

October 21, 2007

“The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness” Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: The longing for and struggle to be “good.”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because goodness is the fruit of the Spirit,
(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate goodness in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

In his book, The Moral Intelligence of Children, Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Coles writes ([READ 750 Illustrations, 104](#)):

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Character is higher than intellect.” Marian, a student of mine several years ago, much admired Emerson. She had arrived at Harvard from the Midwest and was trying hard to work her way through college by cleaning the rooms of her fellow students. Again and again she met classmates who had forgotten the meaning of please, of thank you, no matter how high their SAT scores. They did not hesitate to be rude, even crude toward her. One day she was not so subtly propositioned by a young man she knew to be very bright. She quit her job, and was preparing to quit school. Full of anxiety and anger, she came to see me. “I’ve been taking all these philosophy courses,” she said to me at one point, “and we talk about what’s true, what’s important, what’s good. Well, how do you teach people to be good?”

How indeed. What does it mean to be good? And what could make us so?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Galatians 5:16-26](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

“Goodness” is admittedly a bit vague for most of us, hard to pin down. “Oh, my goodness” or “Goodness, gracious” are the extent to which we hear of it. What exactly does it mean? Our children have grown up on the stories of Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends on the Island of Sodor. Thomas, James, Percy, Gordon, and all the others are not your typical locomotives. They can talk. And not only that, they each have their own personality quirks and foibles. Usually the stories have to do with a certain mess they’ve gotten themselves into and the lessons then learned along the way – the most important one being, according to Sir Topham Hat, that one learns to be a “really useful engine.”

There’s something of that in this particular manifestation of the Spirit’s renewing work in the life of the follower of Christ – “goodness.” Last week, we considered “kindness.” We talked about how it is an inner disposition, an awareness and sensitivity to the needs of others. “Goodness” is its sequel – the deeds that then flesh out and flow from such kindness, actions taken in order to help, to be of some benefit to another.

We stand on the receiving end of God’s goodness. The psalms repeatedly speak to this ([READ Psalm 23:6; 145:4-7; 119:68](#)). The LORD is good. And He does good – to all His creatures but most especially to His people. And His people, having experienced such goodness, are then to express it – being and doing good ourselves.

But that’s easier said than done. Being a “really useful engine” doesn’t come any more naturally for us than it does for Thomas the Tank Engine. Goodness, we need to understand, is the fruit of the Spirit. And, as such, we need to look to the Spirit to cultivate goodness in our lives. All the more as we consider the nature of what goodness entails and then the weeds that threaten to come up and choke out the growth of this fruit.

I. THE NATURE OF THE FRUIT

First, the very nature of this fruit – what goodness is – shows us our need of the Spirit. We need Him to turn us from self-righteousness and self-absorption. We have not been saved by good works. But we have been saved for them ([READ Ephesians 2:8-10](#)).

A) *Not External Alone*

Clearly, God intends us to do good – a deep goodness, not limited to the external alone. The Pharisees, the religious conservatives of Jesus’ day, are worth considering here (**READ Matthew 5:17-20**). It seems goodness is far more difficult than we think.

1. All the right things

These men were known for doing all the right things. They had a deep desire to keep God’s commands. So much so, knowing our tendency to break those commands, they set rules around the commands to ensure no one would break them. Much like a fence.

2. In all the wrong ways

The problem came in their fixation on the fence, forgetting why it was there. Focusing on the externals of the commands and doing so in a self-dependent, self-righteous way.

B) But Internal As Well

Failing to see God was not interested in the external alone but the internal as well. What does it mean, after all to do good? What is goodness? What does it really entail?

1. Deeper demands

Deeper demands. Micah 6 – to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. All the other commands are expressions of this. Or, honing it down even more, we are to love God and to love one another – the 1st and 2nd greatest commands.

2. Deeper conviction

Goodness means hearing the deeper demands of God’s commands. And coming to a deeper conviction. Rejoicing over the beauty of the Law, grieving for the ugliness of my heart, seeing my profound inability to make things right and then my need for Jesus.

We need a deeper goodness. And without it, we are but whitewashed tombs.

Illustration:

C. S. Lewis captures something of this in his short essay entitled, “The Sermon and the Lunch.” There he tells the story of his having dined in the home of the local vicar and his family – dined in the home and seen something of the home life. And it was that which then caused him to say of the sermon, “*How can he? How can he of all people?*”

Application:

You see, as we consider the difficulty of goodness, we need to be honest about the reality of hypocrisy – professing one thing and practicing another, the wearing of masks and the playing of parts. It’s real. And it’s appealing. It’s easier. It’s easier to settle for the external things, the measurable things, and never consider the heart. It’s easier.

To be real before God and one another in terms of our striving and our struggle with being and doing good can be hard as nails. But it is what the gospel frees us to do. That’s Paul’s message in this letter. The debt has been paid – by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our status and standing with God is secure because of nails driven hard through our Lord, securing Him on a cross. And now it’s done. It’s finished.

So while it seems easier to wear the masks and play the parts, we don’t have to do it anymore. No more. We can start anew with life anew – His Word to guide us and His Spirit enabling us to be and do good. And it is the Spirit we need to bring forth this fruit.

II. THE NOXIOUSNESS OF THE WEEDS

We see that as we consider the nature of the fruit, this deeper goodness, and then the noxiousness of the weeds that threaten to come up and choke it out. At both points, we see our need of the Spirit. Now it’s here we need to remember that such goodness is both produced by the Spirit and commanded of us. And Jesus is serious about this (**READ Matthew 25:31-46**). Jesus is serious about this. And we should be as well.

Laboring long at a continual pulling of these weeds – recognizing what they are and the damage they do. And what is that threatens to choke this fruit? Mainly, two things.

A) *Personal Peace*

The first having to do with the hoarding of time – the idolatrous love of personal peace. Francis Schaeffer wrote of this ([READ How Should We Then Live quote](#)):

Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city – to live one’s life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren.

1. The possibility of such peace

Now we need to acknowledge that there is the possibility of such peace in this life, of times of refreshing. God is the giver of every good gift and His gifts are many – the quiet of the morning or the rest of the evening, the company of friends and family, the simple pleasures of the crisp fall air, the pages of a book, or the taste of your favorite beverage.

2. The place of peace

There is the possibility of such personal peace and we need to recognize that. But also its place – being grateful for it when it comes and giving it to the Lord. It’s all from His hand and all for His glory. Or, another way of saying it is that it’s not to be hoarded.

B) *Affluence*

That’s the first threat – time. The second has to do with money – the idolatrous love of affluence. Again, Schaeffer wrote ([READ How Should We Then Live quote](#)):

Affluence means an overwhelming and over-increasing prosperity – a life made up of things, things, and more things – a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.

1. The possibility of riches

Just as with the times of refreshing, of personal peace, we need to acknowledge there is the possibility of wealth, of riches, of affluence in this life. God is said to own the cattle on a thousand hills and He is pleased at times to share something of the herds with us.

2. The place of riches

There is the possibility of riches and we need to recognize that. But also their place – again, being grateful for it when it comes and giving it to the Lord. It’s all from His hand and all for His glory. Or, again, another way of saying it is that it’s not to be hoarded.

For it’s in the hoarding that the weeds find their strength. Listen to Jesus’ words as He tells and explains the “Parable of the Sower” ([READ Mark 4:3-9, 14-20](#)). “The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things.”

Illustration:

Another of C. S. Lewis’ works is worth considering here – The Screwtape Letters. The subtitle is telling: “A devil’s diabolical advice for the capturing of the human heart.”

Let me read you an excerpt from Letter 21 ([READ Screwtape Letters quote](#)):

Men are not angered by mere misfortune but by misfortune conceived as injury. And the sense of injury depends on the feeling that a legitimate claim has been denied. The more claims on life, therefore, that your patient can be induced to make, the more often he will feel injured and, as a result, ill-tempered. Now you will have noticed that nothing throws him into a passion so easily as to find a tract of time which he reckoned on having at his own disposal unexpectedly taken from him. It is the unexpected visitor (when he looked forward to a quite evening), or the friend’s talkative wife (turning up when he looked forward to a tête-à-tête with the friend), that throws him out of gear. Now he is not yet so uncharitable or slothful that these small demands on his courtesy are in themselves too much for it. They anger him because he regards his time as his own and feels that it is being stolen. You must therefore zealously guard in his mind the curious

assumption “My time is my own.” Let him have the feeling that he starts each day as the lawful possessor of twenty-four hours. Let him feel as a grievous tax that portion of this property which he has to make over to his employers, and as a generous donation that further portion which he allows to religious duties. But what he must never be permitted to doubt is that the total from which these deductions have been made was, in some mysterious sense, his own personal birthright.

Application:

Listen. When we find ourselves saying “It’s mine,” we need to recognize the lie for what it is and where it comes from. Nothing – not time or money – is ours. It’s all given to us as a special trust. This thing referred to as “stewardship” is real. The Master is away, if you will, and has entrusted the care of His estate to us as but stewards.

With what in mind? That we would hoard what He has given? That we would clutch, cling, and covet, to do with it as we please? Or that in every aspect of life, having experienced His goodness, we would express that goodness by doing good to others with the earnest longing in our hearts that, upon His return, we would hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That that would happen, that these noxious weeds in our hearts might be pulled at the roots, we need to look to the Spirit. For the love of personal peace and affluence runs deeper and entangles us far more than we know.

CONCLUSION:

(**READ Ephesians 2:10**) “Walking” suggests that these opportunities come not so much in spectacular or glamorous ways but in the common everyday stuff of life. And in our everyday lives, given that God is sovereign and purposeful, we then find not inconveniences, interruptions, or obstacles, but appointments – opportunities to do good.

Beginning where we are. First at home, with our families – doing the dishes, the diapers, and all the duties of shared life. Not falling into the trap of thinking that is our place we are free to “be ourselves.” Show me a place in this life where people are insisting on the freedom to “be themselves” and I’ll show you a place of interpersonal turmoil and misery. Not falling into the trap of thinking somehow it is more “spiritual” to put our energies elsewhere. Show me a place where people are committed to doing good everywhere but there and I’ll show you a place of shallow devotion and cowardly retreat. We are to do good to all, but most especially to members of our own family.

We are to keep watch for the opportunities to do good that the Lord is bringing into our path – first at home and then at work. God has given us certain abilities and also placed before us certain opportunities in which to serve Him by serving others. That may be in the very nature of the calling we have. It may be also in the people around us as well. That’s true for us all – even if the calling and the setting and the people seem small.

We are to begin where we are and then to move out from there. Continually asking ourselves the questions: How can I love? How can I serve? How can I give of myself – in time, thought, and effort? Where am I resisting? And why? Where do I need the Holy Spirit to enlarge my heart, enable my sight, and engage my limbs?

That’s what we were made for, what we need, and what the world is dying to see. May the Spirit work such into us and through us. Let’s go to Him now in prayer.

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