# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness”**

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

**October 3, 2021**

The work of the Holy Spirit is to produce certain traits in us so that our character takes on the shape of God’s character. We have been looking at the so-called fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, and our topic this morning is the fruit of goodness. The word *good* is used to point to some positive quality about the object being described. For example, if I tell you that I have a good watch, you will assume me to mean that it keeps time accurately. That is because most of us agree that the purpose of a watch is to tell us what time it is.

It is, however, the case that there are times when we don’t agree on the purpose of an object. When my teenage son and I were looking for a *good* car to buy for him, I was looking for a car that was reliable, safe, and affordable. His idea of a good car, however, had more to do with how fast it went, how it looked, and what his friends would think about it. The goodness of the car, so to speak, was directly related to the perceived purpose of the car – dependable transport vs. studly ride.

So, when the Bible tells us that God desires goodness in our lives, it is critical for us to know God’s purpose for asking this of us. Is our goodness God’s prerequisite to loving us, being gracious to us, and saving us from our sin? Or, does our call to goodness have a different purpose? I invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 2:8-10

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

God’s purpose for calling us to goodness is not in order to save us. Our prior goodness has absolutely nothing to do with our salvation. If anyone should claim that somehow a “good person” is saved because of their goodness, that person is substituting a false purpose of goodness for God’s true purpose. We are saved entirely by God’s grace, by God’s undeserved favor. And, what is God’s purpose for saving us in this way, completely irrespective of our prior good works? It is in order to create a masterpiece.

Imagine that you are attending a painter’s exhibition of his art. As you walk through his gallery with him, you talk together about his various paintings. Then, you come to a painting that the artist has given a special place of honor, displaying it in the most prominent location under the very best lighting. “This,” he says, “is my masterpiece.”

God created the universe and it contains innumerable wonderful expressions of God’s beauty and imagination: sun, moon and stars; sky, land, and seas; mountains, valleys, and rivers; trees, plants and flowers; birds, fish, and animals – all are wonderfully made and put on display in the gallery of creation that is all around us. Then, on the sixth day, God created you and me. While all else God had created was declared “good,” human beings were declared “very good.” But, we became marred by sin. The pinnacle of God’s creation was no longer beautiful and living according to God’s purpose, but was stained and living in rebellion. But, God did not abandon his purpose for us. Through his Son and by his Holy Spirit, he has saved us from our sin and given us eternal life. By grace, through faith, we have become his masterpiece. We are his ultimate restoration project, taking us from a distorted and damaged condition to the most wonderful of all that God has made: persons created anew in Christ Jesus. And, having been created anew in Christ Jesus, having come to know him and seeking to become like him, we are now enabled to do God’s good work.

Our primary example of goodness is Jesus himself. When we study the four gospels, we see how Jesus lived goodness according to God’s standard rather than the world’s. In fact, he often spoke out against the so-called goodness of riches, or religious status, or self-righteous following of the law. Instead, he practiced goodness by the way he loved others and gave himself for them, seeking nothing for himself.

Paul, in his letter to the church in Philippi, gives us wonderful insight into what God considers good: “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8). Good thoughts lead to good words and good actions.

Every morning when you and I wake up, God is already at work in the world, bringing about his good purposes. Our task is to determine how God is working in our particular spheres of influence and involvement, and then join our good efforts to his. This requires being closely in touch with God through daily Scripture and prayer, that he may guide us through his Holy Spirit into those good works that he has prepared for each one of us to do. It means being alert to the Sprit’s nudging of our hearts in certain directions with particular words and actions which bring the goodness of God bear in a given situation.

We cultivate the fruit of goodness when we seek to do God’s good whenever and wherever we have the opportunity, not so that God will love us more and reward us for our good behavior, but because we desire to live as God’s masterpiece, reflecting the goodness of the master who created us and saved us by his grace.