

Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

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[0 : 00] God and his blessing to that reading from his holy word, as you see in the screen there, our title for the sermon, that's in the words of the second part of verse 22 and into verse 23, the graces that we find Paul mentioning in extension to the ones he's already mentioned, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and the points we're going to look at this evening, the gift of goodness, the fruit of faithfulness, the greatness of gentleness, and the strength of self-control.

So as we've come once more to continue our thoughts on the fruit of the Spirit, then please remember that as we consider these gifts, these are gifts that the Christian believer has been gifted with to exercise by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You who are in Christ, you have the Spirit within you. And you've been given these gifts to exercise and to exercise in love and through love, and to show forth the love of God towards you as you show forth that love at one to another.

And the exercise of these gifts are demonstrated in the way that you do love one another. We've already seen how love is mentioned as the first in the list of the fruit of the Spirit.

It's love that binds all these graces together. And if you remember last Lord's Day evening, those of you who were here in worship, you remember these first four graces beyond love, as it were, joy, peace, patience, and kindness.

[1 : 51] Well, this evening we're going to consider these next four in that great list. Goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And let's be clear here, we're not just doing this as a kind of a word study that you might do in a class.

That know that we're here to worship God, to praise God for his giving to his people these particular gifts to exercise in love.

And, of course, we're to consider from God's Word how to apply more and more, how to apply these gifts in your life as a believer in the Lord Jesus, as you follow him who's full of grace and truth. If you follow Jesus, who is all goodness, all faithfulness, all gentleness, and full of self-control. So let's begin then with the first point, then the gift of goodness, the gift of goodness.

And, you know, when you see colors that, as it were, merge from one shade to another. Well, it's like that when we're following on from kindness, the gift of kindness, and then immediately following Paul mentions goodness.

[3 : 04] I suppose it's a bit like that, in one shade of color following on to another. We've looked at goodness. I suppose if we were to be absolutely within the following of Paul, following of his argument, then we would have put kindness and goodness together.

But I suppose the advantage of this week, you know, just looking particularly at goodness, is again really to emphasize the beauty of the Spirit-filled life that really shows goodness as an expression of kindness.

As we see that expression of kindness in the good works that the believer carries out in response to the God of all grace and the good works that the believer shows as evidence of his faith.

As we noticed last week, kindness is a selfless action. Kindness desires the good of others. As we said, as someone has mentioned, of kindness, it's love with its working clothes on.

And kindness then, of course, reflects the kindness of God, God's kindness in his compassion, in his care, and his leading and directing us for our good.

[4 : 28] When we think of the kindness of God, and we see it, of course, in the kindness of Jesus, in the works of Jesus. As I was preparing this sermon just a few days ago, it came brought to my mind when I was just, I suppose, six years of age, in Leith, in Edinburgh, and given a Sunday School prize.

The book being, some of you may have had it yourselves, Kind Deeds of Jesus, Ethel Boyce's little book. And I still remember all these years ago being presented with this book, and it's been taken by this expression of the kind deeds of Jesus, the kindness of Jesus expressed in goodness. And so we want to follow on with that expression of kindness seen in goodness, good works, and to consider the grace of goodness in the spirit-filled believer.

Because you who love the Lord, you have a responsibility to be like Christ, to reflect the Lord Jesus in your actions, in your works, in fact, in your good works.

And to be motivated in that, I say, well, think of Jesus. When we see his relationship, the relationship that he had, and there has, the relationship that we read off in Scripture, of his relationship, or that relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, in relation to his good works.

[6:02] Peter, the Apostle Peter, spoke of that relationship, that we read off in Acts 10, Acts 10, 38. Listen to these words. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

Then the next words immediately following. He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. It was Jesus, the divine Son of God.

Jesus anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus anointed to receive power to do good. And the amazing truth is this. You who are in Christ by faith, you too have that anointing of the Holy Spirit.

You've been gifted with the Spirit's power power to do good. Now, before you were converted, you couldn't do the good works that God has given you to do. It's only possible through the Holy Spirit's enabling.

Now you have that power. Now you have that enabling. And you see that wonderful, we might say, wonderful coordination of God's plan in your life with the works that he's given you to do.

[7:13] Read of that in Ephesians 2, verse 10, where his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. Works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Remember this, that you don't claim, you don't claim a righteous relationship with God through your goodness. It's God's goodness towards you that's justified you.

It's that goodness that was seen when God the Father sent God the Son to be the Savior of the world. It's that goodness and kindness of God that, well, that we remember and celebrate particularly at this time of year when we remember the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth.

And it's that grace, the grace of goodness and kindness that Paul spoke of in Titus 3, verses 4 to 5. He wrote these words, Paul wrote these words, when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.

Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

[8:27] And it's that goodness, that goodness and kindness of our loving Savior that, well, we must never put to one side at this time of year. because it's that, if you like, that reflected goodness and kindness that we seek to apply in our own lives as we seek to show forth the love of God towards others, as we show that through the gift of goodness.

And then secondly, there's the fruit of faithfulness. Because if kindness and goodness are aspects of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and that's with, as I wear love with its working clothes on, well, as we say, getting involved in good works is seen as evidence of saving faith.

And if that's the case, and since it is the case, then it follows on logically that faithfulness is next on the list after kindness and goodness. Because faithfulness speaks of you as a faithful servant of God, doing the works that God has given you to do.

Doing these works faithfully, faithful as a reliable witness to the Lord Jesus when we think of him and his faithfulness in doing the works that God had given him to do in his saving his people.

And that faithfulness, that faithfulness that we're to practice as believers, that the church is to practice, well, we do that, you do that in a world where we have to say unfaithfulness is very much the hallmark of the world in which we're living in.

[10:07] I know that we tend to speak of faithfulness more in the context of the marriage bond, for example, and the importance of remaining faithful to one's spouse.

Surely, when we think of the family of God, the church of God, and surely, when we think of faithfulness, we're seeing faithfulness that involves being faithful as being witnesses, our witness as believers, faithful to the calling that we have to love one another, faithful in praying one for another, faithful in serving one another, faithful in the exercise of the gifts that God has given to us.

So, if we're going to use the analogy of faithfulness in marriage, then surely, we come to think of the church as the bride of Christ and the church having that responsibility to be faithful to our Lord Jesus, to follow him and to follow in another, to be faithful in that following, to serve him and to serve none other, to put our Lord and Saviour first and foremost as you show forth the fruit of faithfulness in your life.

remember the parable that Jesus taught of the faithful servants, those servants who were reliable and trustworthy when they used the talents, the talents of money that they were given to invest and to make progress with.

And remember the reply of the master to these faithful servants, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord.

[11 : 49] some of you will have known or certainly known of the late Kenneth McRae who was minister in Stornway Free Church from 1931 to 1964.

Just a couple of years before he died, he attended as was his want, he attended the Leicester Ministers Conference. And there in 1962, he spoke at that conference.

he had a long and blessed ministry, not just in Stornway but in other congregations as well. But he was very quick to renounce any emphasis on success in his ministry.

And in that address there at the conference, he spoke about his experience, he spoke a story about himself as a young divinity student. And unexpectedly, he had been called to take services in a congregation in which he'd grown up as a young man, in fact, as a boy.

And as he writes in his diary, he said he was greatly troubled, depressed and downcast at the prospect. As he continues in his diary notes, he wrote this, the church officer, a worthy man named Alexander McLean was waiting for me in the vestry.

[13 : 04] When I came into the vestry, he just put his big arms around me and said, never mind my boy. As Mr. Finlayson of Helmsdale used to say, it's not well done, good and successful servant, but well done, good and faithful servant.

And as Kenneth McCray closed his address, he said this, what's going to count at the end of the day is not success but faithfulness. And you might be the most successful in your profession.

You might be the most successful in terms of the scale of success that is measured by so many. Where's your faithfulness to the one who's faithful and true to the Lord Jesus?

Faithful witness in his utter reliability and utter trustworthiness. So seek to aim to practice faithfulness in your life as you seek to live, not by a kind of a hypocrisy that pretends faithfulness, but to be truly faithful in your desire and your purpose to glorify God, to glorify God through your works of righteousness and to do that as you do it before others to the glory of God, the fruit of faithfulness.

Then thirdly, there's the greatness of gentleness. And with all the different components in the fruit of the Spirit, the fruitful life of the Spirit-filled believer, this grace, the grace of gentleness, reflects the Lord Jesus in his gentleness.

[14 : 48] It's that trait of character that speaks to being humble, not asserting your rights, not being, you know, so self-assertive as to insist on what you consider to be your rights.

No, it's in conformity to Jesus who himself calls us to himself as he spoke of himself as the one who's gentle and lowly.

It's that attitude of grace, that grace, if you like, that gift that deals mercifully with others, just as God's been merciful to you in his compassion, his patience and his love and his kindness.

Remember this, that gentleness isn't weakness. Gentleness doesn't mean, you know, somehow being soft or nice. Gentleness is a strength and it's a strength that we derive in dependence of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it's that strength, that strengthening grace that enables you to care for others, to respond to the needs of others, whether these needs are spiritual or practical.

[15 : 58] And Paul, in fact, in this letter to the Galatians, he gives examples of how a Christian should be gentle. You go right to the next chapter, the first verse of chapter 6, where we read these words, brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

You see, all too easy it can be to be tempted to be severe and hard-hitting and even judgmental. You consider the gentleness of Jesus in his restoring grace.

Even in Jesus' gentleness towards wayward sinners. We see that, of course, wonderfully in the example of Peter. Remember Peter who denied Jesus three times when Jesus was being tried before Jesus' crucifixion.

Then after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus restores Peter to himself. Jesus does so in a spirit of gentleness. It's not for Jesus to judge Peter.

As if Jesus would say, Peter, you've got no longer a part in my kingdom. Peter, you no longer will be my witness. No. Instead, Jesus says to Peter, feed my lambs, feed my sheep.

[17:24] The gentleness of Jesus that restores a broken believer, a believer who's fallen but in repentance returns to Jesus.

Maybe that's one of you here this evening. broken, maybe broken by a particular sin. Fearful even of the response of Jesus towards you.

Come to him. He's gentle and lowly. In his forgiving grace, he'll show you his gentleness. He'll show you his kindness, his goodness. And so it's for you to praise him, to give him thanks and to do that even in response by showing gentleness to others, gentleness to maybe others who perhaps hurt you or done wrong towards you.

Gentle to the person who pleads forgiveness. Jesus, Jesus, the Lamb of God, the gentle Lamb of God. Jesus requires gentleness in our relationships, one with another, another, even gentleness to those who are suffering, those who are backslidden.

So in your own application of gentleness, the greatness of gentleness, you ask yourself this. Are you truly reflecting the gentleness of Jesus? Are you gentle with those whom you find difficult to get on with?

[18:47] Are you gentle with those who've gone astray and need the restoration of God's grace? Are you gentle in your conversation, gentle in your practice, gentle in your attitude towards others?

It's a fruit, it's a fruit like all the other graces, it's a fruit that needs to be cultivated. You do that and you do that in the strength of the Holy Spirit. So I pray that we all, we all will cultivate gentleness as believers, the one in Christ, the greatness of gentleness.

Then finally, the strength of self-control. remember the strength of the Christian, it's derived, that strength is derived from the spirit of power.

That strength that enables the Christian to exercise a grace that in many ways is a standout grace that contrasts so much in the world of no self-control.

in fact, as we were reading again in the passage that section of, excuse me, Galatians 5 when we read of the list, the aspects of the sinful nature that Paul mentions, these aspects of sinful nature stand in utter contrast to self-control.

[20:08] Let's read again, gentlemen, I'm not going to go into any depth, of course, but when we read again that list of the sins of the flesh, the sins of the human nature, they all contrast the grace of self-control, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, pits of rage, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orges.

And, you know, we could go through each one of these, each one of these sins of the flesh and find a lack of restraint, a lack of contentment, a failure to abide by the law of God and indulging with complete license irrespective of God's commands.

Just the other day I was reading an obituary in a national newspaper and it was an obituary to a relatively young man who died in his early 50s. In many ways, as we were reading that obituary, it really came strongly that this was the epitome of a lifestyle, a lifestyle of self-centered license. There was just no self-control at all. Really, it portrayed the ugliness of a life and the character of somebody whose God was self, whose idols were riches, who sought success and self-achievement.

In the end, he left a legacy of tragedy. But the beauty, as opposed to the ugliness of a lack of self-control, the beauty of self-control, the grace of self-control, well, we see that, the beauty of self-control, we see that ultimately, of course, in the Lord Jesus.

[21:58] And it's his example that we follow. Think, for example, when Jesus was being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Jesus wouldn't change stones into bread, even though he was desperately hungry.

Jesus wouldn't succumb to the devils, tempting him to gain instant fame and earthly power. No, Jesus knew that the way, the way to his kingdom was by the way of the cross.

And Jesus, even there in that temptation by the devil, he's exercising that self-control and obedience to his father's will and doing so in love for his own.

Jesus would not abandon his mission for the salvation of lost sinners. Jesus followed the way to the cross and did so with his eyes fixed resolutely to the cross to the very end.

Nothing but nothing hindered Jesus' perfect service to his father. as followers of the Lord Jesus, that's who you are this evening, a follower of Christ, then it's that self-control that's required in your life to, in your journey to heaven as you bear your cross daily, as you bear that cross by self-control. [23 : 16] and the sins that so easily beset you, these sins they're going to try to make you lose that self-control. How often do we lose self-control and do it so easily?

but by the strength of the Spirit you'll know victory, the victory that Paul knew in his life. And so this way we come to the close of this, of these, these words.

Let's seek, let's have that resolve to be fruitful as individuals, whether as individuals indeed or as a congregation of believers and to have that resolve to be fruitful in thankfulness to God because of his mercies towards you and living fruitful lives.

Do it, do it to the one and for the one who's faithful and gentle, the one who knew no sin and be victorious in your serving heaven as you show forth the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

And when you think as we do think and also often do and you're tempted to think that your fruitfulness as a Christian is receding, is waning, then go to the vinedresser.

[24 : 34] Go to the one who tends the vine, who tends his church. Call on him. Call on him so that you might have that renewed zeal for him and his work.

You know, even in the current restrictions that we're living through, we might think that, you know, our fruitfulness as Christian somehow is diminished through a reduced contact with others. God has given us even opportunities through this time to reveal the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit that God has blessed you with, that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

these graces that lift up others, these graces that revive sore hearts, the fruit of the Spirit that brings the grace of the Lord Jesus to shine in the hearts of those who you've been called to share the gospel with.

And one more thing to say, and that's this, to be assured that your days of service as a fruit-bearer, these days will continue until God calls you home.

Your work is not finished. It's not yet finished. And to bring that to our hearts, just listen to the words of Psalm 92, verse 12 to 15.

[25 : 59] Take these words to heart. The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord.

They flourish in the courts of our God. In these words, they still bear fruit in old age. They're even full of sap and green to declare that the Lord is upright.

He is my rock and there is no uprightness in Him. These words, they still bear fruit in old age.

Another year is nearly over.

We don't know what 2021 is going to bring. Yes, while our bodies are growing older, we pray that your character in the Lord will actually grow, develop, grow in graceful fruitfulness.

And that, by the sanctified power of the Holy Spirit, that you may increase in your fruitfulness, that you shine for the Savior, that you'll be reaching out in love one to another.

[26 : 59] as you mature in faith, that you nourish the faithful by the fruit of a life that's lived to the glory of God.

Amen. May God add His blessing to these words that have been given for us this evening. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, strengthen us, we pray, by the power, the enabling power of your Spirit.

teach us, Lord, to be self-controlled, to be faithful, to show forth goodness, to show forth the love of God to others.

Lord, help us to be gentle one to another, to show forth that grace by our words, by our understanding, by our love. Hear us then, Lord, as we close in worship through your word of psalm, psalm giving.

Help us, Lord, as we sing praise to you. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.