**Goodness**

Matthew 5:14-17, 21-22, 27-28, 43-48

Some people question the existence of God ***but an indisputable truth is the existence of GOOD***. There IS a right and wrong and everyone knows it.

* It is qualitatively wrong to ***cut in line*** at Walmart.
* It is the dark side that leads you to ***unplug your roommates phone*** and plug yours in.
* It is indisputably wrong to ***take the oreos*** from someone’s lunchbox.
* It is a definitive evil to ask a woman ***if she’s pregnant***.
* It is a grievous sin to ask a man if the woman with him is his wife when it is clearly his mother. (Yes, that happened and my Mom loves that story. We were at family camp and I was sitting beside my mom, with Kristin across the table with our boys in between. The lady who guessed Mom was my wife must have assumed Kristin was the Nanny or Aunt or something.)

The point is - some things are right and other things are wrong. And some things are just very, terribly wrong. C.S. Lewis calls this **NATURAL LAW** and shows not only how it is encoded into all of our minds but how the fact of this knowledge is a clear pointer to the existence of God. After all, where does this sense of right and wrong come from? It doesn’t come from nature. In nature all you get is power. The big fish eats the little fish. It isn’t moral or immoral it just is.

But with humans ***we don’t let the big children eat the little ones***. At least not most of the time, and only if the little ones have become *really* annoying. We know that small children should be protected, women should not be abused, and people should keep their promises. There is a clear and non-negotiable reality of right and wrong and Lewis says,

“First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.” *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis

You should love your wife and be faithful to her - you should not hurt your wife and chase other women. You should respect your husband and not be critical of him, and you shouldn’t flirt with other men. You should feed your children and help them get educated. You should not harm your children and leave them without food or clothes or schooling.

**Goodness is a thing**. Rightness exists in our world. We all know it. We all feel it. And this is a powerful tool for evangelism. In *Mere Christianity* Lewis doesn’t start with arguments for the existence of God from creation or from the order of the universe. He starts here - with the existence of right and wrong. And as an atheist he had to admit that he had no explanation of where that Natural Law came from. It was there - but he couldn’t explain why. And it forced him to take a step toward the POSSIBILITY that some kind of divine being existed.

Our virtue today, as we study the 13 perfections of the Lord Jesus, is **GOODNESS**. Another word is righteousness or rightness. Jesus is perfectly good. He is absolutely righteous. That means he does not have a single stain of sin and does and says everything exactly as it should be done and said. Here is how he said it in Matthew 5:

“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them… For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17,20

In this chapter, six times Jesus said, “You’ve heard it said but I say to you.” He referenced something in the **Jewish Law** and then clarified what it really means to obey it. This happened a lot in Jesus’ ministry with issues like the Sabbath and work and holiness rules related to eating and washing. A lot of traditions had developed that went beyond the words of Scripture and created practices that actually violated the Bible.

For example, the Pharisees made a point of publicly ***donating a tenth of the spices*** from their personal gardens, but at the same time they failed to care for their aging parents. Jesus said, ***“you strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.”*** In other words, “You’ve missed the whole point.” Jesus did not come to get rid of the Mosaic Law, he came to show the world what it really looks like to obey it. And he did obey it. Completely. Which is ***God’s necessary and non-negotiable standard***. Look at the last verse of Matthew 5:

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

Many people today believe that GOOD PEOPLE go to heaven. The problem is they don’t really stop to think ***“how good is good enough?”*** What is God’s standard? Does the Bible tell us? Yes. Right here. Good people don’t go to heaven - because there are no truly, completely good people. PERFECT people go to heaven. Period.

What’s the point of Matthew 5? Jesus says it clearly and flatly here - **you must be perfect**. He clarifies the Law of Moses - it’s not enough to avoid murder, you have to manage your anger. It’s not enough to avoid adultery, you have to get rid of lust in your heart. It’s not enough to just love your friends and family - if you want to be perfect (and you have to be perfect) you must also love your ENEMIES. God’s standard is profoundly high.

***How good is good enough for heaven?*** Perfectly good. Not one sin. Not one failure to do exactly the right thing. That’s very bad news for all of us until we understand the gospel! This is what God is doing - He is making us perfect in Christ. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s first look at God’s standard. Be perfect. Jesus gives us six examples.

**You must be Perfect:**

1. **Anger** - don’t just avoid **Killing** people

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder…’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” Matt. 5:21-22

The first two come right from the 10 Commandments - the heart of the Mosaic Law. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. Literally engraved in stone. Non-negotiable commands of God.

But Jesus said that it’s not just about the letter of the Law - there is a Spirit to the Law as well. And the Spirit of the Law against murder is actually a law against anger.

1. **Anger** - don’t just avoid **Killing** people
	* Be **Forgiving**

“Leave your gift there at the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come offer your gift.” Matthew 5:23-24

The Christian ***rule of reconciliation applies*** whether you caused the damage in the relationship or you were the one harmed. Either way Jesus makes YOU responsible to follow up in the relationship and bring peace and reconciliation. It may not work out, depending on how the other person responds, but it’s up to you to approach them in a loving, grace-filled way.

**You must be Perfect:**

1. **Lust** - don’t just avoid **Adultery**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27-28

Jesus shows how God’s Law is not just about external behavior, **it’s primary concern is the HEART**. The Pharisees had perfected the art of managing the external behavior and appearing holy and righteous. But their hearts were far from God and far from goodness. He called them whitewashed tombs. Hypocrites. They talked about loving and serving God but their hearts were filled with pride, selfishness, lust and greed. But Jesus said:

**You must be Perfect:**

1. **Lust** - don’t just avoid **Adultery**
	* Be **Holy**

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.” Matt. 5:29

If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Better to be maimed and half blind than to end up in hell. The clear intent of the Law of Moses was not just to prevent adultery in Israel - it was to promote ***holiness and faithfulness in marriage***. Which leads us to the third example.

1. **Divorce** - don’t find a **Loophole** to abandon your wife
	* Be **Faithful**

“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife… causes her to commit adultery.” Matt. 5:32

Yes, Moses made a provision for divorce in certain cases, but that was not God’s general will. Malachi the prophet says explictly, ***“God hates divorce.”*** It was only the hardness of heart in Israel that allowed for divorce. So Jesus makes that clear in his teachings as well. Don’t look for some technicality that would let you leave your wife and take up with another woman. Be faithful. Keep your promises. That’s the fourth example.

1. **Oaths** - don’t make empty **Promises** to cover up your past failures
	* Be **Honest**

“But I say to you, do not take an oath at all… Let what you say be simply, ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’” Matt. 5:36-37

Apparently some detailed practices had developed around making vows and swearing by different body parts and holy places. Scholars surmise that ***some things were considered more sacred or significant than others*** so if you swore by the Temple, for example - which is pretty holy - you might later be able to break that vow by swearing again by Heaven - which is clearly more holy than just the earthly temple. It’s another example of getting off on a technicality. Jesus cuts through the nonsense and says, “Just keep your word. It’s very clear.” Two more.

**You must be Perfect:**

1. **Revenge** - don’t punish people just because they **Deserve** it

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” Matt. 5:38

All of these are ***direct quotes from the Old Testament Law***. God directed Moses to give the young nation of Israel clear rules to govern the people and show how God’s people were different from other nations. The point of “an eye for an eye,” is to prevent excessive punishment. If someone steals a roll from a street vendor, you don’t chop off his head. If someone chews gum in the classroom you don’t pull out a tooth - even if some of you teachers have had it up to here with gum chewing and scraping gum off of desks.

1. **Revenge** - don’t punish people just because they **Deserve** it
	* Be **Patient**

“But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Matt. 5:39

Being slapped in the face has always been considered more of an insult than an injury. Just because someone is trying to provoke you and get a rise out of you doesn’t justify slapping them back. “He started it,” didn’t work with Moses and it didn’t work with Jesus either.

Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. Patiently endure suffering - and expect that evil people will always oppose those who do God’s will. Last example.

1. **Relationships** - don’t just love your friends, love your **Enemies**
	* Be **Compassionate**

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matt. 5:44

Jesus concludes this challenging list with the hardest one. Not only must we love our enemies but we have to PRAY for them - which means we have to DESIRE GOOD for them and ask for God to BLESS people who hate us and oppose us and make us miserable.

***Do you feel the force of these six examples?*** And we know that Jesus could have gone on! He could have given 100 more examples. And again, here is the conclusion of Matthew 5:

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

What a powerful summary statement: it’s simple, Jesus says, ***just be like God***. Be perfect. Be holy. Be righteous. Be GOOD.

***That’s what GOODNESS is - it is GODLINESS - God-likeness.*** Does God really expect that of us? Is that really what God requires? The language is very clear. You MUST be perfect. It’s not negotiable. It’s not a flexible requirement. The book of Revelation makes it clear that only holy, righteous people will get into heaven. After an extended and poetic visual description of the beauty of heaven, John writes of heaven:

“Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.” Revelation 21:27

Scripture is clear: ***God’s standard is PERFECTION.*** In the end, then, it’s true that good people go to heaven. But you have to define GOOD correctly. True GOODNESS is the total absence of sin and immorality. Real goodness is PERFECTION. It is absolute holiness, righteousness and love.

***Let’s follow the path C.S. Lewis marked out for us,*** which is the path Jesus marked out for us too. Let’s acknowledge first: **there is a Law from God** that requires us to do the right thing and second, ***we don’t always follow it***. We know there is a right and a wrong, but we often refuse the right and choose the wrong, so we all know - deep down - that we’re in trouble. If the Bible stopped there we would all tremble in fear and despair. But thanks be to God, the Bible does not stop there, because Jesus didn’t stop there.

You must be **Perfect**.

You have been **Declared** perfect in Christ

“By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Hebrews 10:14

This is the wonderful doctrine of **JUSTIFICATION**. God gives us His final verdict NOW. At the moment you put your faith in Jesus, calling on Him to save you, God declares you RIGHTEOUS, justified, perfect. This could never be based on our efforts or works - but is based insead on the finished work of Jesus - His single offering; His death on the cross. By that single gift, that sacrifice, ***Jesus gave you CREDIT for His perfection***. But the good news doesn’t stop there.

You must be **Perfect**.

You have been **Declared** perfect in Christ.

You are **Becoming** perfect in Christ.

“By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are ***being*** ***sanctified***.” Hebrews 10:14

Now ***put your grammar hat on*** for a second. Those who “are BEING sanctified.” Who is the SUBJECT of that sentence. We are the OBJECT - we are the ones BEING sanctified or made holy. So who is the Actor, who is DOING the sanctifying? It can’t be us because it’s happening to us. It doesn’t say “who are sanctifying themselves.” It says “who are BEING sanctified.”

God. Yes, God is the one doing that work in every believer.

The Bible is so powerful. Look at the words. By a single offering HE HAS PERFECTED. What tense is that? Past. Not just past tense - ***past PERFECT tense***. Completed action. If you belong to Jesus by faith you HAVE BEEN perfected already - you have been justified. You have already been declared righteous by God’s judicial decree.

And at the very same time - **you are BEING SANCTIFIED**. You are righteous in Christ and at the same time you are BECOMING righteous in Christ. Justification and sanctification are inseparably locked. They are bound together. And that shouldn’t surprise us. Paul says the same thing in Romans 8.

You must be **Perfect**.

You have been **Declared** perfect in Christ.

You are **Becoming** perfect in Christ.

“Those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.” Rom. 8:30, NIV

***I hope you FEEL the power and beauty of the gospel here.*** It is not just about getting YOU into heaven. It is about getting heaven into you. It is about Jesus getting His righteousness into you, His goodness. What starts with a declaration - “You are righteous,” continues as a lifelong process, “you must be more righteous,” and ends with glorification when you die or Jesus comes back and then you will be like Him, when you see Him face to face.

You must be **Perfect**.

You have been **Declared** perfect in Christ.

You are **Becoming** perfect in Christ.

You **Will be** perfect forever.

 “We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2

Then all sin will be gone, all remnants and traces of your selfishness, pride, lust and greed and everything else. This is God’s work to sanctify us, as we walk with Him in faith and obedience. And look at God’s formal guarantee on this process:

**You Will be Perfect Forever**

**“**Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” 1 Thess. 5:23-24

God will not fail in His purpose to create holy people for His own possession. He WILL finish the work He started in you. He will bring you to perfection. He is faithful. He will do it.

We’ve heard the gospel - the good news of God’s saving work in us. Now let’s apply the gospel using our four steps.

* **Sanctification** is God’s work of perfecting you as you trust and obey Him

| ↑ | Jesus is perfectly good - utterly sinless and always **Righteous** and loving |
| --- | --- |
| ↓ | We are **Sinful** - falling short of perfection in thought, word and deed |
| ❤ | Jesus washed away our sins and continues to cleanse and **Sanctify** us |
| → | So we can **Grow** in holiness and love as we walk with the Holy Spirit |

First **we look up at the glory and perfection of Jesus**. This is who we know what GOODNESS is - because we see it in the life of Jesus. He was totally without sin, without selfishness, without the smallest taint of pride or greed or lust or unholy anger. What Jesus presented in the sermon on the mount there in Matthew 5 is what he lived. The Pharisees did not practice what they preached, but Jesus did.

Jesus is good. He is righteous, holy, loving and perfect. This should move our hearts to worship Him in humble praise and devotion! But then we have to **look back down at ourselves** and see that in the light of His glory we are not good at all.

Compared to each other some of us are better than others - but ***compared to Jesus we have not begun to be holy or righteous*** or just or fair or loving. We might get some of the externals ok - like we don’t commit murder very often - but when it comes to the heart we all struggle with selfishness, pride, anger, lust and inconsistency. If we’re honest we know that we are not very good - and certainly not good enough to get into heaven on our own merits.

But that’s ***where Jesus meets us*** - that’s when we are ready to **experience again the wonder of the gospel** - “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus’ death paid for your sins so God can look at you and say “Righteous” even though YOU are not righteous because your sin was applied to Jesus and His perfection was applied to you. That’s the amazing grace of justification.

But the good news keeps getting better - not only are you declared righteous in Christ, but God is working in you to help you BECOME more righteous in Christ. That is the lifelong process of **SANCTIFICATION**. “God is faithful. He will do it.” He is doing it. He never stops doing that work - and the Holy Spirit patiently helps us cooperate with the process. He whispers to our hearts. He guides us with every next step.

Even now I expect **the Holy Spirit is showing you YOUR NEXT STEP**. As you heard the six examples, I bet one of them stood out as especially relevant for YOU today. Anger. Lust. Divorce. Oaths. Revenge. Relationships. That’s a pretty comprehensive list - on purpose - Jesus was showing that everyone falls short. No one can completely obey the Law of God.

But as we ***experience the grace of God that is CHANGING US*** - we begin to WANT TO obey the law. We begin to love people we once hated. We are able to forgive those who hurt us instead of nursing grudges against them. We begin to fill our minds with God and His purposes instead of lustful thoughts and images from our sinful days. We learn what it means to serve our wives instead of always seeking to be served by them. We don’t just stay married because we have to but we grow to enjoy and delight in the husband or wife God gave us.

Yes, ***we can cooperate with God’s work*** in making us more holy - growing GOODNESS in us as we become more like Jesus. So whose job is sanctification? It is totally God’s job. And it’s totally YOUR JOB. It’s like the math of Jesus’ incarnation - he was fully God and fully man. So with sanctification - it is 100% God’s job and He has promised to finish the work. But from your perspective, it’s 100% your job too. “You therefore must BE PERFECT.” ***As saints in Christ we ARE holy, yet we are CALLED TO be holy.*** Live worthy of the holiness you’ve already been given.

Grow in goodness. Grow in holiness. Grow in love.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-7/cs-lewis-profile-of-his-life.html>

**C.S. Lewis** called himself the most reluctant convert in England - and his conversion from atheism to Christianity took almost ten full years. Good reminder to be patient with those we love who, right now, seem far from God. But once Lewis surrendered to Jesus, once he bowed the knee, his life was never the same.

Instead of writing rather self-indulgent poetry, he began to ***write explaining and defending the Christian faith*** he had once criticized. Instead of living a reclusive, self-centered life, he reorganized his life in service to others. Even when he became quite famous as an author and speaker, Lewis remained committed to answering every letter written to him personally.

Later in life, when ***royalties on his books became substantial***, Lewis set up a charitable fund and gave most of his earnings away, never changing his wardrobe, home or lifestyle to spend more of what he was earning. Lewis worked hard to conceal the amount and recipients of these funds, never seeking to draw attention to himself. But it is known that he often underwrote education expenses for orphans and poor seminary students.

And ***two boys he sponsored became his stepsons*** when he married their mother, the American Joy Davidman Gresham. She became a Christian by reading his books, and came to England to meet him. After four years of friendship, the two were married and Lewis delighted in her and cared for her through a fast moving battle with cancer.

C.S. Lewis will always be remembered for his powerful and insightful books, like the Chronicles of Narnia and Mere Christianity. But he was more than a good writer; he was a good Christian man who was transformed by the gospel and lived to share that good news with others!

Let’s pray.