

WITH GOODNESS
Live Fully
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We are continuing a summer series from Galatians 5:22-23 regarding “Living Fully with the Fruit of the Spirit.” “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness...” That’s where we are today – the sixth fruit of the Spirit is goodness.

“Good” seems to be a rather weak word in today’s vernacular. It has been supplanted by “totally awesome” and “super” and “terrific.” So “good” has kind of come to mean average even in church circles. We speak of a *good* service, a *good* sermon, a *good* fellowship. It wasn’t bad. It wasn’t particularly great. It was more than mediocre. It was good.

Perhaps we don’t realize how vital goodness is until it is absent and then we miss it. Today our culture is replete with illustrations of the lack of goodness. So numerous I won’t trouble mentioning them. Looking for goodness we turn to the church and sometimes even there our hearts break with scandal.

It’s one thing to look at the deplorable wrongs in society at large and in the church even. But what about ourselves? What about your life and my life? Is goodness present in you? Is goodness present in me?

What is goodness? Who has it? How can I obtain it?

In a theological sense only God is good. Jesus is approached by a young ruler one day. The man says to him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus stops him and says, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Jehovah Witnesses of course mistakenly take this to be a scripture where Jesus is denying his divinity. But what Jesus is really saying to the young man is simply this: “You come to me with a trite expression ‘Good teacher.’ Do you really know what you’re saying? Do you really know what good is? God alone is good.”

Jesus is not denying his divinity in that comment just causing the man to reflect. Good is the absence of flaw, the absence of defect and the positive presence of complete wholesomeness. In that sense therefore only God is good. Only God can be good.

That’s why consistent with his nature of goodness he gives good gifts to his children – Matthew 7:11. Consistent with his nature of goodness he has a good will for our lives – Romans 12:2. Philippians 1:6 “He has begun a good work in us which will come to completion.” And in Roman 8:28 he assures us that he is working everything out for the good in us. The goodness of God produces his good gifts, his good will, his good work, his good paths.

The Spirit who is himself God is at work developing the moral character of God in us. That’s simply the meaning of the fruit of the Spirit. And goodness is this essential attribute of God.

How does the Spirit bring about goodness in our life? I’d like to suggest five ways. These aren’t exclusive. They’re not the only ways the Spirit brings goodness. But as I search the scripture it’s very obvious that at least these five ways are at work whereby the Spirit is developing goodness in us.

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The first way is he gives us a new nature.

The Spirit breathed the life and the personality of Jesus into us. He birthed Christ in us. It's therefore as Paul says, "No longer I who live but Christ lives in me." Goodness cannot be gained in your life simply by practice, simply by me handing you a prescription saying do these things and you'll become good. Goodness is God's personality in Jesus Christ now living in us, made possible first to us only through the new birth. You will never be good in God's eyes unless first you become good by Christ living in you.

You and I need the living presence of Jesus if goodness is going to happen in us. Christ must be formed in us.

That as the base – having a new nature – a second way the Spirit brings goodness to us is that he develops in us a servant mentality.

It's a tremendous paradox and contrast that on the one hand we are the sons and daughters of God. But immediately God turns around and tells us to be servants. It's great that it's not in reverse order. It's great that we're not servants first and then work real hard to someday be good so God can put us in his family. But he starts out with sonship and daughtership and moves from that into service.

When we know our family connections, know who we really are, we then have the freedom to become persons who serve.

Dorcas in Acts 9 is such a person. Of the three times the word "good" occurs in Acts the first time it occurs in reference to Dorcas. She was a person with goodness. Why? Because she cared for the poor. She made robes and clothes for widows. She as a goodness person lived for other people. She had a servant mentality.

If you're looking to find a need, some practical need, you'll have a place of ministry. And goodness is a part of that servant mentality.

The goodness person has Philippians 2:5-11 locked deep in their nature. "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who although he was in the form of God thought not equality with God a thing to be grasped but humbled himself [emptied himself] and took upon himself the form of a servant." Jesus' attitude involved assuming the attitude of slave. He sought not to get but to give. Goodness comes from persons who learn to practice servanthood.

A third way the Spirit uses to bring forth goodness in our lives is to sensitize our hearts to God and to his will.

To make us sensitive in our inner being to God himself. The goodness person brings forth Jesus as the good that is stored up in him. Have you ever been so hurt and devastated by another person or event that your normal tendency is to react in retaliation? You'll find that as the Spirit lives in you, he gives you a different way to respond in times like that. I've found that when I respond well when I am hurt, when I respond in the way the Lord tells me to respond, it is

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because the Spirit has made my heart sensitive to God's will for my life. Sensitive to how Jesus himself would react under the same event.

I'd not pretend to tell you that I always handle those situations perfectly. But when I handle them well it is because the Spirit is putting that characteristic response of Jesus in my life causing my heart to be sensitive to the voice of God.

People with good hearts have good consciousness. Paul was such a person. The second time where "good" occurs in the book of Acts has to do where Paul in Acts 23:1 and 24:16 says he has a good conscious. I'm struck with that statement because I've sometimes wondered how Paul could live with so much pressure in the last number of years of his life when he had on his back his unjust imprisonment. He had on his shoulders the fact that many of his fellow believers had turned against him. He also had anxiety and concern for the believers he'd helped to birth into the kingdom. He had physical deprivation. All of these things were upon him yet if you look at what he says in the book of Acts, as you read his prison epistles, you find him talking a number of times about having a good conscious. "I have lived before God with a clear conscious." He says, "I have striven always to keep my conscious clear before God and before man."

It seems to me when your inner heart is clean and clear – when it's cleansed – that when great pressure occurs against you, there is no inner fault line. No inner crack that breaks and segments you into a number of segmented pieces. A clear conscious guarantees the integrity of the wholeness within which can take the tremendous pressure that is coming from outside.

We look into our heart, our conscious, our inner decision making abilities and we ask, Am I doing anything that is wrong? Is there anything in my life that is out of God's will for me? Is there any secret sin, which poisons the inner well of my being? The Holy Spirit seeks to move goodness into my life by causing me to have a right conscious and a functioning conscious. A right conscious is one that is built from God's word and not simply by human laws. A functioning conscious is one that impels me to correct the law – to repent, to seek God's forgiveness, restoration and cleansing. To want to live in a way that is truly pleasing to God.

A listening heart.

A fourth way the Spirit develops goodness within us is to bring about a positive and encouraging attitude in our life.

Barnabus was such a person – the third use of the word "good" in the book of Acts occurs in relationship to him. Acts 11:24. "He was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith." Barnabus' goodness is seen in his encouraging nature. Some people dwell on the negative side. They see the problems rather than the possibilities. You ask them what's going on and they'll tell you what's wrong rather than what's right. But not Barnabus.

I'm so thankful the early church had the functioning of wisdom. What was happening that employed Barnabus probably could not have gone on had the personality type other than Barnabus. A new work of the Lord was beginning at Antioch. It was happening among non-Jewish persons. Gentile believers were coming to faith and in that process they were not keeping Jewish culture, Jewish dietary laws, dress laws. Certain other kinds of things that were part of

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the Jewish way of life. Had the Jerusalem church sent some of its more legalistically minded types to Antioch they would have said, "What's going on is awful!" They would have not seen the grace of God. They would have only seen the external trappings of a cultural manifestation that was different than their own. But they chose Barnabus who was a good man, a man with an encouraging attitude. When he went and saw what was happening the scripture says, "He was glad." And he encouraged the believers in that place.

He was a good man. He didn't dwell on the minors. He was able to set aside and distinguish non-essential matters from essential matters. He did not bring a judgmental attitude of criticism and suspicion upon people whose ways were different than his own. He was an encourager.

God wants us to be encouraging people. We can wreck Eden all on our own just with a negative attitude.

How do you see life? Filled with complaints? Filled with an encouraging attitude toward people? Who around you needs to be built up? Goodness people are persons who come with encouragement.

A vital part of Christian goodness comes a fifth way as the Spirit brings us into a calm harbor of assurance in the midst of life's storms. Romans 8:28 tells us that God is working everything for the good. This statement can only apply only if there were some things happening to us that didn't appear to be good. That's why we need the statement. God is working for the good.

It's so very difficult to affirm that truth in tough times. When everything is coming unglued around us it is tough to believe and to confess that God will work it for the good. But that quiet calm assurance is a way the Spirit has of developing goodness in us though that having been tested and tried the true nature of our character, our metal is seen. Tough times, times of stress.

Lots of people in this church are going through stress. The Spirit is able to bring calm assurance. God is telling us in the scripture that he is working for the good.

Never attempt to bear more than one kind of trouble at once. Some people all three kinds. All the trouble they've had, all the trouble they have now, all the trouble they expect to have. God helps us to only carry the load in our sack that is from today's troubles and not pick up the boulders that represent tomorrows. The Spirit is speaking peace to us in every storm reminding us that this too shall pass. The Christ life is being reproduced in us. His resurrection followed his crucifixion. So shall life and resurrection follow our losses. God is developing goodness in us in times of stress. Goodness. David in Psalm 23 said it best "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Let the fruit of the Spirit grow up in you. Let the Spirit bring about in you a new nature, a servant mentality, a listening and obedient heart, an encouraging attitude and a calm assurance.

Our Father, we thank you for your presence and the blessed Holy Spirit who has come to create in our life the person of Jesus our Lord. All of us Lord have fallen short of your goodness. There is no one righteous or good, no not one. But Lord, in your great mercy you have come to us given us your own divine life. I pray for persons here in whom your goodness has not yet begun to dwell because they have not yet exceeded to the Spirit's

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invitation to receive Jesus. While we're praying today in the midst of this service we pray that their heart would become open to you and they'd say, Lord Jesus Christ do come into my life. Do enter and be Lord in my life. And Lord as Christian people, help us to have a product that is as good as the name we bear. That our real character and life shall be as real as the testimony from our lips. Develop your goodness in us. In each of these areas where the Spirit is bridging the life of Jesus in us through encouragement, through servanthood, through a listening heart, through calm assurance. Through each of these areas, Lord, bring forth fruit that pleases you. We ask in your name. Amen.