

“DO-GOODERS OR DOING GOOD?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon:

Prayer: Holy Father, in the name of Jesus, enable us by the power and presence of your Holy Spirit to hear and understand and do your Word, to grow in our knowledge of you, and in our likeness of Jesus, to increase in the fruit of your Holy Spirit. Make us to want these things, make us to see the value of living by your Spirit and walking in your will for us. Come, Holy Spirit.

Character of Goodness.

Graduations are good time of life, a time when we celebrate our student's good accomplishments and achievements and recognize their success. We can talk about what's good in so many ways. Some students are good at sports or math. Some took certain classes because it was good for them. Some of them are going to good colleges hoping get a good job or find a good spouse and some are hoping just to have a good time.

And then there is the good person with a good heart. So many ways we use good and goodness, what does it mean?

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit is about cultivating Christian character out of which flows God glorifying conduct. We don't want to just send out our students with good grades and accomplishments, we want them to be good people. So we are talking about being and doing.

Goodness as a fruit of the spirit refers to an internal quality of Christian character, an excellent virtue of integrity and righteousness; and an external quality of conduct that expresses the internal quality. Externally goodness is good works of mercy, service, giving, helping, meeting a need. Good works can be expressed in actions (works), words, attitudes, and even thoughts (thinking well of someone). Anything that is pleasing to God.

Goodness is doing the right thing. It may not always be the popular thing or politically correct thing. It may earn you no praise. It may take boldness and courage. But doing good is fundamentally doing the right thing. Good people do what is right no matter what the cost.

Only God is good.

When the rich ruler called Jesus, good teacher, Jesus questioned him, why do you call me good when only God is good? Only God is unequivocally good, perfectly good.

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God answered,
Exodus 33:19 I will make all my goodness pass before you.

Ps 107:1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love [hesed] endures forever!

God has a good heart, He has integrity, He is trustworthy, straight, true, honest, without deception, crookedness or guile, and He does what is right. God is good and He only does good all the time. God can only do good. Everything He creates is good.

God's goodness is sovereign, He has power to bring good out of very evil actions. God is able to overcome evil with good. If God lifted His goodness from the earth for a moment we would be cast into utter misery.

Like kindness and all the fruit, goodness is grounded in ***God's character***. All good and goodness comes from God. And because the fullness of God dwells in Jesus (Colossians 1:19) Jesus is good and He went about doing good. The Spirit Jesus sends to earth produces the fruit of goodness in us. All good and goodness in the world and in our hearts comes from God.

Acts 11:24 [Barnabas] was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

There is the clue to goodness, what is good in us is God in us. Our goodness is derived, we can't look to ourselves as the source or origin.

What about a good person who is not a Christian? Yes, they can do good things and even make a habit of doing good, but the source is polluted, the motive may be bad. Without a change of heart and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit whatever is done is not considered good by God, because it is not done for His glory. As long as we are sinners, our will to do good, and all the good we do, will be tainted by sin.

Obstacles to goodness.

Wherever there is fruit there are weeds. Every garden, every orchard, every field has weeds that choke out the fruit and ruin our efforts.

The obstacle to good is sin and evil. Evil is the enemy of the good, the enemy of God's good purposes. We will see a great manifestation of evil this evening in our Daniel study.

Human bondage to sin makes us incapable of good. Even our good will be sinful, self-serving.

Romans 3:11, 12 None is righteous ... no one does good, not even one.

Romans 7:18-19, 24-25 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

C.S. Lewis said, "No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good."

Another obstacle to goodness is the culture we live in increasingly hates good and loves evil. Our culture promotes and praises wickedness.

II Timothy 3:1-3 In the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, ***not loving good*** [haters of good, despisers of those that are good-KJV].

Another obstacle to goodness is doing good hypocritically. Or doing good from a bad heart or bad motive.

Think of Ananias and Sapphires who made a donation to a good cause but were deceitful in their actions. They tried to make a show of their goodness, to impress others and gain glory for themselves.

I think of politicians who do those photo ops at some disaster site or in a hospital. They are mostly doing that to look good, to impress others with how caring they are.

Another obstacle to Biblical goodness is the cult of self-help in our country. Go to any book store and there will be a big section on self-help, including Christian book stores. Many of these books are written by and for Christians.

It's sad that a large part of this movement has been fueled by those claiming to be Christians, Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller and now Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer.

What is the premise underlying most self-help books? That you and I are competent and capable and morally able to fix ourselves and improve ourselves. The solution to most of our problems lies within us. This kind of thinking is an obstacle to depending on the Holy Spirit for this fruit.

Christian self-help is an oxymoron. The Gospel says we are broken and in bondage and we can't help or fix ourselves. The good news is we can't help ourselves enough to impress or please God and we don't have to, the only help that helps us is the help freely offered by God in Christ.

God doesn't help those who help themselves, God helps those who know they are helpless.

Cultivating goodness.

Cultivate goodness by regularly confessing our failure to be good and returning to the source of our goodness and good works.

Sin has ruined our ability to be good and our ability to reflect the character of Jesus. We have no willpower or strength to do it. But by repentance and the Holy Spirit that ability can be restored.

Acknowledge to God your weakness, that you cannot do any good apart from His help and strength. This breaks us free from the lies of the self-help movement. Healing and help come out of humility and honesty.

The antidote to evil and the sin in our hearts is not to try harder to do better and be better. The antidote is the Gospel. Only Jesus can deliver us from evil.

Titus 2:14 [Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for *good works*.

Cultivate goodness by deepening your faith in Christ and your dependence on the Spirit.

Christ is the root, good works is the fruit. Where there are roots there is fruit and if there is not fruit then there must be no roots. The fruit does not produce the roots, only the roots can produce the fruit. To do this we must abide in Christ.

Luke 6:43-45 For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. . . . 45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

What comes out shows what's inside. Where the Holy Spirit is there will be growing fruit and increasing evidence of it.

Cultivate goodness by imitating the saints, the goodness in others.

We need examples, models, those who can show us how.

III John 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

I Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

This language is a bit foreign and uncomfortable to us. We hesitate to imitate other people and we are even more hesitant to suggest anyone imitate us. But there is no way around it. The only way to imitate Jesus is to see others doing that and imitate how they do it.

Follow fallible people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Spend time with those whose lives you wish to emulate, with those who you would like to rub off on you. This means humbling ourselves and admitting others know how to do some things better than us.

If you can't find a live person to do that with, then read stories of Christians, of the saints through the ages. Read biographies, collections of stories of godly men and women.

Cultivate goodness by being lovers of goodness (Titus 1:8) and by hating what is evil and overcoming evil with good.

I Thessalonians 5:15, 21-22 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but *always seek to do good* to one another and to everyone. ... *hold fast what is good.* 22
Abstain from every form of evil.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Ephesians 5:11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate.

Cultivate goodness by being others-oriented.

True goodness is self-sacrificing. It usually involves giving time, expending energy. It can be tiring, draining, hence Paul's encouragement to not grow weary in well doing or in doing good (Galatians 6:9).

Cultivate goodness by being generous.

Err on the side of being generous, of going above and beyond. A good person is often called benevolent, he is a benefactor, the bestower of benefits. Such a person is generally thought of as generous or having a generous spirit.

God in Christ shows His goodness to us in His exceedingly great generosity. God has been exceedingly rich toward us and in this we see His goodness.

Barnabas was called a good man, and one of the key characteristics we know about him was he was generous.

Remember the parable of Jesus where an employer hired some men in the morning and paid them a day's wages and then hired some more men in the afternoon and paid them the same. When the morning workers complained the employer said, "Do you begrudge my generosity (goodness)?" (Matthew 20:15).

God-like goodness does good to those who don't deserve it, those we don't even like.

Cultivate goodness by doing practical good works, by meeting the needs of others.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We are created for good works. You exist by God's design and you are here on earth at this specific time and in this specific place to make a difference, to do good.

Have you thought about what God has planned for you to do? Have you asked Him about it? Have you made it a matter of prayer and reflection? Have you looked at your life and who you are and how you are wired and what your talents and abilities and circumstances are and how all that might converge and point to what God created and called and saved you to do?

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see what He is doing and what He is equipping you to do. Walk in them. That's not a call to something difficult or heroic or glamorous, that's a call to normal everyday living, like walking.

Home and work are the two places we spend the most time, and therefore the places we have the most opportunity to do good, to bless and benefit others through good works.

We are to begin at home.

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Galatians 6:10 as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Mundane household chores are a great source of good works. Who takes out the trash, who cleans up the mess, who empties the dishwasher, or sweeps the floor?

Moms are an example of doing good all day long, caring for the myriad needs of their families. Those activities may seem mundane and routine and boring, but they are pleasing to God and they are of great benefit to those who receive them.

There are good works to be done in the home, at school, at work, on the job, in the community.

Serving in the nursery, preparing a meal, helping with the Serve project, meeting a need, visiting a shut in or at a care home, driving the bus, sending a card, offer to baby sit, spend time.

Conclusion.

This world is such a broken and desperately needy place that we should never be at a loss for good works to do and goodness to be demonstrated. The needs are endless and the opportunities are endless.

John Wesley said, "Do all the good you can by all the means you can to all the people you can for as long as you can."

God has prepared you to do what He has given you to do today. He created you for this. Tiny, little you is as important in God's creation and plan as the sun and moon and stars.

Love goodness and do good so that one day we may hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Prayer:

Colossians 1:9-10 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.