God's goodness.

The fruit of a tree can be good, as can the gifts parents give to their children and the precepts of a wise person. Even affliction can be good. We see whether they are good or not by their end result.

We are made in God's image physically. We also have the potential to be made into the righteous image of God through the process of redemption and salvation. This means that with God's help and as a reflection of Him we are capable of good.

Our actions, like God's actions in a perfect sense, are declared to be good. We cannot declare them good and we cannot declare ourselves good. Our actions, when righteous like God's, are good actions. Our thoughts, when loving like God's, are good thoughts.

The story of King Hezekiah of Judah is an interesting story in light of this aspect of whether a person is good or not and how it is dealt with in the Bible. God enabled Hezekiah to be a good king of Judah by performing many acts of goodness to him. Hezekiah re-instituted the Passover and had idols removed from the land. He also improved the overall safety and prosperity of the nation.

II Chronicles 30:17-18 For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the LOORD. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written.

Keep in mind they had a long way to travel for it and apparently did not have the time, or were unable to with all that was going on in the short notice that they received from Hezekiah.

II Chronicles 30:18-19 But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LOORD provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LOORD God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary."

So we see there the emphasis that Hezekiah had in his prayer was dealing more with the attitude

of the people rather than the physical preparation that they had done.

II Chronicles 30:20-22 And the LOORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LOORD day by day, singing to the LOORD, accompanied by loud instruments. And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LOORD; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making

confession to the LOORD God of their fathers.

God received Hezekiah's prayer for the forgiveness of this irregularity regarding Passover positively because Hezekiah's attitude was right with God with regard to the reinstitution of God's Feast days and the genuine concern he had for Judah, as well as the people's attitudes being right.

It was due to his zeal that he had called the people together in such haste, and he did not want anyone to be punished for being unprepared even though they did not have much time to prepare.

So, Hezekiah stepped up as intercessor for the people because of his fear for the people who ate the Passover other than according to the instructions that had been given for it. His prayer was short but sincere. His prayer was intended to ask the good God to pardon every one in the congregation who prepared his heart in sincerity and humility for the Passover service, even though the ceremonial preparation was lacking.

This sheds some light on what is important to God. The good God smiles upon good attitudes and good actions that reflect His standard of righteousness.

II Chronicles 32:32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, indeed they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

Hezekiah's epitaph, so to speak, stated that his goodness was noticed.

Hezekiah was not a perfect man. But the goodness that he was credited with was rooted in energized excellence of character that manifests itself in active good.

Proverbs 12:2 "A good man obtains favor from the LOORD, But a man of wicked intentions He will condemn."

By the blessing of God while he lived, Hezekiah had a great amount of wealth and honor. He accomplished many positive things for the nation of Israel.

In general, he prospered in all his works, because they were good works. He reflected aspects of God's goodness by passing those blessings and goodness on to the people.

He was a leader who had the people's well-being in mind. And so the people honored him at his death and he received great honor during his reign.

His problem was that he tended to idolize himself. He had a serious problem with pride. God left him to himself in it, to try him. God could have prevented the sin; but He allowed it for an opportunity to produce a good ultimate result as a witness to those of us now as well as the nation and to him firstly at that time.

In this way, He and others would know what was in Hezekiah's heart during his trial and his weakness in it. God was working to show him that he was not as perfect as he thought he was; and that he had the same weaknesses, sicknesses and problems that other people in his kingdom did.

Similarly, it is good for us to know ourselves, and our own weaknesses so we do not become conceited, self-confident and self-absorbed. If we are honest with ourselves we will think little of ourselves and tend to live more with a dependence on God and His kindness and goodness. We do not know all the flaws of our own heart and mind, nor what we would do if God left us to ourselves. So, as God's people we are thankful that He has not left us to ourselves and that through His Holy Spirit we are able to produce good fruit.

Hezekiah's sin was that he was a prideful man. He was proud of the honor God had put on him so many times. He was proud of the honor his neighbors showed him in bringing him presents. He was proud when the king of Babylon sent an ambassador to him to stroke and entice him; which exalted him beyond reality.

When Hezekiah had destroyed other idolatries he began to idolize himself. Similarly, we should study our own shortcomings, and reflect on our obligations to God's goodness. We have to do this to prevent thinking too highly of ourselves. This was something that Hezekiah lacked through much of his life.

Proverbs 14:14 The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, But a good man will be satisfied from above. [satisfied from God's goodness, or will reflect God's goodness.]

The additional problem with Hezekiah's sin of pride was that he did not repay near enough compared with God's goodness toward him. He made even the blessings of food, fuel and property that God gave him a fulfillment of his own pride. He did not return to God even a fraction of the good that God had done for him.

Since we have received so much mercy from God, is it not a given fact that we should work to make some suitable return for the mercies that we have received. And, if we do not, our ingratitude will certainly be charged back to us in some negative way.

Even though we may not be able to deliver an equivalent to the blessings we receive from God, or make the payment of a huge debt, we must at least deliver the acknowledgment of a good work done on our behalf by God. This, Hezekiah failed to do.

Pride is a sin that God hates as much as any, and particularly in His own people. Those who exalt themselves must expect to be humiliated, and put under humbling circumstances, just as wrath came on David for his pride in numbering the people.

Hezekiah eventually repented of this sin and he humbled himself for his pride. But the good that he did was an inadequate reflection of what he had received from God.

As a result of God's goodness we should have an attitude of feeling ever obligated to repay the goodness we have received. It is interesting that on Hezekiah's epitaph the word goodness is used toward him, because he was not a good man throughout his whole life. He had reflected *some* of God's goodness during his life and so he was known for his goodness, at least that which he had within him as a result of God's goodness.

Human goodness is not self-generated. Human beings are not inherently good as many in this society believe.

Romans 3:12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." [compared to God's righteousness]

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

That is what we are trying to figure out today in this sermon. How do we perform that good? How do we reflect God's good in us?

But, Paul can instruct those who have the Spirit to "do good to all men," just as Jesus commanded his followers to "do good to your enemies." Jesus also taught "a good tree

bears good fruit." So, we see there that a person cannot be a good person only on the surface but he has to be good from within. Not from within himself but from the spirit of God within.

An important aspect of goodness in the Bible is that it is set over against its opposite. The biblical assumption is made of a great spiritual conflict between good and evil. Just about every story in the Bible gives us a variation on that theme. The conflict begins in the Garden of Eden, with its tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

After eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve know good and evil. Thereafter, good and evil are intertwined for those living in a physical world.

Although Joseph's brothers meant evil against him, Moses recorded Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20. Joseph saw that: "God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

We know that there are times when good people have to suffer so that other people can receive God's goodness. A prime responsibility for those of us living in such a world is to discern good from evil. Another is to do good rather than evil—to actively choose good over evil. This is one of the places in which this society that we live in fails. They do not choose good, they too often choose evil.

The greater churches of God experienced this evil first hand with the murder of members of the Living Church of God in Wisconsin last week. One of the things this horrific incident exposed is the influence of this society on the individuals who tried to place the blame on the church rather than the individual who committed such wickedness.

Proverbs 17:15 "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LOORD."

I am going to repeat that because I read dozens of e-mails this week of people condemning individuals, the church, ministers, sermons and things like that.

Proverbs 17:15 "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LOORD."

I read comments from such people this week who seem to sympathize with the mass

murderer by saying such things as: "*The poor man was made depressed by a sermon.*" Or, "*he was depressed over the concern that he might lose his job.*" Or, "*he loved animals and was gentle with them so obviously something made him do it.*" They removed the personal responsibility that this man had. This man was evil and he was evil from within. If someone were to have chopped his arm off with an axe would that justify him shooting and killing someone? Absolutely not! It does not matter how badly we have been treated. We never have the right to take a life.

Many comments painted a picture of a man who could not help himself and he was pushed to do it because the church depressed him by telling him God wanted him to overcome his problems. Later it came out that he wanted desperately to get married but could not find a wife who would marry him. Well, I wonder why? Obviously that evil had come out at times.

Could it be that the evil that existed in his heart and mind repulsed women? Much like the "person of the lie" that Dr. Peck wrote about, who repulses us but we cannot quite put a finger on the reason. Individuals such as these may have an appearance of goodness (such as the Wisconsin murderer's apparent care and concern for animals). I am sure during the thirty years that he attended with those people that they thought of him as a good person. Well, that was obviously only on the surface.

A "person of the lie" may have a real concern for animals but place no value on human lives. We see this commonly among those who advocate abortion. Interestingly, Hitler was known for his reverence and care of animals but was infamous for his mass butchery of human beings. This type of individual is not a Christian although he appears as one. Satan appears as an angel of light as do those who are influenced by him. The apostle Paul stated the biblical principle involved here relating it to workers.

II Corinthians 11:13-14 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

A man who plans and premeditates the killing of another person and then follows through with the actual act of murdering men, women and children does not have goodness within him, but is evil to the core. There is no need to mince words in this evaluation of the deeds done at that Wisconsin Sabbath Service. There is no justification for such premeditated mass murder.

II Corinthians 11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also

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transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Evil works show an evil mind. The appearance of good works is not always what it seems. In the end thoughts of wickedness are exposed.

III John 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

In the case of the mass murderer in Wisconsin who did evil, the apostle John tells us that he had not seen God.

Even to think about giving in to evil begins to destroy loyalty to God's way of life. A person without God's Holy Spirit does not have within his own human nature a dependable standard by which to judge good and evil. We just need to look at the general populace to see this proven firsthand.

We must always evaluate our comprehension and works by God Himself, for whom love, goodness, and righteousness are absolute attributes. In Christ, these same attributes are available to those who love and obey God. To live God's way of life at all times shows that we are from God.

All goodness originates from him; our determination in goodness displays that in Jesus Christ we have spiritually seen God. Goodness is something that must be actively sought.

Proverbs 11:27 "He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, But trouble will come to him who seeks evil."

In the biblical accounts, actions are assumed to be either good or evil. That somewhat eliminates grey areas.

Although the words good and goodness do not appear in English versions of the Book of Revelation, a major meaning of the book is the final and conclusive triumph of good over evil. That is something that is very encouraging to us. As Mr. Armstrong used to say, "*I have read the end of the book and we win!*"

Everything God does is good, but His goodness can be overwhelming, especially when it is obviously undeserved. It may appear harsh at times to a human being because it may force a change of thought and action, even a total reversal in lifestyle.

An unrealized benefit of God's goodness is when God withdraws 'good' and sends hardship.

Even when God withdraws the 'good' of outward prosperity and brings upon us 'hardship' in its place, we still reap the benefits of His goodness. It is good for us to be afflicted, receiving correction, when we will benefit from it in the end. I am not in any way passing judgment on anyone who was in services and killed or was there or in any of the churches with this sermon. I only directed it towards the mass murderer. This sermon is not meant to give answers as to why in specific ways.

The author of Hebrews explains this in no uncertain terms, that God withdraws good and sends hardship at times.

Hebrews 12:9-11 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Everything that God does is for our benefit and is good. Everything that He allows is for our benefit and for our good. God's correction is a blessing and should not be complained about. Israelites have always carried the unthankful character trait of complaining.

Even though we live in a world of unprecedented prosperity, there is more protesting, complaining, grumbling, moaning, griping, and whining on a global scale than ever before. Our social environment, as a result of Satan's sway and our own human nature, has certainly pressured and influenced us to react the same way.

But, should we allow ourselves to bemoan God's goodness even during a severe trial?

When Job's wife wanted him to curse God for bringing trials upon him, Job expressed the right principle of God's universal goodness and fairness to his wife when he rebuked

her for grumbling, Job's words are recorded in Job 2:10: "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"

There are times when we may feel like God is not treating us fairly. Job points out that as God's creation and the recipient of His generosity and benevolence we have no right to complain when God allows us to be afflicted or brings hardship upon us.

It is interesting that the meaning of the Greek word *agathosune* translated into the English word goodness also includes the quality of sharpness and rebuke to produce good in others. In this way God can mildly, or even severely correct us and it is still goodness in action.

We correct our children and this experience is unpleasant for the child but its results are good because it helps to produce a mature and responsible adult. It is our personal responsibility to produce good works and to help our children to produce good works as well.

Good works take the form of works of love towards God and each other, since 'love is the fulfilling of the law'.

This in no way suggests that no more is required of us than a right motive. The point is, rather, that the specific acts that the commandments stipulate should be understood as expressions of love, so that without a loving heart the commandments cannot be fulfilled. It is not that a right spirit excuses lapses from the letter of the law, but that goodness in the letter is not fulfilling of the law where an attitude of love is lacking.

The truly good person is no less than the truly righteous person. Why?—because the truly righteous person observes the spirit as well as the letter of the law, and the truly good person observes its letter as well as its spirit.

Matthew 5:17-20 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

That difference of the righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—the big difference there is that we should have goodness reflected from God through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Scribes and the Pharisees only had the appearance of goodness—they did the letter without the spirit of the law.

Christ himself fulfills the Law in that he kept both. In fact, His example shows us how to keep the spirit as well as the letter of the law. The spirit of the law is the law's intent having the right balance of mercy and justice.

The apostle Paul used a comparison between the righteous person and the good person. At first glance it looks like Paul sets the good person above the righteous person. But, he is speaking with regard to popularity rather than concerning theology distinctly.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The act of goodness toward others has the same principle as love, that it is directed not only at other good people or righteous people but at everyone. The world often thinks of righteousness as a merely negative correctness, and of the kindness and generosity that mark the good person as something more than righteousness. Which is more revered in our society the "good" person or the righteous person? It is the person who is perceived to be "good". But, God's written word identifies righteousness with goodness and goodness with righteousness, by insisting that what the law requires is, in reality, love.

Good works, then, are works of love, and the nature of love is to give beginning with our own family and our fellow spiritual brothers in Christ, without neglecting works of love for all human beings.

Love for others is expressed by doing 'good' to and for them, laying out our own resources to relieve their need, and seeking their welfare in every possible way.

'Kind' and 'generous' are among the ordinary secular meanings of 'good' as a description of human beings. Even an average human being understands those connections of kindness and generosity referring on the surface at least to a good

person.

Biblically, the love of God and Christ is the model and standard for the kindness, generosity and goodness required of us.

When we seek to fulfill the law in this way we are left with a good conscience, not because we think we are sinlessly perfect, but because we know that our relationship with God is right, being founded on true faith and repentance.

We will genuinely appear to others as a 'good person,' as Barnabas did in Acts 11:24 where it is recorded that, "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." There is the fruit produced by His reflection of God's goodness. Many people were brought to the Lord.

Goodness is defined in terms of God, not vice-versa. God, and God alone, is good without qualification. He is the arbitrator and judge because He is the norm and the standard by which goodness is determined. Man is good, and things are good, only as they conform to the will of God.

In a sense, the whole material order is God's handiwork and is good. Material blessings such as rain in due season reveal God's goodness. Spiritual blessings, such as understanding God's truth and the forgiveness of sin, are seen in the effects of obedience to God's Law.

Not only is God good; he does good. In Psalm 119:68 the psalmist links being good and doing good when he writes, "You are good and do good..."

Good works are good from three main perspectives:

1. They are done in accordance with a right standard (the law of God, the law of love).
2. They are done from a right motive (love and gratitude for redemption and for the goodness and the love that God has sent our way).
3. They are done with a right aim (Everything that we do should be to the glory of God).

The references to goodness in the Bible tell us that God is good and that through His life in us we grow in goodness and in our likeness to him. Meditating on the goodness of God produces a sense of true virtue that develops with the help of the Holy Spirit.

'Good' in Scripture means first and foremost what God is, then what He does, gives, and commands and finally what He wills in the lives of His creation. He is morally perfect and wonderfully generous. His goodness is abundant and eternally satisfying. It is good to all, but great toward those who reverence and trust Him.

We should always rejoice in God's goodness and eagerly remember it in times of blessings and times of affliction. If we are transformed by the renewing our mind we prove the good will of God and we become satisfied with His will because we know that it always ultimately produces good results.

The 23rd Psalm is a very well-known psalm that lists God's acts of goodness toward us, it rises to a sure promise that God's goodness and mercy will be part of our life as long as we exist. Verse 6 says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

We have that wonderful encouragement that if we obey God and in obeying God and working toward using the Holy Spirit to produce good fruit including the fruit of goodness reflecting God's goodness in ourselves then we have that promise that His goodness and mercy will follow us all of our days.