

Intro: The 5th mark of the transformed heart that we will look at this week is the quality of goodness. Now, there is a goodness that is artificial, too, isn't there? In fact, our Christmas songs have warning about being good: "You'd better watch out...he knows when you are sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." There is the type of goodness that is performed in order to gain "gifts". We adults may not do good so that some chubby elf brings us presents, but we often are outwardly good so that others will think better of us or even that we will think better of ourselves. But the goodness that is produced by the Holy Spirit of God is rooted in the goodness of God. It is His fruit, His work, His generous gift to us so that we might enjoy participating in glorifying Him with our desires and our works. He has called us, brothers and sisters. Let that sink in. He has called you, with His own voice, by His very Spirit, to glorify Him; to find in Him the most worthy of all our praises, the most beautiful of any of our hearts' desires, and the most holy, holy, holy God. This perfect, infinite, powerful, creating, holy God has called you to glorify Him in His presence forever. And He didn't merely call you, but He redeemed you for that purpose.

So, this is the goodness of God: He is holy, perfect, true, and right AND He has poured out His Son generously that you and I might be made holy and join in the joy of God's exaltation. With this in mind, let us look briefly at this fruit of His Spirit, the mark of the Christ-exalting heart: goodness.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

- 1) Paul's constant prayer for the Thessalonians was for their lives to glorify Jesus.
 - a) We are called, first and foremost, to glorify Christ
 - b) Constant prayer is needed for our spiritual health
 - c) Our spiritual health is found in both *desire* for goodness and *acts* of faith

- 2) God deems us worthy of our calling by fulfilling:
 - a) Our desire for goodness
 - i) "Desire" is the pursuit of a perceived good thing
 - ii) Goodness is a general quality of moral uprightness, being and doing what is honorable and worthwhile
 - (1) Righteousness (qualitative): that which lines up with the character of God, being who we are created to be in desire and in action
 - (a) Not speaking of judicial righteousness here, but obedience to Christ
 - (b) "If you love me you will keep my commandments" etc.
 - (c) That which can be called "good" by God, as opposed to "evil" or "worthless"
 - (2) Generosity (relational): giving to benefit others
 - (a) God's goodness is His character expressed in generosity, too
 - (i) Not a goodness that nullifies or ignores His righteousness
 - (ii) Hence the cross is necessary for Him to be both just (righteous) and the justifier (making us right before Him) so that He is good in our redemption on both counts
 - (b) Romans 5:7 – somebody might die for a good man
 - (c) That quality of generosity that is winsome, so that "there is no law against such things"
 - (d) Barnabas in Acts 11:20-26
 - b) Goodness is a matter of a transformed heart (*desire* to goodness)
 - i) There is a kind of giving that is really all about me
 - (1) Really to be seen as the Savior
 - (2) To be needed
 - ii) "does not seek its own"
 - (1) True goodness is unconcerned with a verdict of "good" from anyone other than Jesus, and He gives it without your performance, by grace
 - (2) Are you doing the good things for His sake, or yours?
 - c) Learn to see the eternal in things
 - i) Freely you received, freely give

- ii) See every person as having the potential of glorious goodness when transformed by Christ
 - (1) Even the hardest, the most calloused, the proud, the foolish
 - (2) Especially those who have sinned against you
 - (a) You were shown mercy and grace, you have no right and no need to seek justice above mercy.
 - (b) Be gracious to all, returning good for evil

3) Our acts of faith

- a) Our deeds and work are to be performed out of faith in Jesus Christ...His glory
 - i) Every “good” work that does not come from faith is not pleasing to the Lord
 - (1) Rom 14:23 – whatever is not from faith (morality) is sin
 - (2) Faithful acts are what complete the desire for good
 - (a) Without the act, there is not completed desire and therefore no goodness
 - (b) Intent is not enough for faith, action completes it
 - ii) Gospel faith is what grounds and sources every good work
 - (1) If I give generously to another out of a desire to get God to accept me, then it is self-righteous and not of faith
 - (2) If I give generously because I am deeply rooted in the sufficiency of Christ’s love and atoning death for me and want to love another person out of that for His sake and for their sake, then it is good act of faith
- b) Faith is the driver that pushes all of our right living
 - i) Biblical goodness comes out of love for Christ, not fear of wrath
 - (1) Not like Santa Claus
 - ii) Works of faith and the desire for goodness are inseparable for the Christian
 - iii) Note also that faith does work, does do good, is active and powerful
- c) The clinging to our own importance is idolatrous unbelief in God’s promises
 - i) Reputation, wealth, comfort, food, over-promise and under-deliver
 - ii) Matthew 6:24 – You cannot serve both God and wealth
 - (1) It is a god, making demands on your life and promising salvation, joy, freedom, contentment, security...acceptance
 - (2) It does not deliver, as no idol can
 - (3) Often, God removes our idols so that we will become completely dependent upon Him alone
 - (a) *“Mature faith cannot grow when we are [oversupplied] with all kinds of spiritual comforts and consolations. All these must be removed if we are to advance in the pure trust of God. The Lord withdraws all tangible supports to purify our hearts, to discern if we are in love with the gifts of the Giver, or the Giver of the gifts.”* (Brennan Manning)
 - iii) A lack of generosity is really the fear that God will not take care of you.
 - (1) Root of depending on money is fear
 - (2) Root of depending on reputation is fear
 - (3) Root of depending on any idol is fear
 - (a) Afraid of not getting the verdict of acceptance
 - (4) Root of fear is unbelief
 - (a) Not believing the gospel, that Jesus has paid it all
 - (5) What He has promised, He will deliver
 - i. God fulfills this desire for goodness as the result of a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit
 - ii. *“He makes us first to be in Christ by faith, as branches in the vine, that we may bring forth much fruit (John 15:4-5). He first purges our consciences from dead works by justification, that we may serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). He makes us to first live in the Spirit, then walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25)....Now, mark well the great advantages you have for the attainment of holiness, by seeking it in a right gospel order. You will have the advantage of*

the love God manifested toward you, in forgiving your sins, receiving you into favor, and giving you the spirit of adoption, and the hope of His glory, freely, through Christ, to persuade and constrain you, by sweet allurements, to love God again, who has so dearly loved you, and to love others for His sake, and to give up yourselves to the obedience of all His commands out of hearty love to Him.” ~Walter Marshall

4) Both by *His power*

- a) Don't trust your own wisdom, or power, or planning, or efforts, or tools, or organization to fulfill the desire for goodness, trust only Christ
 - i) The Holy Spirit is working within you, with His power, to create goodness from within your soul
 - ii) *“Let us take comfort that the Holy Spirit is not dwelling within us as a spy to discover our infirmities and to report them to God for condemnation. The Holy Spirit knows that Christ has been condemned in our place, and He has come within us as the bookkeeper and teller of God, to remind us ever of our credit balance, and to give us the fruits of our inheritance in order that we may live in the triumph purchased for us.” ~Donald Grey Barnhouse, God's Heirs*
- b) Paul is praying for a purpose: only God can do these things!
- c) PRAY! PRAY! PRAY! God is for you! Go to Him as to a loving Father with unlimited resources to make you grow!
 - i. *“A believer may be in the saddest and darkest condition imaginable. Even so, the Holy Spirit is able to break through all this and bring to mind the promises of Christ. By this work, the Holy Spirit enables Christians to sit in dungeons, rejoice in flames and glory in troubles. If he brings to mind the promises of Christ for our comfort, neither Satan nor man, neither sin nor the world, nor even death itself, shall take away our comfort. Sometimes disasters and distresses appear which are so full of horror and darkness that saints are tempted to give up in despair. So how greatly are their spirits revived when the Holy Spirit brings the words of Christ to their minds for their comfort and joy. Thus, believers are not dependent upon outward circumstances for their happiness, for they have the inward and powerfully effective work of the Holy Spirit, to whom they give themselves up by faith.” ~John Owen*

5) The purpose of His fulfilling these two things is so that JC is glorified *in us*.

- a) Jesus is not only glorified by us only when He returns, but in our lives as He has changed them
- b) He is the one given the credit for our growth and for our changed hearts
 - i) Look at Him! Adore Him! See His beautiful heart and glorious power!
 - ii) Don't get caught up in following a human teacher as the source of your growth
 - (1) Human teachers are the means to bringing you to Christ and His Word, but the source of change is the Spirit of God transforming us through faith and the Word of God
 - (2) The best teachers have been gifted BY CHRIST
 - (3) The best teachers point us TO CHRIST
 - (4) The best teachers teach only what is IN CHRIST

6) We are glorified, too, in Jesus and for Jesus, by the dramatic transformation of our hearts.

- a) Your glory, or praise, comes from being in Christ
- b) Don't let Him go! Cling to Him!
- c) See that your hearts are being changed by gazing into the gospel of grace, which has tremendous transforming power through His Spirit at work within you
 - i) Keep your life centered on Jesus Christ and His gospel

- (1) *Therefore, my dear brothers, learn Christ and Him crucified! Learn to pray to Him, despairing of yourself, saying, "You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, and You are my sin. You have taken on Yourself what was not Your and given to me what I am not."* ~Martin Luther
- ii) See the implications of the grace of God in Jesus Christ upon every area of your life
 - (1) Your sin goes deeper within you than you can even fathom
 - (a) Be humble before God and others for Christ was crucified for you
 - (2) You are more deeply loved than you ever dared to hope
 - (a) *All the good that they [man] have is in and through Christ; He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. All the good of the fallen and redeemed creature is contained in these four things, and cannot be better distributed than into them but Christ is each of them to us, and we have none of them any otherwise than in Him....It is by Christ that we have sanctification: we have in Him true excellency of heart as well as of understanding; and He is made unto us inherent as well as imputed righteousness.*
~Jonathan Edwards
 - (3) Live out your lives in bold humility that that gospel brings to your heart
 - (a) *The more we understand the Gospel as a doctrine of grace, the more it will lead to godliness.*
~Thomas Chalmers
- iii) Make all of your desires and works together centered on Jesus Christ: His person (character), His work (gospel), and His beauty
 - (1) Don't get caught in the trap of looking to other things for growth or change

7) All of this is accomplished by the grace of our God, Jesus Christ.

- a) We do not deserve it, but GOD LOVES US
- b) HE is for us!!! HE seeks your good and works to bring it to fruition!
- c) My prayer is that His loving work will be fulfilled in you for all to see His greatness and your salvation!

Conclusion:

I pray daily that the Holy Spirit would work mightily within the deepest parts of you, showing you the greatness of His love toward you in Jesus Christ. I pray that you would be able to seize greatly upon the severity of the sin for which your Savior died and the severity of His love in giving Himself on your behalf. I pray that this knowledge would completely change the way that you think and the way that you live, humbly serving each other, with gentleness toward those who are struggling, with patience toward those who sin against you, and always with love, seeking the best for others, even when you lose in return. Have these attitudes in you which Jesus has in Him.

When people see you giving with no expectations of return, or compensation, they will wonder at how a person can find joy that has freed them from fear while still remaining morally upright and true...and you have glorified the God of freedom. Don't fear that God will not take care of you if you give beyond your means, or forgive when you have been wronged. Don't fear over anything which elevates your verdict of yourself or others' verdicts of you, because in all things you belong to God and He loves you more deeply than you can even understand, even bringing you to your greatest joy and delight: Himself. Trust Him and His promises.

Our purpose both as a church and as individuals is to cling to Jesus Christ, proclaim His gospel to ourselves and to others as our source and substance of hope, and pray at all times that our hearts would be strengthened to fully comprehend how wonderfully beautiful that He is. God has been gracious to us all in His Son. If He gave us His Son, will He not freely give us all that we need? Do not fear in the midst of disappointment and loss, for He is with you, even to the end of the ages. Step forth and love boldly, serve humbly, give generously, forgive recklessly, and walk worthily of the calling that you have received. And if we love Him, the Savior of our souls, let us obey Him with passionate abandon so that He is honored as worthy of all of us.

I will end my sermon with a quote from Paul in Philippians 1:27:

"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that – whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent – I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel."