

The Fruit of the Spirit
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness

Lesson #7 for February 13, 2010

Scriptures: Psalm 51:10,11; John 14:9; Romans 3:12-20; 7:7-12; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 1:2,3.

1. What is goodness? The Bible seems to suggest that what is good is the opposite of what is evil. It is pleasant, beneficial, approved, and lovely. This lesson will explore why goodness is considered to be a part of the fruit of the Spirit.
2. Goodness is not something static; it involves doing something. It is holiness in practice. Unless goodness exhibits itself in actions, it is not goodness at all. Christians are expected to act in good ways at all times. Do you know any good people? What is it about them that stands out?
3. While we recognize that only God is truly good, (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:18,19) we must also recognize that at the time of creation, God declared all creation—especially human beings—to be very good. (Genesis 1:31) The Scriptures describe both good and bad people. (Matthew 5:45) We are told that it is possible for us to do good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
4. But after the entrance of sin, human beings have been described as sinful, evil, and incapable of good. (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Jeremiah 4:22; 13:23; 17:9; Romans 3:12-20)
5. Greek dualism and Gnosticism in the early years of Christianity really struggled with the idea that anything material could be good. They believed that only the spirit was good. Matter was evil. So, some of them tried to practice a very strict adherence to the Law. Others believed that the body was so hopelessly evil that it could never do anything good anyway, and so they did anything they felt like doing. However, Bible-believing Christians accept the fact that Christ who was fully divine was also fully human. (John 14:9; Hebrews 1:2,3; John 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-4)
6. It is clear from Scripture that God designed us to be good. Clearly, human beings are capable of doing good acts. If God thought we were incapable of doing good or being good, would He have given us the power to reproduce?
7. Read Titus 2:11-14. God's plan for us is to be good and to do good. But, there are some hazards of being good and doing good—it is the natural selfishness of human beings. Selfish human beings can develop a false pride, and some have even believed in salvation by works. When we do something "good," our selfish natures want to claim credit! So, how can we overcome that difficulty? Is it possible to die to self and become like Jesus Christ?
8. If we were truly loving (the first part of the fruit of the Spirit), wouldn't we naturally do what is good? Wouldn't the loving thing always be the good thing? Is it possible for a good God to dwell in an evil body?
9. What is it that leads naturally selfish human beings to do good deeds? Is there a danger of doing good for the wrong reason? The Pharisees believed that they were God's true people. (There was a subgroup of Pharisees called "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" who would cover their faces when they walked down the street lest they see an attractive woman and lust after her. They were constantly running into things, and thus, were bruised and bleeding!) They thought that they were doing what was right and good for themselves and for their nation. But, because Jesus did not line up with their version of how things were supposed to work, they were determined to kill Him.
10. In our lives as Christians, are we capable of doing both good deeds and bad deeds? Is it possible to live lives that are partly good and partly evil? (James 3:11)

11. The Bible clearly teaches that by beholding, we become changed. (2 Corinthians 3:18) This is also stated repeatedly in the writings of Ellen White. (GC 555.1; COL 355.1; GW 479.2) This can work in both directions! (CTBH 127.3; DA 441.4) Is it possible for naturally selfish and evil human beings to become like Jesus? Is it truly possible for us to be grafted into the Vine? (John 15:1-10) We can only be transformed from the inside out.
12. Read Romans 7:7-13. Theologians have argued about these verses for generations. If we intellectually recognize that sin is deadly, why do we continue to do it? Paul was making a very important point in these verses. In his early years, like that rich young ruler that came to Jesus, Paul believed that he was keeping all of the Ten Commandments. He rigorously followed the Pharisaical guidelines, and he was proud of his actions. But, when he became a Christian, he recognized that while his external actions might have been those prescribed by Phariseeism, his motives and his internal thoughts still had serious problems. Paul was used to struggling to produce “good” behavior on the outside. But as a Christian, he first realized that God demands that we only think good things on the inside! It made him angry. God wanted to control even his thoughts! Paul recognized that the tenth commandment was a real problem for him. In its broadest sense, the tenth commandment becomes the foundation on which we keep the other nine. We break the tenth commandment before we break any of the other nine. Paul wanted to do what was good and right, but he could not. Why was that? What is it that keeps us from doing the good we want to do? After a while, Paul recognized that the tenth commandment was a guarantee of safety in heaven. God will only admit people who do what is right because it is right!
13. What about us? Do we recognize that the Law is good? Do we really believe that sin is deadly? What does it take for us to participate in the new covenant agreement which allows God to write His Law within our hearts? (Jeremiah 31:31-34) The first covenant occurred at Sinai when the people promised to keep God’s laws. The new covenant came when God said that He would write His laws in our hearts.
14. Are we inclined to think that the Law is full of “thou shalt not’s”? Do we find keeping the Law to be a real strain? Does it seem like a burden? Why is it that several Bible writers described the keeping of God’s Laws as a delight? (Psalms 1:2; 40:8; 119:92)
15. Why is it so difficult for human beings to give up their selfishness and let God’s transforming Spirit enter their lives?
16. Repeatedly, throughout Scripture God describes our most serious problem as not knowing Him. (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 7:21-23) What is the relationship between knowing God, becoming like Him, and doing good? If we really knew God, would we love Him?
17. What is the relationship between the Law and our sinful natures? The Law has often been described as a mirror. When we look in that mirror, are we happy with what we see? Do we clearly recognize that we are not capable of keeping the Law by our own efforts? Do we clearly understand how we can become more like God?
18. Numerous scholars have come to the conclusion that there are really three parts to living a true Christian life.
 - A. Bible study–this gives us a chance to see our Role Model in action.
 - B. Prayer–this gives us a chance to interact with our Role Model and to recognize our need of the transformation of the Holy Spirit.
 - C. Witnessing–this gives us a chance to refine and improve and constantly update our understanding of God as we seek to explain it to others. We often think we understand things well! So, try to explain it to someone else!

19. But is it really possible for us to change? Albert Einstein once said, “Women marry men hoping they will change. Men marry women hoping they will not. So each is inevitably disappointed.” Does this tell us something about our ability to change ourselves?
20. Motives are very important and often represent the innermost thoughts of our hearts and minds. Think of what is implied by the following two quotations from Ellen White:

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. *Christ’s Object Lessons* 97,98 (1900)

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. *MS 20, 1897 (MR # 970); Signs of the Times, July 22, 1897 (3ST 400:2:1)* - section in [. . .] is omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120; *12MR 236*

21. After his sin with Bathsheba, is it any wonder that David was led to cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”? (Psalms 51:10, *NASB*) So, how does the Holy Spirit change us? It must be from the inside out. If we spend enough time in Bible study, prayer, meditation, and thinking about the life of Christ and about all that He means to us—just as children become like their parents by watching them and trying to imitate them—so we can become like God. This is a pursuit which will continue for the rest of eternity. So how does the Holy Spirit actually change us? If we spend enough time reading, thinking, and talking about God, the Holy Spirit will change us.
22. Taking a somewhat legal approach to the plan of salvation, some Christians believe that once they have been “legally accepted” or justified, their future behavior may not matter much. That is false theology. When God judges us, He does not judge us incorrectly; He judges us correctly. Those who enter heaven will be those who have actually been changed by beholding Him and truly want to live the right kind of lives. There are millions of pretentious Christians who believe they are doing what is right and who flaunt their goodness but who inwardly are far from God’s ideal. (See Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31-46)

The barren fig tree flaunted its pretentious branches in the face of heaven; but when the search for fruit was made by the Redeemer, lo, there was nothing but leaves. Unless there is a thorough work wrought for you as individuals and as a church, the curse of God will as surely come upon you as it fell upon that fruitless tree. {*4T 614.1*}

The Laodicean message must be given with earnestness and power, as a message from heaven. If it be ignored, the Lord will certainly cast away from Him those whose spiritual condition is so objectionable. **Christ declares that pretentious piety is nauseating to Him. To the ones so full of self-sufficiency He says, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor**

hot.” Their works are opposed to the holy principles of God’s word.
{SpTB02 20.1}

23. Read Matthew 7:21-29 and 25:31-46. What is it that distinguishes the good people from the bad people in the judgment?
24. God intended us to do good. He intended for us to be loving, kind, and good. (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14) So, are we, as sinful human beings, prepared to give God and the Holy Spirit the time and attention necessary to be transformed into His likeness? Only He can do it for us. We cannot do it for ourselves. But, in order for Him to do it, we must be willing to give Him the time and attention necessary, to realize our need of transformation, and to be willing to serve others as we are being transformed. “The Lord claims the strength of brain, bone, and muscles; but it is too often withheld from him and given to the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 613.
25. In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, pp.221,222, Ellen White suggested the following ways in which we can develop a true experiential relationship with God.
- A. Heed the warnings and instructions of the Holy Spirit.
 - B. Put forth earnest efforts to claim your heavenly inheritance.
 - C. Make any sacrifice necessary to obtain the character of Christ.
 - D. Make peace with God.
 - E. Act on God's promises.
 - F. Forsake the way that God has forbidden you to go.
 - G. Avail yourself of the refuge God has offered.
 - H. Apply God's remedy for sin.
 - I. Deny self and follow Christ's example through difficult times as well as good times.
26. It is not only by preaching the truth, not only by distributing literature, that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life. Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives. Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.
{9T 21.1}
27. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470
28. What is the condition of our “goodness”? Is it genuine? Do people look at us and praise God? (Matthew 5:16) Are our lives being transformed by our relationship with the Holy Spirit?
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