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**The Fruit of
the Spirit
is...Goodness**

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Series: The Fruit of the Spirit



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The Fruit of the Spirit is...Goodness

HOW GOOD IS GOOD?

Little Johnny was the terror of the neighborhood. In one day, he broke the neighbor's window with a baseball; slid a tree limb alongside Dad's new car, scratching the paint; spilled Kool-Aid on Mom's new sofa, redesigning the floral pattern; and shattered that crystal lamp in the den as he tripped over the cord, chasing the dog to put it in the washing machine. Exasperated, his Mom cried out... "*Johnny, why can't you be good?*"

Johnny, eyes tearing up, face downcast, whimpered. "Mommy," he answered, "If I break *one less thing tomorrow*, will I be gooder?" His Mom had no answer. Just *what is good?* Is it not being as bad as Dennis the Menace? Is it becoming progressively *not as bad as you were before?* Is it relative to your personality? Is it something that changes daily, depending on how much "Mom and Dad" can handle? Or is "good" an absolute? Are you only "good" when you're perfect? How good do you have to be, not to be bad? Or how bad do you have to be, not to be good? And where is the justice in it all? Why are some criminals in jail for stealing a car, while who murdered and raped others are scot free? When is good, good enough?

Who knows what good is? Do you? We say a meal is "good" when it tastes good, but someone else may hate it. We say a ball game is "good" when our team wins, but it wasn't "good" for the other guys. We say a car is "good" when it doesn't break down. We say a book is "good" when it keeps our attention. We say it's been a "good" day, when not too many catastrophes have occurred. But if we ask ourselves to define "good", none of us can. In our generation, good is relative, and it has literally come to mean "anything acceptable".

But to God, "good" is a definable word. Not only is it definable,

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it is attainable. Goodness is an available commodity. While it can be increasingly appropriated, it is, in essence, not a variable. It is an absolute. It is a part of the nature of a Sovereign God and is therefore, constant, and yet as it is made available to His children, *what we see is not always the same*. I believe the closer we get to the Second Coming of Christ, the more noticeable “goodness” is going to be when it is seen; but because of the times we live in, it will seldom be seen.

So we come to the sixth of the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of goodness. This is one of those we usually pass over lightly, because “good” is such a weak word in our vocabulary, and because we assume, so often, the world’s concepts of what goodness is. It is our prayer that this lesson might help us see just what Paul meant when he said “the fruit of the Spirit is goodness...”

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Before we can define goodness as a fruit of God’s Spirit, we must be able to begin to comprehend the goodness of God. I say, begin, because we cannot but touch the hem of the garment; we cannot but scratch the surface; we cannot but see a fleeting glimpse of God’s goodness, even as we walk by faith. God’s goodness will only be manifest in all its glory when we behold Him in all His glory. His goodness is beyond comprehension; yet what we *can grasp*, we must, if we are to begin to understand the life He wants to live in us. Jesus said:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God... (Matthew 19:16,17)

That is the key principle in this study, and its ramifications alone are more complex than we can cover in this lesson. Here was one seeking the way to eternal life, and *as He approached Jesus*, He called Him “good”. Jesus immediately countered. Rather than answering his question first, He answered the *real question first*. He answered, as He so often did, by asking a question Himself. The question was, *why do you call Me good?* Don’t you know that goodness exists only in Jehovah God? Or do you think I’m God?

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Look at the principles that immediately emerge:

- 1- Goodness is an attribute of God.
- 2- It is only available from Him and through Him.
- 3- If Jesus is “good”, He is God.
- 4- If we are to have any “goodness” in us, God must inhabit us.

So until your child is a Christian, for example, he or she cannot “be good”. Oh, they may learn to behave in *an acceptable manner*, but that is not goodness. Goodness is an attribute of the Divine Nature and as such can only exist when the Divine Nature lives within the human soul. Until you become a Christian, you *cannot be good*. You cannot *do good works*. You can do “acceptable” things by the world’s standards, *even by the church’s standards*, but they are not “good works”. *Good works are things God does*. As we shall see, they always have certain characteristics. Always.

There are really two key words used in the New Testament that are translated “good”. The one we will concentrate on is the one found in the Galatians 5 passage, for that is called a direct fruit of God’s Spirit. It is the word *agathos*. That is the adjective. The noun is *agathosune*. The adverbs often used, are *agathospoieo*, or *agathourgeo*. Even Bible dictionaries seem to have a difficult time defining them. The reason is, that it is such a high and noble aspect of God’s character that human qualities cannot attain to it, nor can human languages even begin to describe it. It is that element of God’s nature that defies understanding, because even in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, it abhors evil, hungers for holiness, rejects compromise, and calls men to do the same.

It lifts itself above the morality of this age, and because it is God’s character that is being released, it so clearly exhibits His purity that even the self-righteousness of religion is seen for what it is...nothing.

Goodness is that which sets God apart from man. It desires nothing but that which is highest and best, and thus cannot be satisfied with anything less. Defined in all its simplicity, it would be: that part of God’s nature (III John 11, Romans 7:17) that rejects evil (Romans 12:21), desires holiness (Ephesians 5:8-10),

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and produces eternal fruit (Romans 8:28, Matthew 7:15, Genesis 50:20).

If we are to hold to that definition and appropriate that quality, we must, then, take those passages and others, and be certain that goodness is exactly what we think it is and that it does exactly what we think it does. Otherwise, like little Johnny, we'll just cry at God, and whimper, "But if I'm better than I was yesterday, or better than my neighbor, am I not good?" No, we must graduate to a higher understanding of the word, if we are to graduate to a deeper revelation of the Truth.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN MAN

That part of God's nature...

Let's take it one step at a time. We have already determined that only God is good, and only God can *do good*. In other words, goodness is a part of the essence of God and, as such, cannot exist apart from God. But it *is available to man*. You can actually *possess goodness*, even though only God is good, because God, living in you, will release that goodness through you, *if you'll let Him*. That's what Paul meant when he said the fruit of the Spirit is...goodness. God, living in man, gives man the capacity to *be good* and to *do good*. Without God, it is not possible. Let's verify that from Scripture.

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

(III John 11)

So the believer, indwelt by God's Spirit, has the capacity to do good. Christ in him is perfect goodness. The unbeliever, however, can do *only* evil. He or she does not have the ability to produce anything that is good. You may argue, "But I know some non-Christians who live more moral lives than most Christians. The issue isn't morality. It's goodness. Morality is relative and temporal. Goodness is an absolute and is eternal. The fact that you are a believer does not mean that you will *automatically* produce good works. Paul vented his frustrations for us in Romans and explained the problem.

Now then it is no more I that do it (evil), but sin that dwelleth in me.

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For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (Romans 7:17-19)

Here Paul is explaining the phenomenon of the dual nature of man. In the same body there exists two completely warring factions. The old nature, which *cannot produce good*, and the New Nature, which *cannot produce evil*. But Paul's struggle was in the decision-making process. What he desired to do was not good. He did not *naturally desire to flee evil and pursue holiness*. Left to himself, he constantly was drawn to do that which *was not good*, and the things he was supposed to do *he naturally avoided*. But Paul had a Helper called the Holy Spirit. That Spirit, living in him, *wanted to produce only that which was eternal, or good*. So, while this verse leaves somewhat of a negative connotation, it is more designed to acknowledge the conflict than it is to describe the solution. The solution is found in Galatians 2 where Paul acknowledges that,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Paul found the answer. But Paul was aware of the problem. In and of himself, *that is, apart from divine intervention*, he could do no good thing. Period.

So there is the issue. Until Christ comes into our lives, we can do *no good thing*. Once Christ comes in, we possess the capacity to do both good and evil. The choice, on a moment-by-moment basis, is ours. But, if at any moment, *we take over*, what we produce will not be *good works, for the flesh profiteth nothing*.

That part of God's nature that rejects evil...

The second part of the definition has to do with how "goodness" behaves in the life of the Christian. It has three dominant features. The first is, that the goodness of God is repulsed by evil. One very simple passage to memorize would be this:

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Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Romans 12:21)

What that means is that when God is in control of your life, and the goodness of God is being manifested in your life, *you cannot tolerate impurity, infidelity, or immorality*. In fact, compromise of any kind will make you sick. The reason is, you *will have God's perspective of sin*, and God hates it. He literally loathes all forms of sin, and anything that defies His holiness, both breaks His heart and grieves His spirit.

So if you can tolerate more and more immorality in what you watch, what you think, what you say, or what you do, you are not letting God be God in you. You may be witnessing, serving, teaching, even praying. God will honor His Word, but you will not be growing into His likeness, because the fruit of His Spirit which is goodness will be being quenched in you, and you will be inviting God's Spirit to read that book, or watch that movie, or attend that performance in the theater of your mind, and He is repulsed by it.

Therefore, if His goodness is free to flow through you, *you will be repulsed by it, too*. Overcome evil with good. That means let God's Holiness flow through you until you reach that stage where you think His thoughts and have His responses toward things that are not pure. When you do, you'll know it. Psalm 97:10 says, "You who love the Lord; (ought to) hate evil." If you are not growing progressively more sensitive to sin, you are not becoming progressively filled with the goodness of God.

Give some thought to your own personal standards. Does the current glut of lewdness and filth that pours into your home through the airwaves make you sick to your stomach? Or increasingly tolerant? Are you angry at Satan for what he has done? Or are you secretly enjoying the fact that you can now feed your lower nature in "acceptable" ways? The goodness of God in you can't stand those compromises.

That part of God's nature that desires holiness...

But not only does God's goodness in you recoil from the very thought of evil, it is drawn magnetically to things that are pure.

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It's not just a matter of beating off immorality to maintain the status quo. It is a matter of loving, longing, looking for things that express holiness. The Psalmist said,

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul,
for You, O God. (Psalm 42:1 NKJV)

That ought to be our mentality. The things of God ought to so captivate our thoughts, that we ought not to have to be beaten into submission to read His Word, or meditate on it, or spend time in worship. The goodness of God in us is like a mighty wind that sweeps into the recesses of our hearts crying "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know; fills my every longing; keeps me singing as I go." Paul says:

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light
(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),
trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
(Ephesians 5:8-10 NASB)

Once you lived in darkness. The things of the flesh appealed to you, enticed you, and were *natural to you*. No more. Now you are children of Light. Light emanates from your spirit. The fruit of that light, the expression of that light, is a natural desire for goodness, righteousness, and truth. You simply have one driving motivation in life...to please the Lord. Everything else pales into insignificance. Everything.

Light illuminates. It reaches into the recesses of life's dark places and exposes evil by being totally different. Light and darkness *cannot* coexist. Paul reminded us of that. And the goodness of God in you, when allowed to be free, will be insatiably drawn to Truth at any cost. Because God by nature is Holy, *He simply cannot enjoy evil*; therefore, He only delights in that which is good. When His children do less, it is a sign that they are *not walking in the Spirit*.

How hungry are you for spiritual things? Is there the same unquenchable thirst for things eternal that welled up within you, when first you came to Christ? Is it increasing day by day, from one degree of glory to another? Are you magnetically drawn to

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that which is clean and pure? Is moral compromise of any kind an abomination to you?

Or are the “little” violations becoming “normal”. Are you adapting the “I did it and nothing happened” syndrome that tests God more and more, just waiting for the axe to fall, and *until it does*, justifying every move you make as not bad enough to matter? That’s not good. Literally, *that’s not good*. Goodness cannot bear to grieve the heart of God or bruise His tender Spirit. Goodness would rather die than be satisfied with any form of unholiness. Test your spiritual temperature this week. How *automatically pulled towards things spiritual are you?*

Is that all you think about when the shades of your mind are drawn so no one can see in? (No one but God, that is.) Or do you talk “spiritual talk” when the circumstances demand it, and then recoil into your cocoon of hypocrisy as soon as no one is looking? That’s not “goodness”. The goodness of God in you longs to dwell on things eternal, longs to pray, longs to be immersed in God’s Word, delights in God’s precepts, *even when they mean rebuke*. The goodness of God is the nature of God that reflects the holiness of God, and it finds its satisfaction in Him alone.

The goodness of God produces eternal fruit...

Finally, the goodness of God not only abhors evil and flees to holiness, it is that part of God’s nature that reproduces itself. That is, God’s goodness and His goodness alone, produces fruit that lasts. It produces good works; it produces eternal rewards; and it produces God’s finished product in you. Remember those three things, for all are vital to our becoming “good”.

1- God’s goodness produces good works

We live in a world that is bent on doing good works. It is a reflection of the humanistic age we live in that *no matter what you have or haven’t done, no matter what your relationship to God, and no matter what your motivation, if you do something benevolent, you are doing a good work*. The church is so eager for workers and for donations, it subtly perpetuates that lie.

The clergy often refuses to argue against man’s preconceived notions that whatever we do in the church is a “good work” and

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is somehow earning us brownie points in glory. That is simply *not true*. If God in you is not the author and source of power and the object of glory for what you are doing, you are simply laying up wood, hay, and stubble. I don't care how enamored the folks at the Big City Bible Church are with your supposed goodness, when eternity becomes reality, Beloved, *your treasure is going to burn*.

A good man out of his good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: (Matthew 12:35)

My friend, the treasure of your heart is Jesus, and only He can produce good works. That's what is meant when it says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

His workmanship was ordained before the foundation of the world for Him to produce good works. He created. He ordained. He produces.

Unless God in you inspires you, leads you, and empowers you, the most spiritual of works is not "good". You can teach a Bible Class in the flesh, or out of the will of God, and God will use His Word and may bless His people, *but it is not a good work*. *But, if God in you is doing it*, the most mundane of activities can be a "good work", for everything the "Good One" does is good. Taking a cup of cold water to one who is thirsty in Jesus' name, when God is in control of your life and leading your life, is "good". Think about it. It will change your entire perspective of what is, and what isn't good.

Of course, if it is contrary to Scripture, then God isn't leading you, and it isn't good. That's why knowing the Word is so important. We are reminded that,

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandments holy, and just, and good. (Romans 7:12)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete (mature), thoroughly equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16 NKJV)

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So, contrary to what you may or may not have learned, it is not how noble what you do is, that determines whether or not it is a good work, it is *who is doing it*. When God does it, it's good. When you do it, it's not. Until God lives in you, and unless God works through you, it can't be done.

The exciting thing is, that when God is doing it, there is nothing you cannot do. You can "do all things" when Christ is your strength, or as this verse reminds us,

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (II Corinthians 9:8)

2- God's Goodness produces eternal rewards

In the same manner, the rewards for which we labor in eternity will be governed by the same standard. They will be judged by not how religious, or how noble, or how acceptable they were, but *were they done by God?*

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil. (II Corinthians 5:10)

We so often wonder, "How will God determine what things to reward us for?" By how many people we touched? Not necessarily. How effective we were in our music? our witnessing? our counselling? Not necessarily. God will only reward us for "good" works. Only God can do "good" works. If we did it, there will be no rewards. If He did it, *no matter how "successful" we thought we were or weren't, crowns await us.*

The issue in all of life is not how productive we are, but how surrendered. If you are letting God be God, He is doing good works, and you are laying up treasures in heaven. If Jesus could do "no good thing" of Himself, then neither can you. If Paul could do "no good thing" himself, then neither can you. But God in you has no limits to His power, no limits to His ministry, no limits to His fruitfulness. Remember, *the less you can do, the more He can do.* So the most fruitful believers in eternity will not necessarily be those with such great talents or such great followings, but those who *knew they could do no good thing apart from God.* To

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them, God will say: “*Well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful.*”

3- God's Goodness is complete

God finishes what He starts. Left to Himself, He will begin and complete the work He has for your life. You'll be virtually unaware of *what He is doing*, but gently conscious that *you are not doing it*. Paul put it this way:

And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you, will continue until the day of Jesus Christ—right up to the time of His return—developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to the full completion in you. (Philippians 1:6 Amplified Bible)

God will not call you home until your work is done. When it is, you ought not want to live one day longer. But until then, you are virtually indestructible. For Jesus, it only took 33 years. For Abraham it took nearly four times that long. In both cases, God completed what He set out to do in their lives, *and then called them home.* The reason suicide is not God's will is because only He knows when what He has planned for you is finished. We may shorten that time through disobedience, hindering His ability to do what He desired. I believe I Corinthians 11:30 teaches that. But so long as we allow Him the freedom to be Himself, how long we live and what kind of ministry we have is *His business*, not ours. If *He is doing the work*, and if *He will finish the work*, then why are we so anxious about what we are doing. You may be working in the church nursery, virtually unnoticed, a minister of God to small children, all the while praying constantly, “Lord, not me, but you. Please work through me, and in spite of me, to do your will.” Then, as you relinquish control and let God be God in you, He tends to those children and teaches those children. The result is a “good” work, for which rewards are laid up for you in Heaven; and He will complete that work in you and through you, so long as He chooses. It is a spiritual work.

On the other hand, you may be the head of a gigantic ministry. Thousands may come to Christ through your preaching. You may hold the acclaim of millions, draw large sums of money, touch large numbers of lives; but if you have stopped letting God speak

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through you and have taken over the reigns, *though you are using God's words and doing God's work*, what you are doing is not a "good" work. Don't get me wrong. Souls will be saved. Lives will be changed. Hearts will be touched. Why? Because God's Word never returns void, that's why. But you will have no reward for what you are doing, because *you are doing it*. You will have received your reward when you received your acclaim. It's over. You did it, so only you can be glorified; and when men applauded you, you got your glory. God may let you minister for years, because He is using His Word, but, oh, how grieved He is that you are *not letting Him do the preaching, the teaching, the living, the loving*.

This principle runs cross-grain to the humanistic philosophies of our day, and it is at odds with the theology of many, if not most, of the churches of our day. That doesn't mean it isn't truth. Jesus said, "Of mine own self I can do nothing." He could do "no good thing", not because He wasn't capable. Because if *He did it apart from God*, it wouldn't be eternal, so it wouldn't last. When God does it, *all things work together for good*. When we do it, all things get in God's way.

The issue, then, isn't how many "good" things you do, either in or out of the church. The issue is who is charge of your life, moment by moment. Are you relinquishing control in every situation, asking and allowing God to flow through you into the world you live in? Or are you busy "doing" things for God, as though you were laying up treasures in Heaven by your frenzied activities and frantic commitment to programs and performances?

Do you know what God wants from you? He wants you to be "good". Do you know how He wants to do it? He wants you to get out of the way and let "Perfect Goodness" (Jesus Christ) walk in your shoes, talk with your mouth, work with your hands, and respond with your heart. He wants you to stop trying to imitate goodness and set the real Goodness of God free in its place.

You say, "But that's theoretical. Make it work." Okay, let's do that once more. When you wake up tomorrow morning and roll out of bed, begin singing immediately. Begin to sing, "Just as I Am" or "I Surrender All" or "He Lives" or "How Great Thou Art", or anything else that comes from your heart to glorify God.

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Then, *before you have a chance to listen to the voice of the stranger*, begin to surrender. Tell God you can't live this day. (And you wouldn't want to, if you could.) Ask Him to take over and live through you, instead. Surrender. Consciously surrender. Ask Him who began that good work in you to complete it. Then, begin meditating in the Word. Pray it back to God. Sing it back to God. As you do, acknowledge in your spirit that He is Lord and you are only a vessel designed for Him to fill. Ask Him to do that; ask Him to fill you with His Presence.

Then just begin doing what you normally do. If the kids start fighting, quietly ask God to speak through you to them. Ask His wisdom to pour through you, so you will discipline them correctly. On the way to work, even if your car breaks down, begin to praise Him the more. Thank Him that it's *His car*. Then pray quietly for Him to teach you what He wants you to learn, and send you where you can let His goodness and patience be seen. And rest. Consciously rest.

When you get to work or school or back home or wherever you are being sent to exhibit God for the day, begin to sing in your spirit, whether you *feel like singing or not*. As problems arise, and they will, begin praising God for the problems, and *consciously ask God to manifest goodness in that situation*. Only then will He be glorified, and only then will He be storing up rewards for you. He'll do the doing. He'll get the glory. You'll get the rewards. Beloved, that's the kind of deal only God gives. It's called grace. As the day progresses, thank Him again and again that He in you is good. You're not; He is. Let Him be what He alone can be.

The day may not seem much different on the surface. There may even be *more warfare*. But little by little, an uncanny peace will dominate your heart. A gentle kindness will characterize your relationships. A quiet goodness that hates evil and loves the things of God will control your thoughts. And you will have done...nothing.

That's right. You will have done...nothing. God will have done...everything. And you will have been...good.

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