

The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness

6/9

Galatians 5:16-26;

07 03 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Fruit of the Spirit Series

“God is good all the time. All the time God is good.” This simple affirmation of faith is often used in the African-American church tradition. The leader will say, “*God is good,*” and the congregation will respond, “*All the time.*” Then the leader will echo, “*All the time,*” and the congregation will answer, “*God is good.*”

I know that we are a prim and proper, downtown, county seat United Methodist Church, but let’s give it a try anyway. Ready?

❖ Leader:	God is good!	People:	All the time!
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Goodness is one of God’s primary qualities. Psalm 100:5: “*For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*” Psalm 145:9: “*The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.*” This recognition is echoed in the children’s prayer that begins: “*God is great, God is good.*”

Since God is **good**, God’s people are also called to be good. As children of our Heavenly Father, we are challenged to reflect the Lord’s divine attributes in our lives. Each of us pray that “*goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*”

This morning we are continuing our Summer Worship Series entitled ***The Fruit of the Spirit***. Today we come to the 6th characteristic of the Christian disciple: **goodness**.

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26

Introduction

In the movie, ***Caddy Shack***, a teenager named Danny runs afoul of the chairman of the country club. In this scene, Judge Smails explains the two pathways of life: goodness or badness!

Badness

There IS a lot of badness in the world. The Bible calls it **Sin**. Sinfulness is more than the bad things we do or the good things we leave undone. Since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, humanity has been separated from right relationship with God. Nothing we say or do can bridge the deep division between heaven and earth.

In Romans 7:17-20 (selected verses), Paul summarized our human experience:

I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can’t. I do what I don’t want to—what I hate . . . I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter what way I turn I can’t make myself do right. I want to but I can’t. When I want to do good, I don’t and

when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is: sin still has me in its evil grasp. (Living Bible)

Paul's words resonate in our lives. Today's Scripture lesson reveals there is an ongoing battle between the flesh and the Spirit; and the front line runs through our hearts. Galatians 5:17 says: "*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.*" Paul encourages the church: "*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*" (Galatians 5:16)

Only those who live, walk, and abide in the Holy Spirit find strength beyond their own to lead a holy life. The Fruit of the Spirit is both **gift and goal** in our lives. First and last, all of the Christian life is grace—a gift from God that is neither earned nor deserved. However, we play our role in pursuing holiness in our lives. In partnership with the Holy Spirit, we can choose goodness in life.

Goodness

We tend to treat goodness as a lightweight virtue. It sounds like a quality Miss Manners would espouse. "*Be good*" is something we say to children and pets when we want them to behave.

Traditional worship services feature a **children's sermon** where the pastor teaches the young people something about God. Bishop Will Willimon of the North Alabama Annual Conference wrote: "*I've only got two objections to children's sermons: they are not for children and are usually not sermons.*" Oftentimes, the message is more about morality than the gospel. "*Be good*" sums up many children's sermons.

However, goodness is more than niceness and politeness. It deals with both our inner attitudes and outward actions. Goodness combines being and doing, faith and works. It reveals that our interior landscape is reflected in our exterior lifestyle.

Goodness is closely akin to **Godliness**. Who we are is based upon whose we are. There is a living relationship between how we talk and how we walk. In practical terms, this means that our extended family, neighbors, coworkers, and friends would not be surprised if they visited church and saw us here!

Integrity

A synonym for goodness is **integrity**. Integrity is a hard quality to put into words. It can be defined as soundness, honesty, unity, or oneness. From its root word, we get terms like integral (lacking nothing, essential, complete), integer (whole number), and integration (the joining of various parts into a united whole.)

Integrity reveals a vital connection between profession and practice, word and deed, thought and action. People of integrity do not compromise even when the cost is high—especially when the cost is high.

In this scene from the TV sitcom *Frasier*, we see Doctor Frasier Crane respond to the challenge and cost of personal integrity.

DVD *Frasier* (5th Season, Disc 4, *Sweet Dreams*)

Begin: 8:43 “You know, Roz.” End: 12:12 “Perfect.” (Fade to black.)

Our integrity and goodness is tested in moments when it is going to cost us something. We are called to put faith into action in our daily lives. Listen to how [James 1: 22-25](#) describes this spiritual quality:

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

During my younger years, I took up the sport of **archery**. Today’s compound bows and composite arrows are a far cry from the sticks and strings of our youth. Modern technology makes an amazing degree of accuracy possible.

However, I found that I could still totally miss a 5 x 5 foot block of Styrofoam from 40 yards away. When drawing back the bow, an archer must line up the peep-sight on the string, the pine sight on the bow, and the target. If you do it right, the arrow hits the bulls-eye. Do it wrong, and your neighbor’s cat is history!

Integrity means there is a connectedness between the goal we aim at and the life we lead. A unity exists between our Christian beliefs and daily actions. What we profess on Sunday is lived out in the world Monday through Friday.

Hypocrisy

You can also define a word by defining its opposite. The opposite of integrity is **hypocrisy**. The term “*hypocrite*” originally came from classic, Greek drama. In ancient plays, the actors used masks to display emotions. The Greek word for such a mask was “hypocrite.” The word eventually came to describe someone whose outward appearance and inward being did not match. Hypocrites say one thing but do another.

A favorite target for Jesus in the Gospels was the hypocrisy of the religious elite. In [Matthew 23: 23-24; 27-28](#) Jesus said:

Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides, you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

In 1936, the **Queen Mary** was launched as one of the largest cruise ships of her time. She served through the next four decades and one World War until she was retired and anchored off of Long Beach, California as a floating museum and hotel.

During her conversion, the three large smokestacks were taken off to be scraped and repainted. When they were placed on the dock, however, they crumbled to dust. Nothing was left of the $\frac{3}{4}$ inch steel plate—all that remained was more than 30 coats of paint that had been applied over the years. The steel had rusted away.

Hypocrites are people of no substance. Nothing underlies outward appearance.

One of the chief charges still brought against the church today is the charge of hypocrisy. Do you know why people think the church is full of hypocrites? Because the church is full of hypocrites! The name Christian literally means “*Christ-like*,” and this is a goal and process rather than an accomplished state. I have a standard reply when someone says they don’t come to the church because of all the hypocrites. I say, “Come anyway, you’ll feel right at home!”

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

A people of integrity are called to live out the goodness of Godliness in our daily lives. This often happens in response to our neighbor’s needs.

One day Jesus was teaching the crowds when a religious leader asked him, “*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus turned the question back on him, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*”

The man said, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself.*” Jesus nodded and said, “*You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.*”

The man was embarrassed by the exchange, and he wanted to “*justify*” himself. So he asked a follow up question: “*And who IS my neighbor?*” In response to the question, Jesus told a story now called ***The Parable of the Good Samaritan***.

Once upon a time a man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho. A band of robbers attacked him and left him for dead. A priest walked by and saw the man; but he chose to pass on the other side. A Levite who assisted in the Temple also saw the injured man and hurried past, too.

Finally, a man from Samaria traveled down the road. Due to historical, religious differences, the Jews and Samaritans hated one another. Think the West Bank in the Middle East with Jews and Arabs; or South Africa in the 1960s with whites and blacks; or Belfast in the 1970s with Protestants and Catholics.

However, it was the Samaritan who chose to stop, bind the man’s wounds, and carry him to a nearby inn. The same despised Samaritan paid for the man’s lodging and promised to reimburse any extra expense.

And Jesus then asked the religious expert, “*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*” Note how the question has changed—it is no longer “*Who is my neighbor?*” Now it is “*Who ACTED like a neighbor?*” The focus has shifted from who the other person is to who I am!

The man reluctantly answered, “*The one who had mercy on him.*” Jesus told him, “*Go and do likewise.*”

According to Charles Allen, the parable reveals there are three different types of people in the world: those who **beat’m up**, **pass’m up**, and **help’m up**! Those who walk by the Spirit cultivate goodness in their lives. We intuitively want to do the right thing that honors God, and we act on our faith by becoming the type of people who help’m up.

Note that Luke’s story about the Samaritan never refers to him as “Good.” The title was added later to the parable. The man was known by his actions. Actions speak loudly; and we cannot live with goodness without acting out our faith.

Each decision and crossways challenges us to live out God’s goodness. Since goodness does not come naturally to humans, we must consciously allow the Holy Spirit to guide our choices. Howard Vos wrote: “*The Spirit includes goodness and goodness doesn’t come naturally; it always requires a decision.*”

A life of goodness occurs one decision at a time. We are constantly challenged whether we walk by the world’s ways or the Spirit’s ways. When we abide in the Holy Spirit, then goodness naturally flows out of our lives. (Appreciation to Dr. Jim Ellison, Senior Minister at Simpsonwood UMC, for his shared insights in this section.)

Randy

Some of you have heard me talk about **Randy** before. He belonged to the first congregation I ever served out of seminary. In a church filled with characters, this brother deserved his own pew up front! Randy was the strangest church member I have ever known—and that’s saying something!

Randy attended church faithfully—a faithfulness, I must confess, that I sometimes regretted. He could read quite well but always trailed a phrase or two behind the rest of the congregation during hymns and creeds. When I stood up to preach, he nodded off to sleep. He also drooled. I became quite adept at gauging my sermon’s length by the dampness of Randy’s tie!

Randy possessed other interesting idiosyncrasies. He walked with a shuffle and talked to himself when no one else would. Randy’s favorite handout was the local package store. On occasion, he also had the interesting habit of checking his mailbox without benefit of clothes!

During my first year, Randy’s home burnt to the ground. He lost everything. He had burned all of his bridges with family members years before. None of his relatives offered to put him up or to put up with him!

A group of us stood around the smoldering embers, wondering what would become of Randy. Then someone mentioned that the single Methodist preacher lived in that parsonage with two unoccupied bedrooms. Everyone turned and stared at me. Suddenly, I found myself asking the question, “*Who is my neighbor?*” Reflecting that religion can be mighty inconvenient at times, I reluctantly invited Randy home.

It would be an inspiration to describe how I came to cherish and appreciate my eccentric brother in Christ. It would also be a lie! The days lasted an eternity. Relief was one of the lesser emotions I experienced when Randy finally moved out. Years later, however, I realized how the Lord taught me some important lessons during that time.

Christian love is not so much about feeling as it is about willing. Real love means acting in love even when we don't feel in love. Sentimental emotion does not enable saints to love the unlovable and accept the unacceptable. If action is delayed until we feel like turning the other cheek, blessing those who curse us, and praying for our enemies, then we are in for a long wait. Some of the greatest acts of Christian charity occur despite how we feel about the individual involved. Randy--my Christian brother--helped teach me that lesson.

Several years ago I learned that Randy had died. I experienced an unexpected sense of loss. It was not like Randy and I had exchanged Christmas cards every December. In fact, I had not seen him in over a decade. Yet he was still a child of God and an important member of the church. In my best moments, I understood. At my worst moments, I forgot.

I also have the sneaking suspicion that God sometimes finds me just as unlovable as I found Randy. Yet the Lord loves me still. In the assurance of the Christ's first love, we are invited to love others in turn.

Conclusion

There is a lot of badness in the world; and God's people are called to be good. Goodness is Godliness, and Godliness is expressed in goodness. God IS good—all the time. All the time—God is good. In turn, God calls us to be good—all the time. All the time—God calls us to be good.