

Mark 10.17-22
Really Good People
Sermon #9 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on October 16, 2005.

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Main Idea: *Those who know the riches of Christ overflow in compassion for the needs of others.*

Scripture Introduction

Galatians 5.22-24 tells us: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

In God’s good timing, we have arrived at the sixth of the character traits of those in whom the Spirit of God is working: “goodness.” So that we might have this grace much evident in our lives, please follow along as I read **Mark 10.17-22** and then we will ask the God from whom all good gifts come to make us really good people.

Read **Mark 10.17-22**.

Pray.

Introduction

Helen and I recently watched the film *Changing Lanes*. (We saw it on Clean Films, so I am sure I could not recommend the unedited version.) What interested me was how clearly it dealt with the greed and selfishness which entangles our hearts and which so chokes our compassion for others.

Ben Affleck practices law in a firm run by men who use the law to cheat clients. And Affleck has done the same, convincing a confused man on his deathbed to sign away control of his estate to the firm. But on the way to court to verify the will, a fender-bender while changing lanes begins a series of events which unravel Affleck’s life and force him to come to terms with man’s innate self-centeredness.

In a turning point of the movie, Affleck interviews a young man looking for a job at the firm. He asks, “Why do you want to be a lawyer?” The response is: “Because of the law. I respect the law. And I know that people are basically good and the law will make sure what is done is right.”

There is our instinctual thought, is it not? People are basically good and religion exists to tell us what “little extra” we must do to earn eternal life. As if our lives were a scale; naturally (of course) we are balanced. We are born innocent, having done neither good nor bad; our scale is level. But we make bad choices, failing to achieve perfection, and so our bad works must be balanced again by some “good.”

Such was the thought of Ben Affleck’s character; such was the thought of the rich man who came to Jesus; and such is the natural thought of every sinner born in this world.

But Jesus debunks our instincts. Instead of being satisfied with superficial ideas of external goodness, he drives us back to the law, he insists that we know what it truly means to be good, and he asks: “From where will our goodness come?”

So that we might understand goodness and see it manifest in our lives...

1. We Must Embrace the Biblical Definition of Goodness (Mark 10.17-18)

Unfortunately, the word “good” often is used as carelessly and inaccurately today as it was by this rich man. And so Jesus answers him (and us), saying: “Your idea of goodness will not suffice. You think of me as a moral man, a fine teacher, and so seek to flatter by ascribing to me goodness. But the word properly applies only to God—and that you do not believe of me.”

Psalm 14 had already made it clear that we are not good: “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.”

Jesus is reiterating Psalm 14: Goodness as a character trait is only *properly* true of God! But since some people clearly are better than others, what is it about goodness that makes the Bible insist that none of us is good? We can get to an answer by some further observations on this text. Notice...

1.1. Biblical Goodness Is Taught in the Law (Mark 10.19)

Jesus is not creating some new standard to trip up a sincere seeker. No—he simply points out that if you want to do what is required to earn God’s favor, if you want to be good like God is good, then you must obey the law.

And note well to which commandments Jesus points: all are from the second table of the law, all relate to how we treat our neighbor, all can be summarized as the second greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22.39). Biblical goodness is taught in the law. Then, second, observe that...

1.2. Biblical Goodness Is Radically Other-Oriented (Mark 10.20-21a)

We need not question the sincerity of this young man. No doubt he had, in some way, at least, kept the outward forms of the law. But he had always done so with an eye to himself.

One of the speakers at the conference we attended last week said this: “God often reminded his people that they were Jews because he loved them; but they often believed that God loved them because they were Jews.” When we focus on ourselves, we always reach the wrong answer. We think that God must love us because of who we are rather than realizing who we are depends upon God’s love for us.

This man’s focus was on the wrong person—it was on himself and his own performance. So Jesus takes him back to the law and shows him just how radically other-oriented the law really is: *goodness is so concerned with your fellow human that you give everything to care for them.*

And lest we are tempted to justify ourselves by supposing that Jesus required us only to care for our friends, he explains: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”³⁷ [And the one who asked

what must be done to inherit eternal life] said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The parable of the good Samaritan teaches again that *Biblical goodness is so concerned with your fellow human that you give everything to care for them.*

1.3. *Biblical Goodness Comes Only Through Devotion to Christ (Mark 10.21b-22)*

Though maybe not apparent on a first reading, Jesus is not suggesting that we earn salvation by giving away all our money. He is saying this: "the goodness which God requires is not found in you, nor in any outward forms of obedience to the law. Instead, the kind of goodness which God requires is found only in death to self and living in Christ—"come, take up the cross, and follow me!"

Here then is the definition: *Biblical goodness is so concerned with our fellow humans that we give everything to care for them, and so consumed with God that we give up everything to follow him.*

Such goodness does not come without cost, does it? Remember that the fruit borne in Galatians 5.22 is produced by death to self and crucifixion of the flesh (according to the verses above and below). Therefore, if we are to have the fruit of goodness in our lives...

2. We Must Deny Ourselves the Opposite of Goodness: Selfishness

An ambitious farmer, unhappy about the yield of his crops, heard of a new seed corn. He bought some and produced a crop so abundant his astonished neighbors asked him to sell them a portion of the new seed. But the farmer refused, afraid that he would lose a profitable competitive advantage. The second year the new seed did not produce as good a crop, and when the third-year was still worse, the farmer realized that his prize corn was being pollinated by the inferior grade of corn from his neighbors' fields.

Selfishness is self destructive.

It does not seem that such would be so. It seems that if we grab all the gusto, then we will end up with the most toys. It feels to us that if we look out for ourselves, then we will be looked out for. But Jesus said that he who would save his life must lose it.

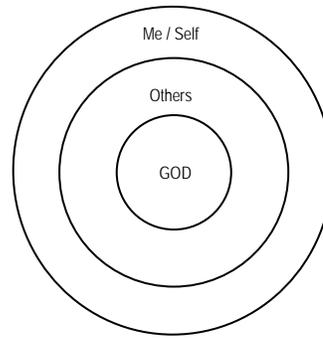
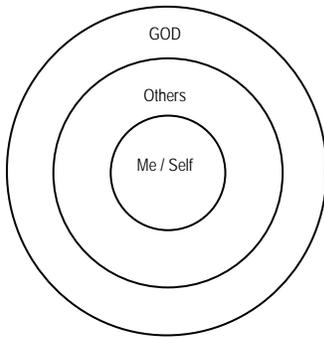
Do you remember the song from *Oklahoma*, "Oh, what a beautiful mornin', Oh, what a beautiful day. I got a beautiful feelin', Ev'rything's goin' my way." Have you noticed how our moods are affected (dare we say, "controlled") by our perceptions of what is going our way?

Think of this: God-Almighty, the Creator of the universe, out of his perfect goodness, has promised that nothing comes to me except what he predestines for my good. His promise of everlasting love, his promise of perfect provision and providence, his promise that underneath me are the everlasting arms—these promises are all mine in Jesus, but if my spouse is rude to me I fall apart and pout.

Why?

The Bible says it is because of our fallen nature; we instinctively perceive the universe in a disordered way—we see ourselves at the center.

A 6 month baby never wakes at 2 am and says to herself: God is good. He has given me loving parents who serve me self-sacrificially day and night. I'm a bit damp and slightly hungry, but I am going to let them sleep in. They deserve extra rest. No, what does a 6 month old do? They scream!



According to this way of thinking, when my needs and desires are met, when I have focused on my wants, then I can consider others. Now contrast this fallen thinking with Christ's thinking. Here is revealed why God says that becoming a Christian must be a "conversion"; or why Jesus says you must be "born-again." A radical reordering of ones' priorities must take place because the Bible says that this mind of Christ, this way of thinking, now belongs to all who place their faith in Jesus.

So a self-centered way of thinking, a selfish view of the world is what must die if Christ's Spirit is to live within us.

Did you hear about the two friends who met for dinner at one of those family-style restaurants? It was easy to split the large salad, the grilled vegetables and the mashed potatoes. But when the steak came and there was one large piece and one small on the same platter. One of the men picked up the serving fork, placed the smaller piece on a plate and handed it across the table to the other.

"Well, you certainly do have nerve!" exclaimed his friend.

"What's troubling you?" asked the other.

"Look what you've done! You've given me the little piece and kept the big one for yourself."

So the first guy asked, "Well how would you have done it?"

His friend replied, "If I were serving, I would have taken the small piece myself and given you the big piece."

"Well," replied the man, "I've got it, haven't I?"

C. S. Lewis said: "There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.... There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit....

Selfishness must be denied if goodness is to be borne in our lives.

3. We Must Be Cautious of the Counterfeit of Goodness: Self-righteousness

The self-righteous cannot be

good to others because they are too busy seeing how good they are. The man who met Jesus was full of self-righteousness, was he not? And "self" kept him from coming to Christ.

J. C. Ryle: “The spiritual blindness here exhibited is unhappily most common. Myriads of professing Christians at the present day have not an idea of their own sinfulness and guilt in the sight of God. They flatter themselves that they have never done anything very wicked: “I have never murdered, or stolen, or committed adultery, or borne false witness. I surely cannot be in much danger of missing heaven.” They forget the holy nature of that God with whom they have to do. They forget how often they break His law in temper, or imagination, even when their outward conduct is correct. They never study such portions of Scripture as the fifth chapter of Matthew, or at any rate they study it with a thick veil over their hearts, and do not apply it to themselves. The result is that they are wrapped up in self-righteousness.... Let us beware of this state of mind. So long as we think that we can keep the law of God, Christ profits us nothing. Let us pray for self-knowledge. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, to show us our own hearts, to show us God’s holiness and so to show us our need for Christ.”

The self-righteous think they are good; all the while that same trait keeps them from the One who truly is good. Be cautious of the counterfeit of goodness.

4. We Must Actively Cultivate Biblical Goodness

Though goodness properly belongs to God alone, and though it is a work of the Spirit to produce it, we are nonetheless granted the privilege of cultivating this fruit in our lives. Here are four headings for our part in the work.

4.1. Know the Law Demands It

We have not obeyed simply by refraining from stabbing those we dislike; the Bible requires that we love our enemies, that we bless those who curse us, that we do good to those who hate us, and that we pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us. Jesus did not say that the second greatest commandment was, “Do no harm to your neighbor,” but “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Active goodness!

Romans 12.10: “Outdo one another in showing honor.”

Philippians 2.3: “...in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

In fact, all of the positive one another verses could be called: “practical goodness.” This is the summary of the law in both the Old Testament and the New.

4.2. Know Your Heart Dislikes It

We are naturally self-centered, self-concerned, self-consumed. Dear Christian, know your heart! Confess your nature and your acts, and ask for Christ’s grace.

Study to know the ways in which your heart will cling to the sin of selfishness and only release when it has a hold on the counterfeit of self-righteousness. Many will be the arguments against Biblical goodness. Many will be the complaints. Your flesh will rise and object at every turn. But allow it not to win. You belong to Christ! You have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

4.3. Know Your Savior Gives It

Apart from Jesus we can do no good works, including the good work of goodness. But meditate often on the goodness of Christ—for he has given abundant goodness to us.

Listen to his generous care for you: ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness

of men. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2.5-8).

See the goodness of the Savior—he has given everything for you!

4.4. Know the Spirit Produces It

Biblical goodness is not that which we screw up by trying harder to care for others. It is a work of grace. So what do we do when we do not good?

We call on the Father who gives the Spirit generously to those who ask. We ask our elders to plead for Christ's goodness to flow through us. We memorize passages which the Spirit can use to transform our minds by Christ's goodness. We place ourselves in positions where other-oriented ministry is necessary. We admit our failings, one to another, and we pray for one another. We abide in Christ that the Spirit of Christ might abide in us.

5. Conclusion

One day, as Alexander the Great passed by, a beggar on the roadside asked for alms. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded: "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."

You will meet few people suited for Biblical goodness from you. But the Spirit asks **not** "Who is worthy of such?" The Spirit asks instead, "Who is wealthy enough to give such goodness?" Such goodness suits you, Christian.