

### BEING GOOD

Goodness can be hard to take! Goodness can be hard to live out and at times hard to take in other people. Think about how often it's the bad news stories that hit the headlines and sell the papers. There seems to be a strange pleasure to hear about people going wrong. Films or plays often seem more interesting when there are some baddies in the story and the good people often come across as bland and dull.

And if you were ever called 'Goody-Goody' at school (I was) , or 'holier than thou' in later life, you might remember that it didn't actually feel like a compliment!

Goodness can be hard to take. Why do people dislike goodness? I suppose it's because it shows up our own weak spots and failings. It makes us feel as if we're not so good as the next person. So we find ourselves jealous about goodness in others instead of glad of it. Instead of being inspired to follow a good example, at the worst we can feel hostile and resentful.

It's hard enough to try to live a good life in a world where there's lots that is dragging us away from being good; but if you're also despised for being good, it's even harder.

Yet in his letter, Peter keeps on telling people to be good. So let's think about the COMMAND to be good, the DIFFICULTIES of being good and the INSPIRATION to be good.

*'Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do (1:15); 'Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind' (2:1); 'live such good lives among the pagans that though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us' (2:12); 'don't use your freedom to cover up evil' (2:16); 'it's commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering...' (2:19) 'keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander' (3:16)*

Be holy, live good lives, don't cover up evil, bear up under unjust suffering, keep

a clear conscience..... **The COMMAND to be good.**

It all sounds a bit hard...be good, all the time, even if you suffer for it. It goes on: *since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude....live for the will of God' (4:1)* 'Arm yourselves' – it's a battle, he seems to be saying and at the end of this section he spells out more practically what goodness includes: loving deeply (not superficially- he's mentioned this before in 1:22), being hospitable without grumbling, using your own gifts wholeheartedly (4:8-11). It's a tall order- **the DIFFICULTIES of being good.**

It seems clear that goodness is hard to live and, if there's all this unjust suffering going about and such a need to show others that they've got no basis for their slander, then goodness is hard to take as well. You see, these Christians once lived the same way as everyone else. Now they've decided to do things differently because of their new-found faith in Christ. So the rest of their people look on in amazement: there used to be deabuchery, lust, drunkenness...and it stopped. *They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (1 Pet. 4:3-4)* Maybe those others are now being shown up for their bad behaviour. There's a resentment. Their faults are obvious. Perhaps the only thing to do is to heap abuse. But it isn't easy to take it if you're the one trying to do the right thing.

It's an ongoing question: *'is there any point in being good? Is there any reward?'* Psalm 73 is a classic for asking those questions: *I envied the arrogant, I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles....they are free from burdens common to man....always carefree they increase in wealth.....* The writer looks at the baddies and they seem to get away with it. Meanwhile, he says *surely in vain I have kept my heart pure....in innocence....all day long I have been plagued*

It's understandable. Here he is trying to do the right thing but it seems as if he's the one having struggles, suffering unjustly, whilst the baddies get away scot free. Where's the reward in that? Thankfully he goes on to say: *It is good to be near God....he knows that 'God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever' (v.26)*

But it does take a fair bit of strength to hang on. To do what Peter says takes major effort and hope: to keep a clear conscience, believe in blessing if they suffer, to love deeply and serve wholeheartedly and believe that God knows all about you, and will judge right even if others don't. *They will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (v.5, 6)*-it's not easy.

**ILLUS:** *I have been reading the autobiography of Clare Balding the sports presenter...although she had well-off family, successful horse racing trainer for a father etc. etc she often felt she didn't fit in. At boarding school she got caught up with a group of friends who took a dare to go shoplifting. A small packet of sweets became a more regular event, and the things that were stolen got bigger. Clare began to back out but eventually it was made clear that she wouldn't be part of the gang if she didn't take risks for them. She got caught, refused to give away the name of the friend who had put her up to it, was suspended from school -and ignored by her friends. She said she later realised that she had given up on honesty and truthfulness for friendships that weren't real and it had got her nowhere.*

Goodness can be hard to take if you're not being good, and hard to live out if you want to be good.

The **DIFFICULTIES of being good.** Thankfully Peter doesn't just say 'grit your teeth and get on with it'. He wants people always to have the inspiration of Jesus Christ to keep them going, the **INSPIRATION to be good.** Jesus the saviour suffered. Since Christ suffered, and died and was raised, *be done with evil and live for God* (v.1-2). Remember who you serve. Remember *the end of all things is near* (v.7) and for a Christian that means a new world and life with God always. It also means we do things with *all the strength that God provides* (v.11)

*A couple of weeks ago a museum was opened in the U.S. To commemorate the 9/11 disaster when the twin towers of the World Trade Centre were hit by terrorists and 3000 people died.*

*Amongst the exhibits there is a pair of high heeled black shoes worn by a woman who said 'I did not plan on walking down 77 flights of stairs' She had to take them off to escape.*

*The stone steps that led from the plaza of an adjoining building to the street outside have been saved- one of the only pieces of the whole structure that survived the wreckage- as a sign of the route to freedom. Ordinary steps that most people didn't think twice about in their everyday lives as they went home to the train or out to get a sandwich or have a cigarette.*

*Other people spoke about a man wearing a red bandana who went up and down the stairs in the buildings countless times guiding people to safety through the*

*smoke, most people not knowing his name, before he was buried in rubble himself as the Towers collapsed.*

To many people he was a saviour. Jesus Christ comes again and again to guide frightened people to safety. Many don't even know his name. Then it seemed as if he had been buried himself, after helping so many down the stairway to safety. But we believe he overcame death and is even more than our inspiration, that he is our strength and power to do good, and our forgiveness for when we fail to do good. He is the reason for loving deeply, for serving wholeheartedly. He is our hope and portion for ever, just as the psalmist said. Jesus even prayed for his disciples and his followers, not to be free of evil influences but to be kept safe and given the power of his Spirit.

Goodness is hard to take if it shows up your faults. Goodness is hard to live out, in a world where there's a lot that's bad, in a world where you long to fit in and be acceptable.

But Peter commands Christians to do good; he encourages them in all the difficulties of being good, to see the inspiration of the Saviour, the strength of the Saviour and to trust in him to be a good judge. Then one day, the people who slander won't have a leg to stand on, and God will be praised through Jesus Christ (v.11). To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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