

On a flight to Boston, a pilot got onto his microphone and said to the passengers, "I have some good news, we are approaching Boston now." He paused a moment then said, "The bad news is, we aren't cleared for landing for another hour, so we're circling around the city." Good news bad news jokes fill our world, partly I think due to how we sense the word good.

Good is word that has a similar problem as does the word love. We love our family, we love apple pie, and we love a beautiful sunset, but each of these "loves" are entirely different. It's the same with the word "good." We say, "I had a good meal," or "I met a good person," or "We had a good cry." They are different, aren't they?

So to understand today's Fruit of the Spirit concept which is goodness, let's look at how the word "good" is used in the Bible. For instance, we read in the opening chapters of Genesis that God created the heavens and the earth. Then God created life in the sea & in the air & on the ground. After each creation, God looked at it and said, "It is good." What does that mean? Well, I guess it means that when God looked at what He had done, He was pleased with it. So maybe we could say, "*Goodness means something that pleases God.*" Or maybe we could go a step further and say, "*A good person is a person who is pleasing to God.*"

The Bible also tells us that "*God is good.*" Now what makes God good? Well, God is pure, God is holy; God is forgiving; God is generous. So therefore, if we're good people, then all those characteristics would be true of us, too.

Pastor Melvin Newland humorously wrote about this one time saying, 'Sometimes, when someone bids me "goodbye, they'll add, "Now be good," and I respond, "Hey, in my profession it's hard to be anything else." Think about that. You expect me to be good because I'm your preacher, don't you? After all, everybody knows that preachers are paid to be good. You all are good for nothing, but I'm paid to be good.'

Well, without going any further on that, let me give you another definition of goodness. It is a pretty simple definition. But if you remember it, I think you'll begin to see the value of goodness. "Goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason."

Now I suppose we could do the right thing for the wrong reason. I suppose that we could even do the wrong thing for the right reason. But "goodness is doing the right thing for the right reason. And the way I come to that conclusion is by looking at the examples as Jesus sets forth for us in His teachings. There are many but let me use just a few today to illustrate this fruit of the spirit called goodness.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about a good tree and a bad tree. He says that the "good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit." Matthew 7:17. And He says, "The good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and the bad tree cannot produce good fruit." Then He says, "If the good tree does not produce good fruit, we cut it down and throw it into the fire." He ends it by saying, "By their fruit you will recognize them."

So the question is, "What kind of fruit are we producing?" And as you look at the fruit, do you see goodness? Is it there? Well, here are 3 ways to display goodness.

First, we can display God's goodness by being forgiving. When I think of people whom I have known who I consider Christians whose lives seemed filled with goodness, I realize that they lived with a sense of love, a sense of living right, but more than anything I realize they lived with this sense of forgiving others and living with compassion for others and what they may be going through. I think Jesus teaches about this from the text prior to the good tree bad tree parable.

Listen to Matthew 6:14-15, "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Now those are frightening verses, because they say that if I'm not forgiving, then I cannot be forgiven. If I go around holding grudges, then I won't receive the forgiveness of God because it is blocked by my unforgiving spirit.

Again returning to my thoughts about Christian servants who lived with goodness as a Fruit of the Spirit I saw in their life, they had this air about them that made you feel loved and sensed them hoping and striving for the good in others that was not always easy to see. Their goodness I saw as they accepted people who did not necessarily deserve good things but got to experience love from them, probably because they understood God being this loving with them in their frailties. So the first step is to do the right thing for the right reason and become forgiving as God is forgiving.

The second way we display goodness is through graciousness. I know it is similar to being forgiving, but has the added dimension of a giving a person another new chance. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that, when we are in Christ, we're a new creation. Now why are we new? We're new because God has changed us. God graciously forgives us and makes us new and lets us have a renewed life. Thus with our hearts changed, we can live doing acts of grace and care. Or as some people have put it in cliché form over many years, we can do things out of the goodness of our hearts.

When researching this Fruit of the Spirit, I found a story by Rachel Kingman.

She writes, 'I was resolved to do an act of goodness every day for a month as a new discipline of this Fruit of the Spirit. I did well at first, but then my resolve waned and I began to feel guilty over this. So when I got on a plane to go home to do a Sunday night speaking engagement at my parents' church, the church of my youth, I ended up sitting on the plane beside an elderly woman. She told me how she needed a ride home after they got to the small airport they were flying to. I told her I had rented a car and would be glad to take her home. I knew I had an hour to spare from the time the plane landed til I was expected at the church.

But guess what? The plane arrived late. I sat there thinking, "I can just hear the people at church now. 'Yes, She is always late isn't she? I thought she'd grow out of that lateness in time.'" I debated about changing my offer to the woman, but decided to stick to my resolve to do a good deed. I remember, laughing to myself, no good deed goes unpunished. So I drove her home. On the way, the conversation turned toward God, with the woman re-committing her life to God. Afterward I realized: Whose reaction is more important: God's or the humans in that church? God's reaction is more important and being gracious is God's way of blessing others.'

Any of us who lives with graciousness does whatever we can to reach out and help. Of course living with such goodness and graciousness in your life, may mean others will never know about your actions. You've performed good acts and no one ever knew that you did them, right? You may never hear a "thank you." But here's the promise: When you are gracious and good to others, one day you will hear the voice of God Himself, "*Well done, good & faithful servant.*" And that's all the recognition we need.

Finally, our third way we express goodness is through generosity. 1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us." It is so much love that we cannot even receive it all. God is a giving God. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." And He gives and He gives and He gives some more.

So in turn, then, if we are to participate in the goodness of God we need to become generous, too. But that's a touchy subject, isn't it? Shouldn't we give cheerfully? Shouldn't we give because God has given us so much? Shouldn't we give just because we love to give to God?

Someone has said, "You never look more like God than when you are giving." Don't give out of guilt. Don't give out of obligation. Give because it's the right thing to do.

Well, after having said all that about goodness, let me say this in closing, "Living a life with the Fruit of the Spirit goodness is rewarding, remember goodness will never get us into heaven." We will never be good enough to get into heaven. It's only through the mercy and grace of God that we can be saved. And that is also an important dimension of goodness in our time with God.