

Defining Goodness

Jonathan K. Dodson | Titus 3:1-7 | May 24, 2020

We've been learning from this letter to be a people of peculiar goodness. But does it mean to be peculiar? It's unusual, out of the ordinary. People stop, take notice. God is calling us to be an stop and take notice church: ready for *every* good work. So *what determines* goodness? Some say justice done this way, others virtue that way. And once it's defined, what does goodness look like in detail? How do you keep it up? Peculiar goodness: its Definition, Detail, and Driving force.

Definition of Goodness

Who determines what's good? Our passage says, [Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work](#) (1). Goodness is in view. Question is *which* authority determines it in your life? It depends on your institutional authority. Two are in view. The first is **governing authorities**. It may be that some Cretan Christians were disregarding civic authority because Jesus is Lord not Caesar. We see similar disregard for civic authority today when churches cry Persecution for being prohibited from gathering due to COVID. Paul writes to reinforce civil obedience. Of course they're not the only ones grate against authority; we're all tempted to disregard civic authority whenever it's *inconvenient*. I live on Manchac. Even though its spelled

Manchaca, we all know you say Manchac. But recently, the city changed the street name to MENchaca. So, now you have to say MENchac, which nobody is doing! Living on Manchac I had to change my address, adjust billing addresses, and resisted it like crazy! Terribly inconvenient. But guess what, inconvenience isn't cause for civil disobedience. I should have complied immediately. We aren't free to reject civic authority just because we find it disagreeable. We're to be submissive. The second institutional authority Paul addresses, **the Word of God**, the trustworthy word. Just because you find something in the Bible disagreeable doesn't give you the right to disregard it. To do so is to elevate your authority over God's authority: *to institutionalize Yourself*. That's what's happened today and why many churches struggle to maintain unity. Everyone is an authority unto themselves. Personal opinion registers higher than divine revelation. Pet doctrines push churches around. Ever respond on social just to give the impression you care about an issue *when you really don't*? You hear about an alleged injustice on FB and post a response without investigating. Why? To be seen as justice-minded. Or gentleness on trending on social, and instead of saying I really struggle to be gentle, you RT as if a paragon of gentility. The whole medium invites performance. Post to signal your virtues; like to get liked back, and this shapes us in a particular way. We begin to value opinions more than facts: our opinions, the opinions of others,

subtly reinforcing the institution of Self (which you don't need SM to do). Say you hear something challenging from the Word of God. If we're not careful, we'll dismiss it simply because it contradicts our opinion, disregard because we find it disagreeable. But Paul elevates the institutional authority of Scripture telling Titus to instruct and rebuke in sound doctrine (1:10), to exhort and correct with *all authority* (2:15). Why? Because *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness* (2 Ti 3:16–17). All divine, all profitable, all training for goodness. We can't say that of our authority or government. God determines what's good. And his determination is declared in Scripture. So Paul says submit to the governing authorities, obey them *and* your spiritual authorities as they instruct you *in sound doctrine*. Remind them of these things, Paul writes. Not because they've forgotten but because we drift. God defines goodness.

Details of Goodness

What does peculiar goodness look like? Verse 2: *speaking evil of no one, avoiding quarreling, being gentle, and showing perfect courtesy toward all*. When we submit to God's definition of goodness it gets into the details of our speech. He gives two negative and two positive examples. **Negative:** *speaking evil of no one*. The word is quite strong: to blaspheme. To profane what God considers sacred. God

does not gossip about you, tear you down to the Spirit and the Son when you're not looking. He honors us with his speech, even when speaking about our sins, he refuses to reduce us to a pile of criticism. What is your speech like? Do you run leaders down behind their backs? Slander your boss to coworkers, gossip about your city group to a spouse? Speak evil of *no one*. If there is a genuine issue, Jesus directs us to go directly to that person or for love to cover a multitude of sins. Cover means to conceal, to hide others' wrongs from your sight. To stop looking at the wrong. So love covers the sin and refuses to pull the cover back off! Close friends or spouses can devolve into little societies of criticism. I was speaking with some friends and the conversation started to go in a more critical direction but then someone asked, *Who is someone that brings you joy?* This launched us into edifying appreciation of others. Much better than blaspheming what God considers sacred, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Speak evil of no one; instead encourage like crazy. Leads to a **positive** example of goodness: *showing perfect courtesy toward all*. The honor we are required to show one another inside the church should spill outside the church. While we may not agree with all, we can show courtesy to all. Sadly, this is often absent in disagreement. We may cling to a cause, doctrine, or position so tightly that we willingly malign or misrepresent a person. But perfect courtesy strives to represent others perfectly and charitably.

If someone uses an offensive term, the courteous person doesn't assume ill intent, and X-ray others, but grants benefit of the doubt. They're poised not to defend but to learn. Like the spouse that says, What did you mean when you said X honey? But asking the question isn't enough. The word courtesy is the same word for *meekness*. It's *humbly* asking the question, ready to learn, change, or repent. We're prone to do this when we live under the authority of Scripture. Why? Because we're in the habit of submitting ourselves to God's authority asking, What do you mean? How can I change? The courteous person is meek and *gentle*. In fact, these two words—meekness and gentleness—are used together to describe Christ: *I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ* (2 Cor 10:1). What does gentleness look like? Jesus Christ. He is tender toward the sinner, close to the sufferer, patient with the doubter. His posture is open arms not wagging finger. To all he says, Come. Dane Ortlund says if Jesus had a website the About Me dropdown would read *Gentle & Lowly in Heart*. What would our dropdown read?

Drives Goodness

What defines goodness? God's trustworthy Word. The details of goodness? Charitable in speech, gentle in heart. But how do we become good? What *drives* the goodness? A proper sense of who we are, which comes from two complementary perspectives in 3-7.

Verse 3: *FOR we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray,*

slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. The first perspective is one we would never give ourselves. Where we should see crooked, we often see straight. Kant: *Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.* The first perspective is that of a mirror. This is who you are. The second perspective, an engine, the driving force of goodness: *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.* This appearance introduces a view of humanity that is grounded, not in our goodness but in God's goodness. The sudden appearance of his loving kindness changes everything, especially the sense of who we are. Three ways. *God the Father saves.* Not because of our activism, not because of our evangelism, not because of our theology, our perfectly arranged prayers, our apologetic speech, our career success. God saved—past tense—in spite of those self-righteous works! Mercy! God the Father saves. *God the Spirit regenerates by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.* Now without this, no one can be saved, straightened out, rescued from institutionalizing the Self. Two things have to be done. *Cleansing.* To get a proper sense of who we are, we not only have to look in the mirror to see the egg on our face; it has to be cleaned off. Our rags are dirty, but not the Spirit. He takes the work of Christ and applies it to us, absorbing our guilt and sin—cleansed! But cleansing alone

isn't enough. Just because the timber is clean doesn't make it uncrooked. You've got to go all the way back and regrow the tree. Regenerate: to make new. The Spirit doesn't just clean us on the outside; he remakes us from the inside. The Spirit refashions us, gives us a whole new sense of who we are as God's new creation! This, he says, is renewing. Likely referring to the whole past-tense process, clean and regenerate: renewal inside and out! See God doesn't just give a drop of the Spirit; he gives us all of the Spirit, not a drizzle but a bucket—*richly poured out through Jesus*. Jesus is the linchpin; take him out and it all falls apart. The Father saves, the Spirit regenerates, the Son **justifies** makes us right with God. As a result, God is thrilled to have us as his own. Now, if we take this in, it radically changes the sense of who you are. It becomes the driving force of your life. Not entitled your humbled, not tolerated your loved, not a nuisance but favorite of God. He dotes on us in the Spirit and the Son! All of this is yours, *if God's Word is true*, all of it. *If he's the authority on humanity*. If you take his perspective down into your soul: worse than you care to admit, more loved than you can imagine. You won't get this news anywhere else. Open your heart to it, and let your life run on it. Then speak like it: courteous, charitable, humble, gentle. Let salvation reorient who you are and your drop down will read: peculiarly good.