

Pastor Jim Lloyd

Date: November 4, 2018

Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 7. Goodness: The Journey To Goodness

Text: Ephesians 4:8-10

Today we continue our series on the Fruit of the Spirit. In recent messages I have talked about how some of these qualities can be described as feelings, or emotions. Joy is a feeling. Inner peace is a feeling. Patience could be described as a feeling. However, today we'll look at one aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit that has NOTHING whatsoever to do with feelings. I'm talking about GOODNESS. What I trust you will leave today knowing is that goodness is NOT a feeling. As it relates to the fruit of the Spirit, it is an ACTION, and nothing less.

As a toddler, I think I remember my dad saying, as he dropped me off at the babysitters, "Now you BE GOOD, hear?" When he left me at my toddler Sunday School class, it was – "You BE GOOD." In JR & SR High, when I was going out for the evening, it was – "YOU BE GOOD!" I think he said that to me when they left me at college – BIBLE COLLEGE, no less. It even seems he said it to me as I left for my honeymoon – "YOU BE GOOD!" Much of my life I've heard – "YOU BE GOOD!" I suppose many of you have said to your kids – "BE GOOD!" I thought, how am I to improve upon a message that many have likely heard their whole life. I get a kick out of the parent who sits their kid on a chair and tells them to BE GOOD. In doing that, what I think they mean is – Don't move or don't do anything bad. Well, the word for today is certainly more than that. God's Word today is more than BE good – it is DO GOOD!

In the New Testament we see Paul saying to believers: I want you to DO good. Paul said in Galatians 6:9, "*Let us not become weary in doing good.*" And he said in 2 Corinthians 9:8, "*You will abound in every good work.*" In Colossians 1:10, Paul prays that the believers will continue "*...bearing fruit in every good work.*" In 2 Timothy 3:17, Paul says that through the Word of God we are "*...equipped for every good work.*" GOD's plan for His people, who are growing in spiritual maturity, and who are walking in the fullness of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, is that they – we – will DO GOOD at every opportunity. We hear the same from Jesus, in the gospels, as a warning for those who consider themselves religious. He said... "*By their FRUIT you will recognize them*" (Matthew 7:16). He also said – and these are words we should take to heart – "*Every tree that does not BEAR GOOD FRUIT will be cut down...*" (Luke 3:9).

Today's message, then, is an exhortation for each one of us to take seriously the gospel call to DO GOOD, with an emphasis on DO. The problem is that anyone who sets out to do good runs head first into a big obstacle. What is that obstacle? We're NOT good. None of us. Not me – Not you – Not anyone! When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he said to him, "*There is none good but God*" (Mark 10:18). In the Old Testament, David said, "*There is no one who does good, not even one*" (Psalm 53:3). Then, in Romans 3:10, Paul repeated what David said, "*There is no one righteous, not even one.*" On the one hand, we have the Bible telling us NO ONE does good because no one IS good. On the other hand, God tells us through His Word: I want YOU to DO GOOD. This is a tall order. Someone said it's kind of like telling a dog you want him to sing opera. You might get him onstage. You might get some noise out of him, BUT he's not going to hit the high notes. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. You're all too aware that when the Bible says there is none righteous, it is talking about you. Some wonder if it's humanly possible. Today, we'll take a journey into goodness – YOUR goodness. Paul said that the fruit of the Spirit INCLUDES goodness. So how do we get there? Today we'll talk about three essential distinctions we need to make in order to fully cultivate this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

1. There IS a difference between BEING and DOING. Another way to say it: You need to understand the difference between being made righteous, and DOING works of righteousness. When the Bible tells us to DO good, we need to remember that the command comes with a non-negotiable clause. You CANNOT "do-good" your way into heaven. You CANNOT "do-good" your way into a right relationship with God. You CAN'T even "do-good" your way into being a "good person." It will never be enough. The prophet Isaiah said, "*All our righteous acts (our efforts to do right) are like filthy rags...*" (64:6). Trying to earn your own salvation is like a dog singing opera. He can't form the words and he can't hit the notes. This is why Jesus came into the world to die for our sins. While He was on the cross, the sinless Savior bore the sin of the world. Every sin was placed upon Him, and He paid the price for it, like a sacrificial lamb. But His work doesn't end there. Not only was your sin transferred to Jesus on the cross, but when you received Him as your Lord and Savior, His righteousness was transferred to you! The theological word for it is IMPUTED righteousness. Paul said, "*God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took on your sin. You took on His righteousness, and YOU ARE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD – NOT by your own hard work,

BUT by His mercy. This is exactly what today's text tells us – *“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.”* The Bible never says – “do good so that GOD WILL LOVE YOU,” or “do good so that YOU CAN EARN YOUR SALVATION,” or “do good so that YOU WILL BECOME A GOOD PERSON.” That kind of goodness doesn't exist. The GOODNESS of the Fruit of the Spirit comes by receiving the gift of righteousness through God's Son, Jesus Christ. If you've never made that decision, TODAY IS THE DAY! Continuing this journey into goodness, we need to remember that the Christian life DOES NOT END with being made positionally righteous through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our Christian life CONTINUES as we become – BY OUR ACTIONS – more and more like Jesus. Let's look at the next verse in today's text. Paul says we are saved by grace, not by works, and then he 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). This was God's plan all along for each of us. You do good, not in order to earn God's favor, but you do good in response to the favor you were freely given. That's why I say that when Paul tells us that goodness is a fruit of the Spirit, he's NOT talking about our positional right standing with God through Jesus Christ. That matter has already been settled. He's talking about our daily behavior.

2. GOODNESS is NEVER LESS than AN ACTION. Sometimes we have a tendency to judge ourselves by our best INTENTIONS: I really MEANT to do good. I really WANTED to help...but I just never got around to doing it. And sometimes I think we fool ourselves into thinking that our good intentions are enough. When it comes to cultivating the fruit of goodness, good intentions BY THEMSELVES are NEVER good enough. It comes down to WHAT YOU DO. In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus told a parable about a man who had two sons. He told his first son to go work in the vineyard, and the son said, “I won't do it.” He then told his other son to go work in the vineyard, and the other son said, “I will do it.” However, as it turned out, the son who said he would work in the vineyard never actually went to work in the vineyard. The first son, who said I will not work in the vineyard, changed his mind and went to work. Jesus then asked, *“Which of these two did what his father wanted?”* (vs. 31). The answer is obvious, isn't it? When it comes to working in the vineyard, good intentions may be good, but they're not good enough. Ultimately it comes down to WHAT YOU DO. Feeling compassion is ONE thing; but DOING compassion is what counts. The DESIRE to do good and the PROMISE to do good by themselves aren't enough. It comes down to what you ACTUALLY do. When a screenwriter or playwright is developing a character, they must keep in mind a simple principle: A character or one's character is determined by what he or she DOES. In the movies, that's how we separate the good guys from the bad guys, because you can only see the character's actions. The GOOD guy does GOOD. The BAD guy does BAD. The character may grow and change throughout the story – and that change will be reflected in a change of behavior, because goodness is NEVER LESS THAN AN ACTION. Here's what I'm saying: If you've been taking refuge in your good intentions, thinking “at least I mean well,” it's time to put your best intentions to work. Maybe some of us are like the first son who said, “I will not work in the vineyard.” If so, it's time to change your mind and GET TO WORK. I suspect however, that more might be like the second son. We had every intention of doing the good we know our Father has asked us to do, but we just never quite got around to doing it. It's time to back up our best INTENTIONS with our VERY BEST EFFORTS.

3. GOODNESS is cultivated on a case-by-case basis. It's not a one-and-done kind of thing: “I did this good work and... I helped that person over there and... I've built up a credit balance and I can coast for a while.” When it comes to cultivating goodness, we start every day with a clean slate, with a zero balance, and it is up to us to build up the account – EVERY DAY! In Galatians 6:10, Paul said, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* At every opportunity, he says. And, if you're paying attention, you'll hear the opportunity to do good pounding on your door throughout the day. The best way to cultivate goodness, then, is to develop a THIS TIME mentality. As in: THIS TIME I will do the RIGHT thing. THIS TIME I will do the GOOD thing. I may be tempted to defer my obedience to another day, but THIS TIME I will do the right thing. I don't have the best track record in all the world, and I've certainly blown it plenty of times in the past, but THIS TIME I will do the GOOD thing. Rather than wait to help this person in need, I will do it NOW – THIS TIME! Rather than merely patting myself on my back for having good intentions deep down, I will take my good intentions to the next level and give it my BEST effort, THIS TIME. Goodness is cultivated on a day-by-day, case-by-case basis. And it comes down to you saying: “As I have opportunity, THIS TIME, I will do good.” DOING GOOD becomes our way of life. In one of the Apostle Peter's sermons in the book of Acts, he summarized the life of Jesus like this: *“He went around doing good”* (10:38). What an amazing way to summarize a life – to go around doing good. You MAY or MAY NOT be able to raise the dead and heal the sick, but you CAN go through life doing good AS YOU HAVE OPPORTUNITY.

Conclusion: Now, as a final thought, here's why this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit – GOODNESS – is so very important. As I said in my opening statements, this has NOTHING to do with your feelings. It all comes down to your ACTIONS. There

may be days when you don't FEEL like a good person. The devil may be reminding you of – every bad thing you've ever done, every stupid thing you've ever said, every empty promise you've ever made, every good intention you've abandoned, and you may be thinking, "I don't feel any goodness at all within me. I feel like the worst person in the world." In this context, for the purpose of cultivating this quality of the Spirit's fruit, it DOES NOT MATTER HOW YOU FEEL. It only matters WHAT YOU DO! If you buy groceries for a single mother who's staring at empty cupboards, it doesn't matter how you FEEL about yourself on that particular day. The good you DO is tangible. If you visit someone who is lonely, and speak words of encouragement to someone on the edge of despair, it doesn't matter how you FEEL about yourself in that given moment. The good you DO is tangible. If you drag yourself out of bed in the morning and open your Bible and ask God to give you direction for the day, it doesn't matter how unworthy you FEEL in that given moment. The good you do is tangible. There are times – a high percentage of the time, I would say – when the Christian life is an abundance of GOOD feelings: joy, peace, contentment, satisfaction, love and a strong connection to others...AND THEN...there are times when we DON'T FEEL GOOD AT ALL...about ourselves, about our past, about our future, about anything. Even when you're feeling your worst, you can still cultivate the quality of goodness BECAUSE – GOODNESS IS NOT BASED ON YOUR FEELINGS. Goodness is built on your actions – what you put your hands to DO. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, you have been made good "deep down deep." When we walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we can bring this quality of goodness to the surface. Any negative emotion that you will ever have is absolutely powerless to affect the cultivation of this quality, because it's all about WHAT YOU DO, NOT what you feel. Galatians 6:10 – *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, LET US DO GOOD TO ALL PEOPLE, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."* It begins today. Right now! It's MORE than BEING good. It's all about DOING GOOD.