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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

CONTENTS

IN THE HEAVENLIES	49
THE HEBREW PSALTER	53
WORLD LEADERS IN THE FINAL CRISES	...	...	...	...	...	61
NOTES ON HEBREWS	...	...	...	...	...	65
THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT	...	...	...	...	...	72
THE WISDOM LITERATURE OF THE BIBLE	...	...	...	...	...	76
THE PROMISED DELIVERER	78
THE PLACE OF GOOD WORKS	87
"GOODNESS"	90
URBANE	94

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“GOODNESS”

A word study

By W. WILCOX

The Greek word *agathōsunē* is translated “goodness” in the N.T. It is an active benevolence towards others, arising from our oneness with Christ. Soutter, in his pocket lexicon, defines it as “intrinsic goodness, especially as a personal quality, with stress on the kindly, rather than the righteous, side of goodness.” In the N.T. it is used only by Paul and always with reference to man and not to God, and then only of the new man created in Christ Jesus, actively displaying the characteristics of the new life within.

In the Septuagint it is used in Ps. 38:20 and 52:3, as the opposite of evil, while in Nehem. 9:25 it has the sense of bountifulness.

It is never considered a mere adjunct of the new life, however, which is active only under certain special circumstances. Rather, it is the distinctive element of the new nature, and manifests itself, therefore, both in definite opposition to all evil, and in benevolence toward man. This is to be expected, because it issues from the life that has learned by experience God’s own goodness. And as life lengthens and experience of God’s goodness increases and deepens, so will this quality of goodness in us overflow in increasing measure towards others.

The word occurs four times in the N.T. Romans 15:14; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9; and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. Let us briefly note these in turn.

1. *Goodness in the inner life* (Gal. 5:22). It is one of the fruits of the Spirit seen in the transformed life. Findlay (*Expositor’s Bible*) remarks on it: “Linked with *kindness* comes *goodness*, which is its other self, differing from it only as twin sisters may, each fairer for the beauty of the other. Goodness is perhaps more affluent, more catholic in its bounty; kindness more delicate and discriminating. The former looks to the benefit conferred, seeking to make it as large and as full as possible; the latter has respect to the recipients, and studies to suit their necessity. While kindness makes its opportunities and seeks out the most needy and miserable, goodness *throws its doors open* to all-comers. Goodness is the more masculine and large-hearted form of charity, and if it errs, errs through blundering and want of tact. Kindness is the more

feminine, and may err through exclusiveness and narrowness of view. United they are perfect."

Let us remark on two points:

(a) This goodness is the fruit of the *Spirit's indwelling*. Consequently it is not a mere legalistic rectitude of behaviour, which only engenders pride and repels others. It is the overflowing beneficence of a kindly nature which attracts, and so entices one to a closer acquaintance with the possessor. It reveals a character which makes glad the heart of the giver, and receiver alike, which is the glory of the Spirit-filled life.

(b) In this we are reminded of the blessed Lord, the great Exemplar of all goodness, who ever "went about doing good," as Acts 10:38 so succinctly describes. Too often in our recoil from preaching a mere "social Gospel" dependent upon the doing of good works, we forget the other side, viz., that the practical evidence of a true spiritual life in Christ is to be constantly demonstrated by the evidence of the good works which should flow from such a life (read Eph. 2:10).

2. *Goodness in the Outer Life* (Eph. 5:9).

This goodness in the outward acts of life is now said to be the "fruit of the life". Moule, commenting on this verse, says, "The Greek word like the English while properly meaning the whole quality opposite to evil, tends to mean especially the goodness of beneficence, or at least benevolence." Now the result of darkness is evil and a love of evil things; the fruit of the light is good and a love for that which is good.

Here the word is linked with *righteousness*, i.e., rectitude, probity; also with *truth*; moral truth, sincerity, integrity. The illumination of the whole man by God, Who is light, produces an aversion for the darkness and its works, and there comes a love for the light and its results. Untruth, insincerity, and moral obliquity cannot live in the light. "Once ye were darkness but now are ye light in the Lord." His light, His truth, His goodness have brought about the change. "Walk as children of the light," i.e., as the offspring of the light, as those who are an incarnation of the light, and hence, those who must manifest goodness as a "natural" outcome in the walk, the daily progress, the commonplace experiences of life, which combine to make the sphere in which the light needs to be seen brightest.

3. *Goodness in Assembly Life* (Rom. 15:14).

Paul has spoken of the relation of brother to brother, of the strong to the weak, of the welcome one should give to the other, and then turns to his readers, "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another." Sanday and Headlam comment on this verse as follows: "here *agathōsunē* is combined with *gnōsis* because the two words represent exactly the qualities which are demanded by the discussion in ch. 14. St. Paul demands on the one side a complete grasp of the Christian faith as a whole, and on the other 'goodness of heart', which may prevent a man from injuring the spiritual life of his brother Christians by disregarding their consciences. Both these were, St. Paul is fully assured, realized in the Roman community."

There was no meagreness about their goodness—it was like a full stream ready to flow out to reach the need of every one thirsting for it; it was a rich supply which had an eternal Source in the God-given Spirit Who dwelt within. It particularly manifested itself in relation to fellow-brethren, realizing that its own strength was made manifest when it could sweep aside its own prejudices and shew to the brother who was different "because of weakness", both grace and goodness, that could grasp his hand and treat him as if he were fully likeminded with himself.

But again it was no sentimental virtue; it was able, when need arose, to admonish those in fellowship. There was no foolish fear lest one should be offended and turn aside, but a right fear lest one, failing to be admonished, should continue in a path contrary to the truths he had been taught. Hence Paul himself speaks of his boldness in uttering the needed word of reproof, at the same time refraining from any rigid adherence to non-essentials if by so doing he should turn the 'weak' brother out of the way.

"Goodness" of this kind is much needed in all church life; a goodness which acts as the handmaid of knowledge, a goodness which in its beneficence wins a weak brother and which in its righteousness admonishes an erring brother; a goodness which realizes and acts upon this "one-another-ness," this fellowship within the community which is known in word and act, and such as are good and for good and will lead on to continuing in the good way.

4. *Goodness in the Ministering Life* (2 Thess. 1:11).

It was the prayer of the apostle that in every public activity

as well as in their individual lives, God might be glorified. To this end he besought: (a) that they might be counted worthy of their calling, and (b) that God would fulfil every desire of goodness and every work of faith with power. The two were closely linked; their calling would cause to arise in their hearts new desires. Their old calling, the calling of the flesh, made them seek only their own things, but their new calling made them seek the good of others. But goodness is not a mere passive virtue, it is manifested in works, and these works are to be of faith and with power. There is the inward source in the grace of the Spirit,—*goodness*; the upward look to the Giver of all,—*faith*; the outward manifestation to those to whom the good is directed,—*power*.

Any ministry that arises not from the Spirit's promptings is bound to be unfruitful; any service that is not linked by faith to the God of all grace is sure to be barren; any working devoid of power will be of no avail.

Let goodness live in us, be manifested in us and be to the praise of His glory through us!



THE CHRISTIAN'S ASSETS

IN A WORLD OF TROUBLE

1. The infinite resources of the greatness and power of God.

2. The measureless wealth of the Father's love. This One has said: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13: 5). A husband may *leave his* wife to go to his work, but he does not thereby *forsake* her. Our God is always by our side.

Therefore faith says: "God is our refuge and strength, a *very present* help in trouble" (Psa. 46: 1). Any other would-be helper may possibly be far away when most needed, but not our God. He is a god "at hand", and not "afar off" (Jer. 23: 23).

—W. W. Fereday