

“FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: Kindness, Goodness and Gentleness”

Psalm 23 • Titus 3:1-11

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 1, 2020

This morning we are still going through our series on the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. Paul says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Remember that these are not separate *fruits* of the Spirit, as if love were one fruit and peace were another. Rather, these are different aspects or characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in your life. Think of it like this: the fruit of the lemon tree is yellow, oblong, sour, smells good, has seeds. Those are all different descriptions of one fruit. In the same way, the characteristics of love and joy and peace are descriptions of the fruit of the Spirit.

We’ve already talked about love, joy, peace, and patience over the past few weeks. Today we’re going to actually talk about three of the remaining characteristics: kindness, goodness, and gentleness. Why would we want to do that? Because they are all related. In fact, the Greek word for kindness is defined as “kindness, goodness, or gentleness,” and one of the definitions of the word for goodness is kindness. However, one of the important principles of understanding Paul’s letters is that when he uses similar words like this he means for them to have slightly different meanings. So we are going to look at all three and see that together they form a more complete picture.

Paul’s letter to Titus helps us to see what kindness, goodness, and gentleness looks like in the life of a Christian.

The first characteristic we want to look at is goodness. When my kids were young one of their favorite movies was Disney’s *Lilo and Stitch*. If you haven’t seen the movie, it’s about a creature that was created as part of a genetic experiment in a far away galaxy but ends up in Hawaii and is adopted as a dog by an orphaned girl. Both of them struggle to fit in and are always in trouble. At one point Lilo draws a picture of stitch that she says shows his “badness

level.” When she shows it to Stitch, Lilo says, “This is your badness level. It’s unusually high for someone your size. We have to fix that.”

When you think of goodness, maybe you think of the part of your life that’s left after your badness level. And to some extent that’s true. Goodness is about who you are. It’s about the kind of person you are on the inside, when no one is watching. The thing is, all of us are a lot like Stitch. Our badness level is unusually high. As Romans 3:23 says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” None of us is good by God’s standards, which are the only standards that really count.

The good news is that God is good all the time. Amen? When we say God is good we’re saying that he is perfect. There is no error, no deceit, no fault in God. He is holy and he is just. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is that when you are united with Christ, the Holy Spirit puts that goodness inside of you. That’s why goodness is the fruit of the Spirit. In theology we say that the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to you. Titus 3:4 says, “when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Because of Christ’s saving work on the cross, when God the Father sees you he no longer sees your sin but instead he sees the righteousness of Jesus who was sinless. That’s why Paul says in verse 7, “being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” That means that any genuine goodness in you is completely the work of God. The opposite of goodness, then, is not so much badness as it is Godlessness.

So goodness is about who you are on the inside. Gentleness and kindness are about what you do, how you treat other people. Gentleness has to do with your interactions with others, how you speak to them. The opposite of

gentleness would be harshness. When you spend time with others are you focused on the other person or on making sure you get your point across? Do you feel the need to win an argument? To be right? Paul has a lot to say about that in this short passage. He tells Titus to remind the members of his congregation “to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

The reason? For one thing, he says that arguing is unprofitable and worthless. But the main reason is that we used to be just like them. I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that some of you have been wrong before. Don’t worry. I’m not going to name any names. Verse 3 says, “we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”

Notice that you don’t ever find Jesus acting like that. Jesus was the most gentle person who ever lived. Gentle doesn’t mean weak. In fact it takes great inner strength and confidence to be gentle. It’s that confidence in God that gives you the ability to *not* argue or fight.

The third characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit we’re looking at today is kindness. These days we tend to think of kindness as being nice. That’s really more of what we’ve called gentleness. Instead, kindness is about action. As one author has said, “If goodness is the light of God shining *within* the human heart, then kindness is the light of God shining *from* the human heart.” Kindness is doing something for the benefit of someone else. The opposite of kindness, then, is really selfishness, which is doing something for your own benefit.

Like goodness and gentleness, kindness is the result – the fruit – of the Holy Spirit working in your life. We are able to be kind because God is kind with us. In Ephesians 2 we read, “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and

raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

We know that there is nothing we can do to earn anything from God. But God does expect us to act. Acts of kindness are what the Bible often calls good works. The very next line in Ephesians 2 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The good works we do don’t earn anything but they are the evidence of God working in your life. What are these good works, these acts of kindness? Another word for it is serving. If Jesus has made a difference in your life you should then be making a difference in other peoples’ lives. I firmly believe that every Christian should want to serve somewhere *in* the church and also to serve people *outside* the church. Our Serving Committee exists to help you find places to do both. Opportunities are all around us to serve others. We just heard last week about opportunities to serve people who are in prison by writing and sending them Bible study materials. There are opportunities with many of our ministry partners such as the Pregnancy Center and Mission 911. I want to invite you to also think of other ways we as a church can serve our community and I want to encourage you to say yes when those opportunities are presented.

So how do we grow in the areas of goodness, gentleness, and kindness? We grow by getting close to God. We grow by intentionally devoting ourselves to what we can call “soul work.” That means taking time out of every day to be with Jesus. Read his Word. Meditate on God’s character. Pray more praising God for who He is. And then love Him enough to serve other people.

Amen.