

THE EVIDENCE OF GOODNESS**GALATIANS 5:22-23**

When you decide to be good, you can sometimes surprise those closest to you. Maybe you heard about the man who put in a hard day of work every day. He came home dirty and sweaty, stumbled in the back door, went straight to the refrigerator, got something cold to drink and then went to the family room to watch TV until dinner time. He decided he could and should do better. So, before he left work, he showered, shaved and put on a clean shirt. On the way home, he stopped in at the florist and bought a bouquet of roses. Instead of going to the back door, he went to the front door and rang the doorbell. His wife opened the door, took one look at her husband and burst into tears. Of course, he asked what was wrong. "It's been a horrible day. Billy broke his leg and had to have it put in a cast. I no sooner got home from the hospital when your mother called and told me she's coming to stay with us for three weeks. Three weeks! I tried to do the wash and the washing machine broke. There's water all over the basement floor. And then, to top it all off, you have to come home drunk!"

If you're accused of being a Christian, what evidence will convict you? If you were accused and then arrested for being a follower of Jesus, could a court of law find enough evidence to convict you? The evidence that you are truly a child of God is called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I'd like everyone to find the following passage in your Bible – Galatians 5:22-23 – but I want us to read those two verses in unison today. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!" (Gal 5:22-23 NLT)

Now, today, I want to focus on goodness which is the sixth of the nine fruit of the Spirit mentioned in those verses. What is goodness? The words "good" or "goodness" are kind of like the word "love." They can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For example, some people honestly believe that good is whatever brings them pleasure and bad is anything that causes them pain. Such a definition has real problems. After all, if you're going through a painful time in your marriage, you might wrongly conclude that getting a divorce is a good thing! Other people believe that good is doing unto others what you wish they would do unto you, in other words, the Golden Rule. That's a limited outlook as well. What you might want others to do for you may not be all that good necessarily. For instance, you might want other people just to put up with your nasty temper or your foul mouth, but that isn't something good, is it?

Still other people conclude that what's good is whatever the majority of people decide is good. We love opinion polls in our culture. There's nothing wrong with an opinion poll in and of itself. But some in our culture believe that when a majority of Americans conclude that abortion or same-sex marriage is OK, then, they must be OK. Finally, we have some folk who identify goodness with "goods and goodies." In other words, they define goodness by stuff – nice homes, nice cars, and nice vacations, just having and enjoying nice stuff. When you compare

all of these cultural definitions of goodness, you notice a similarity. They're all human-centered rather than being God-centered. So, how does the Bible define goodness? What does the spiritual fruit of goodness look like? First...

REAL GOODNESS IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION.

God is the only One who perfectly embodies and expresses each one of these fruit of the Holy Spirit. God is goodness personified. The Bible says simply, "The LORD is good and does what is right...." (Ps 25:8 NLT) It invites you to discover the goodness of God. "Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8 NLT) The Bible also teaches everywhere that while human beings are capable of being good, none of us start out being good. Each of us has engaged in wrong actions and wrong attitudes. Sometimes, we have failed to do the good things we know we should have. The Bible's word for that is sin and all of us are sinners. Sure, we're capable of doing something good here and there once and awhile. But the Bible makes it clear that each of us falls far short of God standard of goodness. What is that standard? Perfection! It's impossible for you, me or anyone to make ourselves good as God defines goodness.

This is why Jesus came and died on the cross. Your goodness and mine is pathetically inadequate in God's eyes. But because God is good, His ultimate plan for your life and mine is to make us good – really good. Again, the Bible says, "For God caused Christ, who himself knew nothing of sin, actually to be sin for our sakes, so that in Christ we might be made good with the goodness of God." (2 Cor 5:21 Phillips) Your own attempts to be good can never earn you a relationship with God. In fact, to think you can approach God on the basis of your own goodness insults God. Why? If you could get to Heaven by being good enough through your own efforts; then, Jesus died for nothing. But, once you become a part of God's family by putting your trust in Jesus, God starts a process in you of actually making you good. Real goodness is about transformation. The Bible says, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity." (Rom 12:2 Phillips)

How does God do it? How does He make you and me good? The key is the presence of the Holy Spirit who enters your life the moment you put your faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit begins a profound change process. Over time and through many different circumstances and events, He changes your thinking, your values, your attitudes and your behavior. The Holy Spirit will use things like your growing knowledge of the Bible, your life experiences and your personal relationships to mold, shape and transform you over time. It's a process that will last the rest of your life. There will be days you think you're making great progress. There will be other days you'll be greatly discouraged by how much of what is not good is still a part of your life.

I find comfort in the fact that the early Christian leader who wrote much of what is now the New Testament, Paul – arguably the greatest single follower of Jesus who’s ever lived – said this about his own trek towards goodness. “I obviously need help! I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don’t *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.... I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does....” (Rom 7:18-19, 24-25 MSG) God is about working goodness into your character. That demands transformation. Secondly,

REAL GOODNESS IS ABOUT INTEGRITY.

The word “integrity” comes from the word “integrate.” Integrity is the ability to integrate your values with your behavior. Integrity means you walk what you talk and you practice what you preach. God is absolute integrity personified. When He puts His mind and efforts to making you and me really good, one of His primary objectives is to address this issue of integrity. The fact is that all of us have a gap when it comes to integrity. Call it an authenticity gap. We say, “It’s wrong to be materialistic”, but we still buy things we don’t need. We say, “It’s important to spend quality time with my spouse and kids”, but we make excuses for the time we don’t spend with them. We say, “It matters that I’m honest in everything,” but we indulge in “white lies” and little acts of theft. We often hear a lot about the lack of integrity in the world of business, finance or politics. It’s true; there is a crying need for integrity in all those areas of life. But, what about you? What about me? Don’t we need to develop personal integrity, too? Yes, we do!

In my study for today’s message, I came across four excellent and biblical suggestions on developing integrity. First, learn to speak honestly. Mark Twain once said, “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything.” George Burns, the comedian, observed, “The most important thing about acting is honesty. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made.” But you can’t fake honesty, can you? Not really. But, it’s not always easy to speak honestly. Sometimes, it’s just easier to keep your mouth shut and just live with it. When you speak honestly, you run the risk of someone disliking you or getting angry with you. You run the risk of conflict, and who wants that? But, there’s also a price to be paid in refusing to speak honestly – especially with those closest to you in life – your spouse, your kids, your closest friends. Relationship becomes increasingly artificial and superficial when there’s the absence of honesty.

A second way to develop integrity is to confess regularly. Integrity doesn’t require perfection. Integrity doesn’t mean living a mistake free life. Integrity doesn’t mean you can never fail. No, it means you own up to it when you make a mistake, when you fail, and when you mess up. The Bible does say, “Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other

so that you can live together whole and healed....” (Jam 5:16 MSG) Isn't it enough to just confess something to God and leave it at that? Not if it involves other people. There's a principle called restitution. It's a financial idea. If I steal \$100 from you, it's not enough to feel really bad about it, say I'm sorry and keep the money. No, I also need to return the \$100 to you, right?! When we do something wrong and offend someone, there's a need for what you might all call emotional restitution. Emotional restitution is the ability to admit your wrongdoing and ask forgiveness genuinely. It means looking someone in the eye and saying, "I was wrong and I want to ask your forgiveness for what I did."

Suppose you walk in the door after a long, hard day at work and your daughter runs up to you and says, "Daddy, look what I made at school today!" You're preoccupied, so you kind of grunt something, and just walk by without taking the time to "ooh" and "aah" over it appropriately. About a half hour later the Holy Spirit speaks into your inner spirit and says, "You just blew your daughter off." You ask God to forgive you for your insensitivity. Isn't that enough? No. Emotional restitution means finding your daughter, looking her in the eye, giving her a hug and saying, "Honey, I'm so sorry for ignoring you when I came in the door tonight. Will you forgive me? Now, let's look at your project together." That's what integrity looks like. Own your mistake. Confess it. Offer whatever emotional restitution is necessary.

Developing integrity will always demand the ongoing effort to live consistently. That's easier said than done. That's also where we experience this authenticity gap. It's important to live consistently in every venue of life, but no place is more important than in your own home with your own family. With the home as a reference point, let me ask you and me a few questions. Is your public image consistent with your private reality? Do people see a different Rick Breusch on Sunday morning than my family sees on Monday evening? Do people see the same person at work that your family sees at home? Is there consistency between your words and your actions? Do you say one thing but do another? Do you claim to believe something but then your actions deny it. At the end of the day, your actions have far more impact than your words. It's the people closest to you who measure your integrity by observing the consistency you demonstrate between your words and your actions.

You golfers out there probably remember Tom Lehman. His biggest win was the British Open back in 1996. Before qualifying for the PGA Tour, he had to enter qualifying school. Golf pros call it Q-school. During that high-pressure, all-or-nothing event, Lehman called a penalty stroke on himself. A stiff breeze caused his ball to move slightly after he addressed it. The rules are clear – if the ball moves, you're penalized one stroke. The result? Lehman missed qualifying for the PGA Tour by one stroke. His honesty resulted in having to wait another year to qualify. He explained his decision this way, "If a breach of the rules had occurred and I didn't call it on myself, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror."

You're only as good as your word. And your word wouldn't be worth much if you can't even be honest with yourself." By the way, Tom Lehman is a Christian.

Here's a fourth way to develop integrity: commit to it openly. Integrity never just happens accidentally. You have to decide in advance to act with integrity, or the fact is you probably won't. For example, decide in advance that hot, angry, hurtful words will not spew out of your mouth when you experience conflict. Decide in advance that you're going to handle your family's finances responsibly if that's an area of struggle for you. Decide in advance to not expose yourself to questionable material on the Internet, or at the movies or on the TV. Decide in advance that when you make a mistake, you'll admit it, confess it and ask for forgiveness. Again, integrity isn't about perfection and never failing. But integrity does demand that you don't just gloss over it. When you stumble, you pick up the pieces by God's grace, start over and do what's right. God wants to work goodness into your character and a lot of goodness looks like integrity. Thirdly,

REAL GOODNESS IS ABOUT GENEROSITY.

By generosity, I mean something more important than just giving money. Real goodness is about whether you're giving to and doing good things for your spouse, your kids, your parents, the people you work with, live next door to or worship with on Sundays. Someone has called it "the ministry of little things." Just little acts of kindness, little acts of consideration, little acts of thoughtfulness, little acts of appreciation. All those little acts of goodness add up to a very big good in the end. You can help create that kind of atmosphere of goodness and generosity in your home, at your school, in your neighborhood, among your circle of friends, and at your church. Holy Spirit-filled goodness can actually create this marvelous atmosphere of love, joy and peace in which people live everyday.

I fully realize that the place you work, the school you attend, the neighborhood you live in or even the place you call home can sometimes be full of harshness or indifference. It's not a generous environment. But when a follower of Jesus makes up his or her mind to extend generosity – to show goodness – God can use you in a powerful way. The Bible says that it can have an amazing affect on people – especially people who aren't Christians. It says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Pt 2:12 NIV)

Out of Africa is a book written by Isak Dinesen that was also made into a movie. She tells the story of how a Kenyan tribesman appearing at her door in Nairobi to ask her for a job.. She said, "Yes" and he turned out to be a marvelous employee. After three months, he came and asked for a letter of recommendation saying he wanted to go to Mombasa to work for a Muslim sheik. She was upset that she was losing him as an employee so she offered him higher wages. He said, "No." He told her that he had taken a job with her because she was a Christian. Now he wanted to work for a Muslim for three

months. After observing a person of each religion for three months, he wanted to decide for himself which was the true religion. Isak Dinesen was aghast. She said, "I wish you would have told me why you were here. I would have tried to treat you better." People are watching. And rarely do we get a second chance.

This church is also a primary place to practice this kind of goodness and generosity. I believe what the Bible says, "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith." (Gal 6:9-10 NLT) The "ministry of little things" can find fertile ground here at Karl Road Baptist Church! Simple, small acts of kindness and appreciation delivered at just the right time can bless someone in this church far more than my messages might. This place is already full of a generous goodness - someone making a meal for someone in need, someone offering words and a hug of support in a tough time, someone meeting an unexpected financial need. But this church could be even fuller of more generosity! There's just no limit to the expression of generous goodness when the Holy Spirit is flowing through us as individuals and as a church. My own life has been enriched in numerous ways by simple acts of goodness or generosity by many of you towards me personally – an encouraging word, a thank you card, sneaking me a dessert when Cheryl isn't around. May this church become more and more a place where goodness flourishes and abounds! God wants to work goodness into your character. A lot of goodness looks like generosity.

Bryan Chapell tells a great story about his father. One of the things his dad taught all of his sons was how to use a crosscut saw. It was kind of a rite of manhood among the Chapell men. One brisk fall morning, Bryan and his dad began sawing on a log. They didn't know it had a rotten core. When they'd sawn through the log partially, it split and fell off the sawing frame. A large chunk of the log broke off. Bryan, with his childish imagination, thought the unusual shape of the piece of log looked like a horse head. He took it home with him that night because he had an idea. For his dad's next birthday, Bryan attached a length of 2X4 to the log head and attached a rope tail. Then he stuck on some sticks to act as legs. Then Bryan hammered in about a dozen nails down the 2X4, put a bow on it and presented it to his dad as a birthday gift. When his dad took off the wrapping paper, he smiled and said, "Thank you, son, it's wonderful.... What is it?" "It's a tie rack, Dad. See, you can hang your ties on those nails down the side of the horse's body." Bryan's dad smiled again and thanked his son. Then he leaned it up against his closet wall because the stick legs didn't work so well. For years he used Bryan's horse tie rack to hang his ties. Now, when Bryan gave his dad that rotten-log-horse tie rack, he really thought it was "good." This was Metropolitan Museum of Art good! But, as Bryan got older, he realized that his tie rack wasn't nearly as good as he once thought. In fact, he came to understand ultimately that his father had received and used his gift not because of how good it was but because of how good his father was.

God wants to work His goodness into you and me. When it shows up in your life and mine, it's one evidence that you're truly a child of God. His goodness looks like transformation, integrity and generosity. No, your goodness and mine really isn't all that wonderful. Not from God's perspective. But because God is good and because He is a loving Father, He smiles, He thanks us for whatever gift of goodness we can produce through His Spirit and He even uses it to help build His Kingdom.