

Hello Dear Listeners;

“ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 12: 21

Those are the words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans at the end of chapter 12. Someone has said, “ *These are fighting words!*” That’s certainly true. There is a kind of military ring to them. That’s because the bible says we are called to fight “ the good fight of the faith”.¹ The fighting spirit of these words comes out even stronger in a more literal rendering of Rom. 12:21, “ *Don’t be conquered by the evil, but conquer the evil by (or, in) the good.*”

Yet while we might not have too much difficulty identifying evil it is perhaps more difficult to realize what is “good” or what is “goodness”. There was a time in the not-too-distant past that people really didn’t want to speak of evil. Yet what with wholesale terrorism, cruel and barbaric acts have become daily occurrences it seems. There is a lot of evil in the world and it seems to be bound up in the hearts of many.

It didn’t take long after our first parents, *and we in them!* fell into sin, that Cain committed the first murder. Time and again in the bible you find God having to reproach his own people because they did evil in his sight.

(Judges 2;11; 3:12; 4:1; 6:10)

But the One True and Living God is not one to take pleasure in evil. (Psalm 5:4) Instead he would have people “Turn from evil and do good.” (Ps. 34: 14). Then, as He’s promised in that well-known Psalm 23, “ *Surely goodness and mercy (or love) will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” (Psalm 23: 6)

¹ 1 Timothy 6:12, cf. 2 Tim. 4:7

Such goodness is not some elusive, imaginary thing that you and I can't get hold of. O it is so, good and goodness is not something of human making, human engineering. It is rather a most precious gift. Things that are truly good are like a bag full of jewels!

These jewels are gifts of God and as such they are outside of the control of human beings. (see Psalm 34:10; 84:11). God himself is very good indeed. That's made very clear in the fact that he saves and carries, protects and leads a whole lot of people who are of themselves unworthy. Yet everything that comes from him is good including his works of creation, his acts of governing the world and the precious gift of his Word.

A person who belongs to Jesus Christ is created and sustained to do good works. In fact he/she is to bear fruit in good works. We're called to do good to everyone (Romans 15:2)

And what is good but that which conforms to God's Word, His Law. Those who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and mind, certainly do good. Those who love their neighbour are very good to them.

Now it is unfortunately so that our modern society often seems to deprecate goodness. Someone is derisively called a "*do-gooder*" or a "*Goody two-shoes*" if you distance yourself from those who are "*up to no good*." Then goodness or doing good is seen as a sign of weakness, or a failure to assert yourself when in fact it means caving in and letting yourself run wild!

Philip Keller, wrote a little commentary on the "fruits of the Spirit ". In it he looks at the close link between God's goodness and our own goodness practised in fellowship with him. He says.

The goodness of God is not a spineless, sentimental indulgence of sensuality. It is not just some emotional “high”. It is rather the rugged reality of God himself coming to grips with the awfulness of sin. It is the invincible power of God’s own person overcoming evil. It is the goodness of his love, the graciousness in giving us himself. It is the pulsing, powerful performance of right in the middle of the wrong in and around us. ²

I once heard a preacher of the gospel say,

People will pray for love, joy and peace, patience or kindness yet seldom does one hear a heart-rending cry coming from the depths of sin-shattered, sin-stained souls, “ God, please, I just want to be made good.

Actually there is such a heart-rending cry coming from David, that man “ after God’s heart,” recorded in the bible. When he committed the sin of adultery as well as being an accomplice in the murder of his neighbor, Bathsheba’s husband he was confronted by the prophet Nathan. That prophet pointed out to him his sin and David repented saying, among other things,

Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God
and renew a steadfast spirit within me,
Psalm 51: 9, 10

In this heartfelt request David asked God to grant him His goodness that he might do what is right and good and clean in God’s sight. Many years later, in fact I understand it was in 1872 someone by the name of James L.

² Keller, P. A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit p. 141

Nicholson wrote a hymn called I Shall be Whiter Than Snow. It must be based on Psalm 51 for it asks the Lord to wash oneself, to “*break down every idol,*” and “*cast out every foe*” - Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. “

The amazing thing is that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God is prepared to do just that for you and for me. For all those who are sick and tired of the evil, not just in the world at large but in their own lives. They desire the goodness of Jesus Christ to conquer their hearts. So they get on their knees and confess their sins and pray for this amazing transformation of their lives to take place.

They look to Jesus Christ and learn from his Word that he gave himself fully so that in the lives of mortal, sinful human beings, goodness would sprout forth. So that people might willingly live in faithfulness, and in integrity before the Lord.

That they might delight in doing good to others living in harmony with one's spouse, children, neighbours. Fighting disharmony, jealousy, bitterness and uncalled for anger with goodness, love and patience.

The apostles Paul says, “*Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.*” Earlier he had said, “*Love must be genuine. Abhor what is evil ; cling to what is good.*” (ch. 12:9. We can't cosy up to evil , whether evil persons or evil things and ideas. We need to march to the beat of a different drummer than the one who would lead us into temptation to do evil, wrong.

Surely the good Paul was speaking about is that life of faith and of love that is pleasing to the Lord. It involves a tender-heart and a humble spirit. It

includes blessings rather than curses, a reaching out to others, for others, for the sake of Christ who is so very good to you and me.

O it is so, goodness is costly. It can mean that if you and I practice goodness that you end up being shunned, ostracized. It may cost you personal privation.

It did so for Jesus Christ who suffered the agony and loneliness, the forsakenness of the cross. But he did so for all those who would believe in him. That they might be filled with the Spirit and be led by the Spirit to offer their lives, their time, their talents, strengths and energies to the Lord.

May you cherish this God and His Christ and Holy Spirit. Then surely goodness and mercy will follow you, even as you seek to be joined to and remain in God's house, now and forever, Amen and thanks so much for listening.