

For Pete's Sake
A Study of 1st and 2nd Peter
Doing Good, for all the Right Reasons
1 Peter 3:8-16
July 23, 2017

She thinks that because she made some bad choices in high school that a few actions make her a bad person. To look at her, she's an all-American girl. She's pretty, kind to small animals, lives in a nice home, drives a reliable car, and wears sensible shoes. But she thinks she is a bad person. Ironically, she thinks the world is good. She is on one end of the three types of people in the world: those who think the world is basically good, those who think it is bad, and those who fall somewhere in between. Because she thinks the world is a good place, her self-identity will not allow her to fit into such a good world. And so she smiles, greets people, is very friendly, but she wonders if she can ever be a good person.

Across town there lives an older man who thinks the world is a terrible place. He hates all the violence in the world, even though he watches it on Fox News all day long. He talks about young people in exaggerated stereotypes even though he doesn't really know anyone under that age of 65. He's mean to small animals, lives in a messy home, drives a beat-up car, and wears uncomfortable shoes. He sleeps with a hand gun under his pillow because he's sure that one day someone will break into his home. He yells: "get off my lawn" at least once a week. He thinks the world doesn't stand a chance. But he thinks he's a good person.

Then there's those who fall somewhere in between; we want to know how to be good. Maybe it is too simplistic, but I have noticed that people who think the world is a bad place often think of themselves as good people. And the people who proclaim they're "good" can really come across as self-righteousness. I don't think God looks at that and calls it good. I've also noticed that there are some people who think the world is a good place (they want to save the environment, recycle, protect the whales) at times have low self-esteem about themselves, even though they are a part of the world they believe is good. And I don't think God looks at self-loathing and calls that good.

But scratch all that. I just want to know what it means to be good. I know that most people say things about other people like, "He's a good man" or "She's a good person." No preacher slides into the pulpit at a funeral and says, "This guy was a real heel and a jerk," even if that's the only thing people said about him. Its led people to believe that only good people die because you never read an obituary that announces, "Finally she died. People hated being around her. She was a crotchety old bag. Party on Wednesday at 6:00 at her neighbor's house." So, what is it to be good? I know how we use the word "good." But what does it take for God to look at something and say, "That is good."

In the beginning – at creation the answer is quite simple: God calls all the things He makes "good." God made the giraffe, the hickory tree, and the Amazon River and said, "That's good." God makes aardvarks, termites, and those really, ugly bugs with all the legs and says, they're good. God makes the mountains and the seas, the sky and the stars, the universes and says, they're good. As God spoke into existence each phase of creation, God saw that it was good. God's creation did what God intended it to do. It accomplished its purpose. It met God's expectations. And that is one of the basic ideas of the goodness the Spirit wants to manifest in our lives. But, listen to this, when God makes humans God looks at them and says, now that's "Very good?" The suggestion is that God knows what "good" is and what very good is and what the difference between to the is.

WE ARE CREATED GOOD.

"Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!" (Genesis 1:31 NLT)

"Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens." (James 1:17 NLT)

Let us look at 1 Peter 3: 8 – 17 and see what God really believes to be good and whether we line up to it.

Goodness is what is attractive and luring, that catches people's attention, sometimes catches us off guard, and causes us to have respect. This is the quintessential element that attracts people to you and finds and keeps friends. It builds marriages and shows God's love to others around us. It is virtue in action; it is being a role model and putting into practice excellence in all that we do to God and others. Goodness enables us to be liked and enjoyed, even if an enemy comes against us (Proverbs 25: 22). According to Genesis we can be very good and according to Peter we can live lives that are seen as good.

So, I just want to be good, right. Come on Dave...just tell me what I need to do to be good, right. We know that the Bible tells us that God is good. That God is perfect and that all God does is done out of love because God is love and love is good, right. So, maybe, just maybe if we want to be good, we should start praying that God will transform us into people who look more and more each day like God. Because here is something we also know, we are not good like God. We are capable of being and doing good things but, we are not perfect like God so, what does "being good" look like.

We have the potential for good built into us by God's design. We have some capacity for good and we cannot deny that since we were created in the image of God, who is good. The Apostle Paul very truthfully and accurately described our sinful condition, but he also truthfully and accurately states that we are ***God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** – Ephesians 2:10. So how do we reconcile this conflict between our sinful nature as humans and the calling of God to do good works? Is it fair of God to expect us to do good works when we are corrupted by the sinful nature? It is if we accept that ...

Sin gets in the way of goodness, God put within us a capacity for goodness. We are created in the image of God, the one who is good. God created us to be good. So, here's the key, truly knowing the goodness of God only comes to us from God, the Holy Spirit, living in us. As an act of redemption, God works for "good" with those who love Him (Romans 8).

OUR SIN GETS IN THE WAY OF OUR GOODNESS.

"So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death." (Romans 8:6 NLT)

But that still doesn't tell me how to be good and I really want to know. We usually think of good as excellence, or good as effective in purpose. If someone says they bought a "good" house it usually means that it's in pretty good shape and they like it. We say things like: that was a good movie, a good dinner or I had a good time. These are my good pants. So, being good is different than the way we usually talk about good things.

FAITH IN JESUS RESTORES OUR CREATED GOODNESS.

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

It is difficult for us to talk about being good in a society who doesn't like to discuss "the common good." We've replaced the common good for individual freedoms and we've convinced ourselves that we should be free to determine for ourselves what is good in any given situation. Goodness has become individualized. How can we know what good is when what is good for you may not be good for me? As Christians, we are called to embody goodness together as a community. That's why the first thing Peter says in this section about being good is that we need to be in unity/harmony with each other if we're going to succeed at being good. Peter is saying that the people who make up the Church need to agree on what being good is, together, in unity. Because, left to our own devices we will all come up with our own definition and God has already defined goodness for us. When we agree we can support each other as we strive to live good lives and we can speak to one another when we see the standard is not being lived up to.

But, you're still saying...what do I need to do to be good, right! Okay, let's look at the list that Peter gives to the early church and see if we can make it a part of who we are and followers of the same Jesus that Peter knew first hand.

The first characteristic that Peter points to is "sympathy." If we are going to be good then we need to be sympathetic to the needs, conditions, situations, hardships and heartaches, that other are going through. In other words, we need to grow the skill of knowing when we need to pull out the goodness on someone and the only way we're going to know that is if we are sympathetic. First, sympathetic to God's small whispers in our ears about the people around us. And second, sympathetic to the circumstances that people are dealing with. What God is using Peter to tell us today is this: if you want to be good – open your eyes! There are lots of opportunities happening all around you every day you take breath to do good things. Some of us think we need a billboard when God puts people in our path each day that we can be good to, when God puts situations in front of us every day where we can do something good. This is not rocket science. Do you see someone hurting, do something good. If you see someone crying, do something good. If you see someone having a tough time, do something good. For goodness sake, have your sympathetic eyes open and do some good stuff.

The second thing Peter says we need to do is learn how to love as brothers and sisters, with compassion and humility. If we want to live a "good" life then loving others like they are family is essential. Loving people like they're family means going the extra mile, going above and beyond, answering the phone when you'd rather just let them leave a message. We often put family first when we look at our time and resources. What if we loved everyone like that?

The third thing Peter points to is we need to stop all the retaliation stuff. We love to get back at people. We have phrases like, that's okay, she'll get what's (fill in the blank) coming to her. God says that paybacks belong to Him, not us. Our job is to love and with love – there is no room for spending time figuring out how we're going to get back at those who wrong or hurt us. Retaliation is a poor use of the gifts, skills, and time God gives you to live your life blessing others.

The fourth things Peter says is good is to speak no evil and tell no lies. I'm thinking this is a no brainer but, we all know that speaking evil and telling lies has not going out of fashion yet. This one applies to all of us. Gossip, stretching the truth, leaving out important parts and telling only what you want someone to hear, spreading rumors, and just plain being evil is not what God says is living a good life.

The fifth thing is that to be good means we search for peace. This one just might be the hardest one. We love a good conflict. We seem to feed off restlessness and turmoil. We know people who seem to function best when there's a hullabaloo going on. We also know people who will cause trouble if there's none happening at the moment, right. We know people who stir stuff up because they love trouble. Our job, if we want to be good according to God's standards, is to look for ways to bring peace, to be peace makers not trouble makers. To be good is to look for peace, pray for peace, want more peace. To be the people who defuse instead of accelerate. To be the people with the fire extinguishers instead of those who pour gas on the flames of trouble.

AS BELIEVERS OF JESUS WE DO GOOD:

- **SYMPATHY**
- **LOVE**
- **DON'T RETALIATE, BLESS**
- **PEACE**

"Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. ... Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing... Search for peace, and work to maintain it." (1 Peter 3:8,9,11 NLT)

So, being good is being godly. Let's pray today that we can be more like God and less like who we used to be so that we can be seen by God and then the rest of the world, as those who are "good."