

INTRODUCTION

We're in a series about the Fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is the outward manifestation of the inner nature. When you see a banana hanging on a tree, you know it's a banana tree. When you see these nine traits in someone's personality, you know that they are a Jesus person. There's one fruit, and it has nine flavors. You can't pick and choose, and say, "I'll take joy, but I'll pass on patience." It's a package deal. In this message we're going to examine the fruit of goodness. The Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

We tend to lump people into categories of good people and bad people. I'm going to call out the names of some famous (and infamous) people. When I call their name, you say whether they are good or bad: Adolph Hitler? Ronald Reagan? Osama Ben Laden? Mother Teresa? Joseph Stalin? Coach Tom Landry? Bonnie and Clyde? Billy Graham? Chief Justice John Roberts? I thought that one would stump you. Goodness isn't as clear-cut as we may think.

What makes something or someone good? The first time we see the word in the Bible is in the very first chapter of Genesis. As God was creating the universe, there were six times He created a portion of the universe and He saw that it was good.

But when God looked at Adam all alone in the Garden of Eden He said, "It is NOT good for man to be alone." So He said, "Adam, have I got a deal for you! I'm going to give you a wife and she is going to be perfect. She will always look great, and every night she'll massage your neck and cook delicious meals. She will never nag or complain. In other words, she's going to be perfect." Adam said, "That sounds good, but what is it going to cost me?" God said, "It's going to cost you an arm and a leg." Adam thought for a minute and said, "What can you give me for only a rib?" Of course, it didn't happen that way. God put Adam asleep and took one of his ribs; he had a spare rib—and He made it into a prime rib—Eve. And when Adam saw her for the first time he said, "Whoa! Man!" So she was called woman. Seriously, after God created the male and the female the Bible says God saw that it was VERY good.

As we talk about goodness, I want to make three statements to help you understand the Spiritual fruit of goodness.

(1) I WANT TO BE GOOD!

It would be easy to pass this fruit over because the word good or goodness is rather weak in our vocabulary. We throw the word "good" around a lot. Here are some of the ways we use it: Good morning; Have a good day; good night; good job; good game; good luck; good luck with that; good move; good hair day; good to know; good to go; good looking; looking good; the good life; good clean fun; good idea; good to see you; it's all good; feeling good; looks good to me; that's not good; so far so good; it's too good to be true; a good time was had by all; you good with that? I'm good with that; you good and ready? Is that milk still good? I feel good; for good measure; good riddance; it does my heart good; your guess is as good as mine; it's for your own good; and if you got all that: good for you!

From the beginning of our lives our parents tell us to be good little boys and girls. When I was a teenager I went through a rebellious time, and I can recall my mother saying when I left to hang out with my buddies, "Now be good, and have fun." At that time, I thought that being good and having fun were two totally opposite things!

Wanting to be good is a worthy goal. George Orwell wrote: "On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all of the time." That quote reminds me of the mischievous little boy who prayed, "Dear God, make me good; but not too good. Just good enough that I don't get a spanking."

Definition: Goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason

Let's start with a definition of goodness. I believe goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason. You can do the right thing, but if you're not doing it for the right reason, that's not goodness. For instance, Jesus warned against the Pharisees who gave their alms before men so they could be seen. They would blow a horn and make a show out of giving money to a beggar. The reason they did it was so their peers would see how "good" they were. That's not goodness; it's pure selfishness. Jesus said when you do your good deeds, don't blow a horn. If you see a beggar, give them money out of a sense of compassion, NOT so your reputation will be enhanced.

Going to church is a really good thing to do, but make sure you're doing it for the right reason. Are you here to meet and worship God? Or are you here because you think it will increase your business contacts or that people will see you and think how holy you are? Goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason.

The Bible really is the Good Book, because it has a lot to say about what is good. The Greek word for "good" is *agathos* and it appears over 250 times in the New Testament. The Hebrew word for "good" is *tov* and it appears over 350 times in the Old Testament. Whenever we visit Israel we use this word because the way you say "good morning" in Hebrew is "Boker Tov" which is literally "morning good." Some Texans who travel with us have a hard time remembering that so I tell them instead of saying, "Boker Tov" just say, "Broken Toe." It must seem strange to other tourists when our group gathers for breakfast and everyone is saying, "Broken toe!"

We don't have to wonder what "good" is because God gives us three guidelines for goodness in His good Book. The prophet Micah wrote, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

To act justly means you treat all people with fairness, honesty, and integrity. Some say "honesty is the best policy" but for a follower of Jesus, honesty is the only policy. Loving mercy means showing mercy to those who most need your mercy. The word "mercy" in Hebrew literally means "unexpected kindness." Last week I mentioned that true kindness isn't being kind to someone who can repay your kindness—that's just swapping. True kindness is shown to those

who have no way of repaying your kindness. Do you love mercy? Justice and mercy both direct us how to live in relationship with each other. But God saved the best for last. The "best good" you can do is walk humbly with God. You can't approach God with arrogance or by making demands that He treat you a certain way. When subjects approached a king, they had to bow down as they approached the throne looking at the floor. If the king directed them to stand and speak they could look into his eyes. That's the way we approach the King of Kings, humbly with our heads bowed. But there's a great promise that says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:6). And we're also told that because of the blood of Jesus, we may boldly approach the throne of grace.

So based on God's three guidelines for goodness, how good are you? If you think you're pretty good, then pay close attention to this next truth.

(2) BUT I CAN'T BE GOOD!

We think we're good because we compare ourselves to others. We look at our neighbors, our co-workers, and our friends and if we're a little better than them, we feel we're pretty good people. You're using the wrong standard if you compare yourself to other people. God's standard is perfect goodness and complete holiness. If you use the wrong standard, then all comparison is useless.

I heard a funny story about two brothers who lived in a little community. We'll call them Bob and Old Tom. Bob and Old Tom were the meanest, most dishonest, conniving men in the county. They were gamblers, moonshiners, and robbers. They never darkened the door of the local church. Old Tom died one day and Bob asked the Baptist preacher to preach his funeral. The pastor agreed. Bob said, "Preacher, during the funeral I want you to say, 'Old Tom was a saint.'" The preacher said, "Bob, I can't do that. Everybody in town knows what a mean scoundrel your brother was." Bob said, "Please preacher. I'll donate \$10,000 to your building program if you'll just say, 'Old Tom was a saint.'"

The church was packed for the funeral because everyone wanted to see what the preacher would say about Old Tom. He said, "Folks, you know that Old Tom was a mean-spirited, wicked man who never had time for God. You know that Tom was a drunkard and a liar. He was as mean as a snake." Then the preacher pointed to Bob and said, "But compared to his brother Bob, Old Tom was a saint!"

Some people read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and try to live by those principles, and if they do, they think they're pretty good. After Jesus gave all the beatitudes, He talked about murder, divorce, adultery, and revenge, and loving your enemies. Some people use those as a checklist to check off their obedience in those areas, and if they check all the boxes they think, "I'm pretty good." But don't miss what Jesus said next. He said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Some people can be good most of the time and most people can be good some of the time. But no person can be perfectly good all of the time.

So before you start talking about how good you are, look at these words from the Bible,

"There is no one who does good, not even one...I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 3:12; 7:18) Can you relate to that? I think all of us desire to be good and do good; but we have this anchor called a sinful nature that keeps dragging us back down. You'll never really find true forgiveness and goodness until you ADMIT you don't have the capacity to be good. The Bible says this about my heart and your heart, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV) The Bible says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." (Psalm 58:3 NKJV)

My experiences as a parent and a grandparent only confirm that children aren't born inherently good—they are born with a full-grown selfish, sinful nature. They don't have to be taught to steal; they have to be taught NOT to steal. They don't have to be taught to lie, they have to be taught NOT to steal.

But many of us are in denial about this truth in our lives and in the lives of people in our family. Years ago I listened to a heartbroken mother cry her eyes out because her son had been arrested the third time for dealing drugs and he was heading to prison. To this day, I can still hear her say, "But deep down inside, Johnny is a good boy." No. Deep down inside, Johnny is like the rest of us. He's a bad boy. I've heard abused wives excuse their husband's violent behavior by saying something like, "Even though he beats me, he's a good man at heart." No ma'am. He's a bad man at heart. All of us are. We want to be good, but we can't be good on our own. So the solution is found in this third truth:

(3) JESUS: HE'S NOT ONLY GOOD FOR ME; HE'S GOOD IN ME!

In Mark 10 a rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Before Jesus answered his question, He posed His own question. He asked, "Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone." Jesus didn't say, "Don't call me good." He accepted the title and said, "Only God is good." Jesus is good because He is God. And because He's God, He's good.

One of the first prayers we teach our children contains two powerful statements about the nature and character of God. We pray, "God is great; God is good; Let us thank Him for our food." I have read that some pro-environmental parents have changed it to "God is great. God is green. Let us keep His world so clean." I like the original one better! God IS great; and He IS good. Both of those affirmations are bedrock truths about our Heavenly Father.

The Bible affirms many times that God is good all the time...And all the time God is good.

Psalms 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." Psalm 86:5 says, "You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you." We read in Psalm 106:1, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."

When you came to Christ, Jesus took up residence in your heart through the person of the Holy Spirit. You have access to this divine goodness. But it's not your goodness; it's the goodness of Jesus shining out through you. Let me illustrate this from an important event in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 33:18 Moses is on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. He makes a strange request of God. He says, "Show me your glory." In other words, Moses said, "I want to see you face-to-face, God." God said, "If you looked at my face, you would die on the spot. But here's what I will do. I will let my goodness pass in front of you." Moses asked to see God's glory, and God said His glory is best seen in His goodness. And when the goodness of God passed by Moses, he was hidden in a cleft of a rock. But even a glimpse of the afterglow of God's goodness made the face of Moses shine and radiate. Moses wasn't aware his face was shining until he went back down to the people and they said, "Moses, your face is shining!" Moses had to wear a veil to cover the radiance that came from seeing God's electrifying goodness.

In the New Testament, Paul compares us to Moses. He points out that Moses' radiance faded, but he kept wearing the veil so the people would think he was still shining. But we don't have to wear a veil. He writes, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18) Just as the radiance of God was literally shining out from Moses, the power and goodness of Jesus can shine out through our lives. We don't have to wear a veil. Instead God wants us to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

Walking in the Spirit is a daily, continual experience of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Jesus' personality was full of goodness, and when I allow his personality to fill my personality, goodness will be seen in me.

At funerals you often hear preachers say, "He was a good man." Or "She was a good woman." What is the key to being recognized as a good man or a good woman? We find in a description of one of the early Christians named Barnabas. The Bible says, "He (Barnabas) was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 11:24) Now, those aren't two separate descriptions, they are connected. Barnabas was a good man BECAUSE he was full of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus was crucified, He promised the disciples He would send them the Holy Spirit to take His place. Jesus said, "I have been with you, but He will be in you." Before Pentecost, the disciples could only watch Jesus and try to imitate His personality and actions; how frustrating that must have been. But after the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, they were filled the Spirit of Jesus. No longer did they have to try imitate Jesus. His personality was dwelling within them. And we have the same resource today. If you will concentrate on allowing the Holy Spirit of Jesus fill you every day, then you will be a good boy, or a good girl, or a good man, or a good woman.

God's plan for your life is that you will perform good works. The Bible says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) The Bible says in Ephesians 2 that we are saved by grace through faith, unto good works. Don't confuse those prepositions. Good works doesn't save us; we are saved UNTO good works, which means our salvation ushers us into a life of goodness. Good works

can never EARN salvation, but they are EVIDENCE of our salvation. If you are a Christian, you will be doing good things—but you can't boast about them because it's not your goodness—it's God's goodness.

Good works are not the root of salvation; they are the fruit of salvation. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men," meaning doing good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." How can you know if you are truly saved and there is good evidence in your life of your salvation? When people look at you and the goodness you exhibit—are they giving you the credit? Are they giving you the glory? Or are they turning and giving the glory and credit to God? That is the best example of the kind of good works this is talking about.

CONCLUSION

We lost one of the "good guys" this week with the death of Andy Griffith. Some of you will associate him with Matlock, but he will forever be Sheriff Andy Taylor from Mayberry to me. By the way, in 2006, a man running for sheriff in Wisconsin had his name legally changed to "Andy Griffith" thinking it would help him get elected. It didn't work. In the show, Sheriff Andy Taylor was a good guy. He was a single dad who attended church on Sunday; and even sang in the choir. He demonstrated amazing patience with Deputy Barney Fife.

In real life, Andy was a committed follower of Jesus. His wife, Cindi, posted this statement after his death: "Andy was a person of incredibly strong Christian faith and was prepared for the day he would be called Home to his Lord. I cannot imagine life without Andy, but I take comfort and strength in God's Grace and in the knowledge that Andy is at peace and with God."

My very favorite episode was when Barney and Andy had to eat Aunt Bea's homemade pickles even though they tasted like kerosene. But there was another episode that taught a great lesson about goodness. It was called, "The Cave Rescue." The people of Mayberry were laughing at Barney Fife, because early that morning he tried to arrest the bank president who was unlocking the door to his own bank.

In order to make him forget the humiliation, Andy planned a picnic for Barney, Thelma Lou, and Helen. During the picnic, Andy and Helen wandered off to explore Lost Lovers Cave. There was a cave-in and Barney realized Andy and Helen were trapped. So he organized a massive rescue effort. Meanwhile, Andy and Helen find a way out of the cave through another opening. They hitchhiked back into town to clean up at Helen's house. While listening to the radio, they heard a news bulletin about two people trapped in a cave near Mayberry and how Deputy Barney Fife had organized a massive rescue effort. Helen picked up the phone to call the courthouse and tell them to call off the search. But Andy stopped her. He said if the townspeople knew they were safe, Barney would become even more of a joke to the citizens. What they did next illustrates goodness. In order to prevent further ridicule directed at Barney, they put dirty clothes back on and rushed back into the cave through the back entrance. They rubbed dirt on their faces and sat down as if they were exhausted just a few moments before the rescue party broke through. They let themselves be rescued. As a result, Barney becomes the hero because of Andy's sense of goodness. Goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason.

Final thought: Goodness won't get you into heaven; only Jesus can!

Ask the average person on the street how to go to heaven and the #1 answer is still: "Be good. Do good." But as you can see, we don't have the human capacity for perfect goodness. We need to depend on the goodness and grace of someone better than us—and that Someone is Jesus. Here's how you can go to heaven. "For God so loved the world (substitute your name), that He gave His one-and-only Son; that whoever (your name) believes in Him, will not perish, but will have eternal life." The only good thing you need to do to spend eternity in heaven is to simple BELIEVE that Jesus is the only One who can take you there, and then trust Him to do it. And if you do that I just want to say, "Good for you!"

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes