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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GOODNESS

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The Fruit of the Spirit
". . . Unto the Least of These My Brethren"

by Don Doezema
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in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"When the Son of man shall come in all his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for. . . ."

For. . .what? For, you were members of the Protestant Reformed Churches? Or, for, in your theology you adhered most closely to the truth of the Word of God?

Church membership is, without a doubt, important. And the Lord has given us His Word in order that, when we worship Him, we might worship Him as He **is**, not robbing Him of any of His glory. But it's interesting to note that, in the judgment day, when public justification is given for the verdict rendered (in order that it might be clear to all that the Lord judges **righteously**), the question is going to be, not "What did you **profess**?" but "What did you **do**?" God judges every man according to his **works** (Rev. 20:13). Did you feed the hungry? Did you give a glass of water to one who was thirsty? Did you befriend the stranger? Did you clothe the poor? Did you visit the sick and those in prison? (See Matt. 25:31-46.) In other words, was **goodness** as it is a fruit of the Spirit of Christ, evident in your **life**?

Perhaps it goes without saying in this magazine that, though the kingdom of heaven is indeed the reward only of those who do the works, the works do not in themselves constitute the **ground** of entry into it. That's evident in Jesus' instruction to His disciples on the occasion referred to above. What is it the King will say to those on His right? "Come, ye **blessed of my Father**." The reward, you see, goes to those whom God is pleased to bless. Further, the kingdom is referred to as an **inheritance**, which excludes the idea of obtaining by **merit** — especially so, since it was prepared **from the foundation of the world**, and **for you**. The reward, therefore, actually **preceded** both the work and the worker. So what then **is** the ground? It's the good pleasure of God, as that is revealed in the decree of election (Rom. 9:15-19). When in the day of judgment the King judges on the basis of works (which can be **seen**), He judges on the basis of what really is the **proof** of faith (which is unseen and which according

to the clear testimony of Scripture is the gift of God — Eph. 2:8). Only when we maintain this do we give all the glory to **God**.

That's good theology — because it's based on God's Word. And, because it's grounded in the Scriptures, every child of God is obliged to subscribe to it too. Unwavering affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of God in His dealings with men is not **optional**. And yet, we say again, **the** question in the day of judgment is not, did you have, so to speak, all of your theological ducks in a row? Nor even, did you spend your life somehow in a defense of the truth? It's this: how did you treat the least of My brethren?

We will not be asked to recall great and mighty deeds of kindness, which caused men to sit up and take notice. Most people who wait for an opportunity to crawl into a burning building in order to drag out an unconscious victim of smoke inhalation will wait in vain. But the question is, did you give a cup of cold water, in due season. . .when nobody was looking? **That** is the highest manifestation of the grace of God in the hearts of His elect. **That** is the proof of the sincerity of our professions. And that is what goodness is all about.

• • • • • • •

Goodness is not only a **desire**, be it ever so sincere, for the happiness of others. It's an **active** disposition to promote that happiness. It's that kind of goodness that we see in Christ. Of Jesus of Nazareth, Whose devotion to the welfare of men we must emulate if we would possess the grace of true goodness, it is said that He "went about **doing** good" (Acts 10:38). Jesus Himself testified of that when He said to the unbelieving Jews, "**Many good works** have I showed you from my Father" (John 10:32). So many were those works, in fact, that if all of them were to have been recorded, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25).

Jesus had truly on countless occasions shown Himself to be concerned for the welfare of individual saints. We think, for example, of the leper who came to Jesus near the beginning of His public ministry in Galilee. The man's affliction was a terrible one. The disease, which began as nothing more than little spots on the skin, progressed through the body till the whole became a mass of rottenness. This particular leper, according to Luke's account, was "full of leprosy." The disease must have been in its final stage and appeared in all its horribleness. We can imagine that the disciples must have backed away, maintaining a discreet distance, so as to avoid levitical defilement. But not so Jesus. On hearing the man's plea, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Jesus reached out and **touched** him and said, "I will: be thou clean" (Luke 5:13).

Jesus was touched with the feeling of that poor leper's physical infirmities. His healing of the man's disease was therefore a display of His goodness; it was a part of His going about doing good. But the physical cure does not tell it all. Jesus' concern for others did not consist only, or even primarily, in a desire to give them relief from bodily ills. His healing of the leper was actually a demonstration of a deeper concern, for, as leprosy spoke to the Jewish nation of sin, so did the cure of it speak of the spiritual reality of salvation for sinners, as that would be

accomplished by Christ on the cross. Jesus was, above all else, concerned about the spiritual, eternal well-being of His sheep.

This becomes more apparent perhaps in a later miracle of Jesus, performed not for the direct benefit of only one person, or a few, but for a large multitude. This one also occurred in Galilee. Jesus' popularity was growing steadily — to the point that, with people coming and going constantly, He and His disciples had difficulty finding time even to **eat** (Mark 6:31). Jesus said therefore to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." So it was that they entered a boat, left Capernaum, and headed for a desert area which lay to the north of the Sea of Galilee, a couple of hours walking distance east of Capernaum.

The "rest" which they sought, and which Jesus so sorely needed, was not yet, however, to be theirs. For, their departure had not gone undetected; and somehow the people had learned where they were headed. So determined were Jesus' followers to see and hear more of Him that they were willing to follow Him, even if it required a long walk out into a desert place. Men, women, and children from Capernaum and surrounding villages set out on foot, running; and they outwent Jesus, reaching the place where He intended to find solitude, even before the boat which carried Him had arrived (Mark 6:33).

When Jesus saw the multitude He uttered no cry of dismay, no complaint for their imposition on His time or invasion of His privacy. He was moved, rather, with compassion "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). As always, Jesus was ready to put the needs of **others** first — i.e., **before** His own. He did not, in other words, do good only when that was **convenient**. There was very really **personal sacrifice** involved in Jesus' acts of kindness. Thus here, though He had left Capernaum in order to find temporary respite from exactly this kind of constant pressure, He plunged right into the work of teaching (Mark 6:34) and of healing their sick (Matt. 14:14).

As the afternoon wore on, and the people gave no indication at all that they were ready to leave, nor yet Jesus to stop teaching, the disciples grew increasingly concerned. Aware that the people had brought with them no food, and that many of them were far from home, the disciples finally made bold to interrupt Jesus with a suggestion that, for the people's own good, He should send them away. Jesus however had also seen and was touched by their need. Disposed as He ever was to the welfare of His people, He said to the disciples, "They need not depart; give **ye** them to eat."

The story is familiar. With but five loaves and two fishes Jesus fed a multitude of some 8,000 people (5,000 men, plus women and children). It was of course a sign — as were all of Jesus' miracles. It pointed to Himself and what He accomplishes in the realm of grace. He is the true bread, sufficient for all of His people, no matter how great may be the multitude of the redeemed.

The truth is that the significance of the miracle was not perceived by the people — at least by the vast majority of them. They reacted **carnally** to this wonderful work of Christ. They had indeed been impressed by Jesus' earlier miracles; but nothing that He

had ever done before generated as much popular excitement as did the miracle of the loaves. Five loaves and two little fishes, in His hand, had been enough to feed the whole multitude! What then, really, they must have wondered, could be **beyond** His power? Surely in Him lay the solution to their physical, economic, and even political problems!

Can you imagine the excitement which must have gripped the people in that multitude? For centuries the Jews had eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah. And here He was, before their very eyes! Here was the Christ, Who had it in His power to do all manner of good things for them. They would make Him their king (see John 6:15).

But the Galileans were inventing a kingdom that the prophets had never promised. And in their reaching for the "good" life, they sought nothing more than bread for their stomachs, cures for their physical ills, freedom from foreign domination. They were soon to learn that Jesus of Nazareth, Who did indeed go about doing **good**, was not about to satisfy their carnal desires. He would not be their king. He would not give them more bread — at least, not of the kind **they** wanted. The blessed truth that Christ is the bread of life to His own, through the giving of His flesh in order that they might have eternal life, was to the Galileans a "hard saying" (John 6:60). It was that because it blasted all of their hopes for an earthly kingdom, and in it an abundance of good things of this life. Hence, they would not hear it. They were completely disillusioned. And they left Him (John 6:66).

Such was the goodness of Jesus. He was interested first of all in the spiritual well-being and the eternal state of His people. Had He given the bread-seekers the "good" they desired, an earthly crown would have been His for the asking ("All this power will I give thee. . .**if**. . ."). But Jesus had no ambition for earthly prestige or power for Himself, nor yet material or political advantage for the Jews. The blessings of His Kingdom were **spiritual**. He chose **that** for His people — even though it meant desertion by hundreds of His Galilean followers on this occasion, and for Himself eventual suffering and death at the hands of His enemies in Jerusalem, all in order that the elect might be saved, and enjoy the blessings of His goodness forever.

On His way to Jerusalem for the last time, when one would expect Jesus to have been preoccupied with thoughts of Himself, of the terrible death which He faced in a matter of days on the cross of Calvary, we find Him as concerned as ever about the plight of His brethren. Again, how unlike us! How quick we are to view our own "misfortunes" as more than enough reason to put us on the **receiving end** of goodness. Not so Jesus. We think particularly of two incidents in the city of Jericho. A blind beggar sat by the side of the road. Hearing the noise of a crowd of people passing by, the man asked concerning the reason for it. On learning that Jesus of Nazareth was the center of attention in this large company of people on the way to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover, the blind man seized what he saw to be a once-in-a-life-time opportunity for receiving sight. "Jesus, thou son of David," he cried, "have mercy on me."

Had he been an influential man in the community, the blind man would

most likely have been escorted directly to Jesus. But he wasn't that. He was a beggar, and therefore only an annoyance. So he was told in no uncertain terms to hush up, with the idea no doubt that Jesus was busy with matters that were far more important than whatever it was that this beggar wanted.

The man was however undaunted by the rebuke of the people. In fact, he only cried the louder, "thou son of David, have mercy on me." That's right, "Son of David" — i.e., the Messiah, the Christ, He believed it. It mattered not to him that others denied it. He was ready to affirm it before the entire multitude. And Jesus responded to that faith. Contrary to the thinking of the people, Jesus **did** have time for the likes of this beggar, this outcast of society. He stopped and commanded that the man be brought to Him. Then, by the word of Jesus' mouth and the touch of His hand, Bartimaeus was made able to **see**. . .the least of these My brethren.

There was yet another man in Jericho who had more than a passing interest in seeing Jesus. His name was Zacchaeus. Whereas Bartimaeus was considered by the general populace to be merely of no account in Jericho, Zacchaeus, was heartily **hated**. He was a tax collector. He was a Jew who made his living by cooperating with the oppressors, the Romans. And in doing so he had managed to enrich himself, at the expense of his countrymen. So they despised him. In fact, it's probably safe to say that there wasn't a **more** despised man in all of Jericho.

This tax collector, at any rate, wished to see Jesus. As far as the **reason** for that desire is concerned, we are told only that he "sought to see Jesus who he was." Sounds like curiosity. But it must have been something more than that. For when he, being a short man, could not see Jesus for the press of the multitude, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to be able to see Jesus as He passed. Hardly the thing one would expect of a grown man, and a tax collector besides — if he were motivated by nothing more than idle curiosity. Perhaps it's true, as Calvin suggests, that there was put in his mind a "seed of godliness" — not yet **faith**, but a kind of **preparation** for it. It may be therefore that Zacchaeus himself would not have been able to explain **why** he wanted to look on Jesus. He knew only that he **did**; and he was willing to adopt rather unusual tactics in order to overcome obstacles in the way of doing so.

Imagine the surprise of Zacchaeus when Jesus stopped, looked up into the tree, and called him by name! The people crowding around Jesus were also surprised. At Jesus' word they too looked up into the tree; and whom should they see but that despised little publican. What in the world was **he** doing up in a **tree**? And when they heard Jesus announce to Zacchaeus that He would visit his house that day, their surprise turned to disgust. They began at once to grumble that Jesus was gone to be guest with a man that is a **sinner**. And so He was. Christ had in fact come into this world exactly in order to save those who are **lost**, those who are perishing under the wrath and curse of God because of their **sins**. Before He left Zacchaeus that day, He declared, "This day is salvation come to this house." . . .the least of these My brethren.

We ourselves possess the grace of

goodness only in so far as we walk in the footsteps of Him Who went about doing good. That means, then, that our goodness will be more than mere sentiment. It's easy enough, you know, to talk much and even eloquently about duty to those who are in need. It's easy enough to feel deep sympathy for those who are dying of starvation in Ethiopia, and to feel outrage over the suffering of the victims of war in Afghanistan or Nicaragua. It's easy enough, too, to **wish for** opportunity to show one's generosity on some grand scale. What's harder is to **take** opportunities as they come our way every day. Do we perhaps hear no call for compassion, and see no fit recipient for our benevolence? Then we're not listening, or looking. Jesus found it everywhere. And, oh, what it cost Him to reach out to help those who had need! Just to dine with Zacchaeus earned Him the animosity of the more distinguished citizens of Jericho. But the ultimate price was paid just a little more than a week later, when He accomplished, on the cross, that work by which He merited the salvation of which He spoken to Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus.

Yes, "doing good" does involve sacrifice. The charity of which the world boasts will be found, on examination, either to have cost the dispensers of it very little of what they truly valued, or to have gained for them honors which they valued more. But how about us? Do we find it relatively easy to be liberal in offering **God's** riches ("We wish you the Lord's blessing"), and difficult to part with our **own** (Here's $800 for the school drive)? Be followers of **Christ**, Who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor. Help the saints, the least and the greatest; for in doing that, you serve the Lord Jesus. Then look forward to the day of judgment and those blessed words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; . . .enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

As long as your complaints about the church, and your efforts in improve the church, are motivated by **self**, because the imperfections annoy **you** or displease **you**, and because the church falls short of **your** ideals, then you are on the wrong path.

Then if your efforts fail, you will grumble because your needs are not fulfilled and your rights not honored. And eventually you will perhaps withdraw yourself as from something unworthy of your labours.

But one

But once you realize that **not my honor** but the **honor of God** is the true motive for the battle against evil, then the beauty of simple obedience will become clear to you. . . .

Then, too, it no longer matters if there are no immediate results upon your efforts and protests against evil. **That make no difference at all.**

For you realize that you have no right or claim to a model church. You acknowledge yourself a humble sinner whose imperfections add to the corruption of the Church.

Abraham Kuiper

The Fruit of the Spirit
GOODNESS

by Mary Beth Lubbers
Teacher at South Holland
Protestant Reformed School

. . . for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. Ruth 3:11

Tucked between the saber rattling of the Book of Judges and the power and panoply of the six books about the kings of Israel lies the quiet little Book of Ruth. It consists in its entirety of just 85 verses. It is the one book in the Bible which devotes itself to the domestic history of a woman—a foreigner in Israel, no less! In idyllic, pastoral scenes, it leads us in four short chapters from famine, poverty, and untimely deaths right up to the splendor of David's throne.

The Book of Ruth, like all the other books in the Old Testament, does not speak primarily of men and women—although we will meet some memorable one in its few, short verses. Its intent is not to promenade its noble people—although we will come to admire several spiritual blue bloods on its pages. Above all, this book speaks about God. In its simple, rural narrative, we catch a glimpse of the goodness of God as He remembers His covenant faithfulness in the midst of blatant infidelty. And on its pages we see Jehovah's goodness as He reaches His redemptive arm across all nations, tongues, and tribes to save His own. In the Book of Ruth we see the goodness of God as He transforms children of wrath, Moabites, into the finest tradition of Israelite maidens.

The exemplary conduct of at least three of the leading characters in the Book of Ruth could well be the subject for the fruit of the Holy Spirit, goodness.

Certainly Boaz, who is wholly characterized by godly dignity, integrity, and benevolence, could depict this fruit of the Spirit. Christlike, he is willing to serve as the redeemer for the crumbling household of Elimelech by marrying Ruth (at her instigation and request) and thus return the parcel of land to Elimelech's posterity. By Ruth's own declaration, Boaz is the first in all of Bethlehem to speak "friendly unto thine handmaid" Ruth 2:13. (What a sad commentary on Israel's refusal to show hospitality to the "stranger within thy gates." Is this also a commentary on us today?) Every action and consideration of Boaz, even to the least of his employees, is exemplified by goodness.

We could even pay homage to Naomi, the saintly old woman in the account. For although it is true that she erred greatly in leaving the land of Israel with her husband and sons (as is marked by the judgment of God upon each step of her walk in the land of Moab), nevertheless, it must have been through Naomi's instruction that Ruth

had come to know and love Naomi's God and land, her people and faith. And then, there is Naomi's own solemn and humble confession, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. . .call me Mara . . ." Ruth 1:21 and 20. What delights God more than acknowledgement of wrongdoing and confession of sin? Yes, Naomi was good.

But this particular book is not named the Book of Boaz, nor is it called the Book of Naomi, but it has come down to us in the holy canon of Scripture as the Book of Ruth. So let's see, now, how Ruth the Moabitess reflects the goodness of God in her own life and stands in her simple piety as a wholesome example of the fruit of the Spirit called goodness.

• • • • • • •

Alone in her humble cottage with the hours stretching long and silent ahead of her, Naomi had much time to ponder and reflect. As she had done each morning since their return from Moab, Ruth had left in the early hours to begin her monotonous task of picking up the grain left behind by the reapers.

Naomi was disturbed that once the excitement of their return had settled down, no one in all of Bethlehem had done anything to make Ruth feel accepted. The two of them, poor and destitute, widows indeed. were left severely alone. Naomi did not mind for herself that she was kept icily at bay—for she knew she deserved the distance at which she was held—but her heart ached to see Ruth, a fledgling in the faith, subjected to the proud and scornful looks of her neighbors.

Naomi had tried to dissuade Ruth from returning to Bethlehem with her. She had told Ruth in no uncertain terms before their departure from Moab that prospects for anything pleasant in Israel were dim. She had plainly told Ruth that the widow's plight in Israel was grim. With no sons or husband to provide, poverty would stalk them. She had even discouraged any hopes that Ruth might have of remarrying. She had warned both Orpah and Ruth that it was clear that the hand of God was against her (Ruth 1:13). So Ruth had been prepared for unpleasant physical circumstances; but how could she ever have been prepared for such open hostility as they faced in Bethlehem? Was this all there was to experience in the blessedness of choosing for Jehovah? Yet Ruth quietly went about her own business, seemingly untouched by the cold looks and inhospitable treatment of Bethlehem's inhabitants.

Ruth's primary concern was for the physical care of her mother-in-law. And no unneighborly attitude could stand in the way of what she considered to be her duty. Naomi was deeply touched by Ruth's devotion to her. Ruth cared for Naomi's earthly needs by gleaning from early morning until late afternoon in the hot, dusty fields of Bethlehem. Back-breaking work, it was, only compensated by the few stray strands of barley which she was able to gather in the corners of the field—but so necessary to keep herself and Naomi from starving. Yes, she and Ruth were hungry. She, Naomi, who had once been a wealthy landowner's wife, faced each new day with the primeval need for food. Sometimes, it didn't seem possible, such a longing for food as the two of them endured. But God had been good, for He had brought them home at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Naomi remembered with some embarrassment the day that Ruth had worked in Boaz's field and coming home had taken parched corn and bread from her pocket, reserved from her own midday meal, to share with the hungry Naomi. Naomi recalled how that she could not even exchange pleasantries or converse with Ruth until after she had warded off the hunger pangs by quickly eating Ruth's kindly-saved lunch (Ruth 2:18).

Ruth was certainly loyal to her bereft mother-in-law. Her love was deep and pure. Freely she gave of herself for the good and service of Naomi. Not once did she intimate by glance or word that caring for her aged mother-in-law was more than she had bargained for—bothersome, a distasteful chore for her.

Naomi was well-aware too, that not only was Ruth keeping them from virtual starvation, but that she heeded old Naomi's counsel, as well, never chafing (as so many young ones did) under Naomi's "old-fashioned" advice.

As a new convert, Ruth had many things to learn about Israel's customs and culture. She listened intently to all Naomi's wisdom and experience as they fellowshipped in the evenings. Ruth paid attention to Naomi's gentle but urgent warnings that she stay in Boaz' field to glean because she might be sexually molested if she went to work in another field (Ruth 2:22).

Often in the weeks following their return to Bethlehem, Naomi recalled Ruth's eloquent and timeless confession as the two of them had stood near the bend of the stream which led from Moab to Bethlehem. Here Naomi had urged her two daughters-in-law to return to the land of Moab. Orpah had done so, but Ruth had clung to her and answered in ardency:

"Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee. . ."

Had Ruth known then the circumstances calculated to discourage her, would she have been so determined in her convictions? Is newly-found faith so strong that it can unflinchingly face up to ostracism, loneliness, poverty, and grief? Why hadn't Moab been able to entice her or hold her back with its comfortable prospects of companionship, marriage, and the good life?

Naomi longed for rest for Ruth—a home and husband—but knew that this would be highly unlikely in the land of Israel. Yet Naomi had done all she could to warn this innocent one that her reasons for coming to Bethlehem had better not be thoughts of marriage. Old Naomi had no sons in her womb and had explicitly told Ruth that even if she did, it would be too long until they were grown up. And Naomi, who knew the law well, also assured Ruth that although her son Mahlon had married Ruth while their family had sojourned in Moab, no Israelite would wed a Moabite in his own land. Nor would there be any welcome for them in Bethlehem, for poor they would be and poverty was a sure sign of Jehovah's displeasure.

Yet Ruth persevered in the face of many obstacles. She stood staunchly by her confession. She never wavered from it. She did not yet know this Jehovah intimately, but one thing was certain, she had separated herself unequivocally from Moab. She had chosen **for** Israel. She had denied Moab's god Chemosh. She had embraced Jehovah, the one true God. She would not falter for her entire confidence was **Jehovah**. He would not fail her. In just a short time, she had come

to love Israel and its people. By grace, she would not forsake them either. In truth, she meant it: nothing but death would separate her and Naomi. Naomi's own faith was strengthened by the goodness of her daughter-in-law who was willing to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. . ." Philippians 3:8.

And so, Ruth gives herself over to goodness. Out of goodness she requests permission to gather grain in the fields of Boaz, although the law clearly stated that the poor and stranger could glean in the fields at harvest time (Lev. 19:9 and 10). In humility, she places herself beneath Boaz' most menial of servants (Ruth 2:13). Out of goodness, for Naomi's sake and so that Elimelech's name will not expire nor his inheritance be lost, she contracts a marriage with her late father-in-law's kinsman, Boaz, to bear a child for Naomi in her old age when it was freely acknowledged that she would have made a God-fearing wife for any man in Bethlehem (Ruth 3:11).

Even Boaz praises Ruth's essential goodness, her virtue, when he says, "You have shown more kindness in the latter end (to Naomi in agreeing to a marriage within the family of Elimelech) than at the beginning (when you left Moab and chose for God, Israel, and the care of your mother-in-law)" Ruth 3:10.

Old Naomi's ears would thrill to hear the confession of her neighbors that Ruth was better to Naomi than **seven** sons (Ruth 4:15), this being the supreme Old Testament blessing for a woman (see I Samuel 2:5).

• • • • • • •

Naomi's heart was full. No longer did she want her friends to call her empty. Pleasantness would be her name once more. Truly Jehovah had changed her tears of bitterness into a well of joy.

Fondly she clasped Obed, the tiny son of Boaz and Ruth, to her bosom, and looking into his infant eyes, beheld down throught he ages the Great Goodness of God, Jesus Christ.

Do You Really Pray?

I often say my prayers,
But do I ever pray?
And do the wishes of my heart
Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down
And worship gods of stone,
As offer to the living God
A prayer of words alone.

For words without the heart,
The Lord will never hear;
Now will He to those lips attend
Whose prayer is not sincere.

The Fruit of the Spirit
Developing the Virtue of Goodness

by Pastor Ron Van Overloop

The aspect of the fruit of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, which occupies our attention at this time, is goodness.

Goodness stands closely related to the virtue of gentleness - which immediately precedes it in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit. It is said that goodness is the activity which proceeds from the virtue of gentleness. Gentleness is potential goodness, and goodness is energizing gentleness.

Goodness is desiring the happiness of others and actually doing good for them. It is a seeking after my neighbor's spiritual, eternal well-being.

An act is good, not first according to the opinions of men. Rather an act is good when it can stand before the brilliant glare of God's righteousness. God determines whether something is good or not. God determines goodness.

Sometimes this goodness is giving my neighbor actual, concrete benefits, both materially and spiritually. It is visiting or telephoning the sick. It is sending a card or letter to someone with a need. It is exercising the gift of understanding. It is giving a cup of cold water in the time of need.

At other times this goodness is rebuking, correcting, or chastising my neighbor for his sin. Goodness can have a sharpness in it, as an expression of righteous indignation against sin.

But the edge is taken off the sharpness because the obvious motive of goodness is love for the neighbor. This love is the desire for his salvation or spiritual advancement. This kind of concern for my neighbor's spiritual well-being cannot but be evidenced in expressions for his physical and material well-being.

This goodness puts the needs of others first. It requires personal sacrifice.

Well put is the searching question: Is goodness, as a fruit of the Spirit, evident in our lives?

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Goodness is a virtue which is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. For goodness to be in evidence, the Spirit of Christ must be active. The Holy Spirit, working irresistibly, effects the virtue of goodness within the heart and in the life of the elected, regenerated and called saint.

How, then do we develop this virtue?

The consciousness that this virtue is a fruit of the Spirit does not make the saint lethargic, but, much to the contrary, gives energy to his faith.

1. To develop a fruit of the Spirit, the child of God is driven to prayer. Fervently and ceaselessly we are to ask for this gift of grace. Pleading the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ever have reason to make this request known unto our heavenly Father. Seeking goodness of the Lord, we are assured that we shall find it. For He

gives His Spirit and grace to those who humbly and continually ask for them of Him.

2. For the development of the virtue of goodness it is necessary that we consider Christ.

Some would think that we should begin by looking at our neighbor's needs and letting those needs move us to pity and action. There is a time and place for learning our neighbor's needs.

But more important, even an absolute necessity, is that we look at Christ.

This looking at Christ, He Himself calls, "learn of Me" (Matt. 11:29).

This is not an intellectual learning, for according to our intellect it is foolishness to do good to those who hate us and despitefully use us. Rather this is a spiritual discernment. We must know Christ. We learn that the spiritual quality of His heart in relation to God and men was that He was meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29). We will shake off the yoke of doing good unless we learn meekness in Christ.

From Chist we learn the joy of doing the will of our Father, rather than our own will. From Christ we learn that the possibility for doing good lies in the motive of love for God. This love for God is because He first loved us and makes us ever the objects of His goodness. As God loves us and gives us good things, we love our neighbors and do good things for them.

This is what we learn of Christ.

Then we are children of our Father Who is in heaven (look up Matt. 5:44, 45).

3. The development of the virtue of goodness is greatly aided when we remember that goodness is not a matter of choice, but a command of God. "Depart from evil, and do good." "Trust in the LORD, and do good." Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification." "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Psalm 34:14; 37:3, 27; Romans 12:21; 15:2; Galatians 6:10).

4. The virtue of goodness is developed when we gain a healthy concern for the spiritual well-being of our neighbor. Then the words and acts of goodness will be motivated first by a concern for his soul.

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Doing good to our neighbor is easy when we consider that, unlike the unconverted, we can, and are able to do good. Our gracious God has created within us a new man, which takes to goodness, just as the old man takes to evil.

Doing good is easy, even to the evil, when we love God. Recalling His many goodnesses to us we love Him. And we love our neighbor. Not considering first our neighbor, but first God's goodness to us, we are inspired to good for others. And we, recalling the undeserved goodness of God to us, can love our neighbor and respond to His need.

Doing good is easy because we have the ever-present grace of God to uphold us and the Comforter to strengthen and guide us.

Indifference in religion, is the first step to apostasy from religion.
William Secker

Current Events and Comments
Stress and Teen-age Suicide

by John Kalsbeek Jr.

Traffic accidents, homicides, and suicides are the main causes of teen-age death in the United States today. And not necessarily in the above order. Many in the medical and psychiatric fields believe suicide is the #1 killer—that a lot of accidents and homicides among the young are really suicides in disguise.

According to a Grand Rapids Press article of October 22, 1983, "Teen Suicide", "more than 5,600 young men and women under the age of 25 took their lives in 1981, the most recent year with figures available."

In an earlier January 1, 1979 Grand Rapids Press article, "Teen Age Suicide: In Search of an Answer", the author Randy Shipps wrote:

- "nearly 5,000 Americans under age 24 committed suicide in 1977."
- "An additional 100,000 tried to do so."
- "200,000 to 300,000 more contemplated it."
- "This means that 10 to 15% of America's young people had contemplated it."
- "The suicide rate among the young has nearly tripled in the last two decades."

In "A Cry For Help", an article written for **Family Circle** Magazine by Dr. Mary Giffin and Carol Felsenthal, a study of 7,000 high school students showed that one in five had severe feelings of failure, alienation, loneliness, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts.

According to these writers an average of 18 youngsters kill themselves everyday and about 57 children and adolescents attempt suicide every hour.

These are sobering statistics, people. The young teen-agers who commit suicide and attempt to commit suicide come from every stratum of society. They live in the rich upper classes of society, in the affluent middle classes of society and in the poverty stricken lower classes of society. The victims include girls as well as boys. Some have had religious upbringings and others have not. They include whites, blacks and people of other races.

Suicide is, of course, a violation of the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill". To kill oneself is as much a breaking of the sixth commandment as to kill someone else. Perhaps even more so. A person who murders another person is alive to be sorry for his sin and to repent of it. This is hardly possible when one takes his own life. Whether this implies that a suicide is, through this very act of self murder, condemned to eternal destruction is best left to the Lord's judgment. It is, however, something that anyone contemplating suicide should consider carefully before taking this final step of self destruction.

In Scripture in the six specific instances where suicide was actually achieved, none of them were God-

fearing people. The six I have in mind are Abimelech, the son of Gideon; Saul and his armour bearer (we know little about the life of Saul's armour bearer so it's difficult to make a determinatior in this case); Ahithophel, David's counselor; Zimri, the sixth king of the ten tribes; and Judas Iscariot. In one case we have recorded for us an attempted suicide—the Philippian jailor. Though he was indeed a child of God, he was unconverted at the time he contemplated the taking of his own life. God powerfully prevented him from committing this rash deed.

I think it unlikely that a child of God would actually take his or her own life. But there may be extenuating circumstances in which a child of God may be mentally incompetent and irresponsible to such an extent that he or she accomplishes his or her own death. I believe, therefore, it is best to leave this matter to God.

Those who have made it their life's work to study the problem of suicide are very much concerned about the rapid increases in the past couple of decades in teen-age suicide.

Although people have been destroying themselves since the beginning of time, it's the escalating frequency in our modern age that is causing rising concern.

Medical men and psychiatrists are searching for the reasons why teenagers and young adults are turning more and more to suicide as a way out of difficulties.

One of the primary causes has to do with stress. In our competitive society today, young people often feel pressured to excel, to get good grades, to earn that scholarship in order to go to college.

Not only is their stress in the school situation but also in the home. "Family life also has been in disarray, with the high divorce rate and the added pressure when both parents work. Teen-agers see a situation in which roughly half of all first marriages end in divorce." (U.S. News and World Report, April 2, 1984)

Sometimes it's family problems such as parents quarreling and fighting, or a brother or sister who refuses to honor and respect a parent. Stress can also result when parents openly criticize those in authority.

Tension and stressful situations also occur when young people begin to date. In our modern society young people are allowed and even encourages to date before they are mature enough to date. They have their wild flings and disasterous break-ups and aren't mature enough to cope. They become depressed.

The need to make career decisions can cause tension. The media is enamored with the rich in society and the possibility of getting rich. Careers for young women and executive positions for young men are held before the eyes of young people in all their "dazzling brightness". Besides this, larger numbers of young people are competing for these high paying jobs and thus, not everyone is successful. The urge, the desire, the compulsion to get ahead in the world, have real potential for stress.

Furthermore, stress can be a direct result of the death of a loved one: of a parent, a brother or sister, a girlfriend or a boyfriend.

Another factor that often leads to suicide is the increased "incidence of drugs and alcohol abuse and promiscuity in schools which adds to the confusion and chaos of young people

and hurts their self-esteem." (U.S. News, April 2, 1984)

Stress and tension are realities for everyone. Yet it's something one learns to accept and deal with as he/she becomes older and more experienced. This age and experience teen-agers just don't have. Anxiety builds up and suicide begins to appeal more and more as the way out.

Stress is, no doubt, a contributing factor to many suicides. However, let us recognize that most, if not all, stress and anxiety is a result of sin. As parents it's important that we recognize this.

What's needed to avert suicidal tendencies in our children and young people are a strong commitment to the Reformed faith and strong, caring and loving families.

Sociologist Steven Stack of Penn State University hits the nail right on the head. He says that "a decline in religious values among the young makes them less resilent in facing life's difficulties. Religious activities clearly help to prevent suicide, yet this is a period in which it is harder to be religious."

Young people, "commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass". Psalm 37:5. Pray when you are anxious and when you despair for your Father in heaven is ever ready to hear and answer your prayers. Don't be surprised when you face stressful situations—rather expect them. Paul understands stress when he writes in II Corinthians 4:8-10, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our bodies." Stress is common to everyone. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are the only one in the whole world with problems. One of the common denominators of all mankind is that each experience stress.

Face your difficulties head on with the Bible in your hand. Suicide is not an option for a child of God.

Parents, make yourself available to your teen-agers. Learn to become good listeners. Hear out your teen-age sons and daughters. Oftentimes we are impatient with them and not very understanding. The obvious result is that our young people have, in many instances, developed a lack of trust. They are afraid to discuss their problems with us becuase they are afraid of an outburst from us. We need to be more caring and more loving. We have to be careful not to play down what are to the developing teen-ager most serious problems. With an impatient wave of the hand we can so easily discourage needful and healthy communication. We have a tendency to make ourselves so busy that we don't have time for the precious gift that God has given us—our families. Fellow parents, let us be constant in prayer beseeching our Father in heaven for an abundance of wisdom and grace.

Stress, young people, is common in the world of men since the day Adam fell. Adam never once experienced stress in the state of rectitude. But the instant he ate of the forbidden fruit he found out what stress was all about. He and Eve, his wife, no longer looked forward to walking and talking with the Lord in the garden. They tried to hide from Him instead. Since that day, sinful man has had to experience the stress brought about by sinful thoughts

and actions.

Suicide should not be once named among us. Young people, or anyone for that matter who might be considering this final step, suicide is not the solution.

Live each day as unto the Lord. Strengthen yourself in the Lord when troubles overwhelm you. Be spiritually minded and mindless about the material things of the earth that moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through to steal. Remember that God is always in the midst of His people and ever ready to help in time of trouble. That is His promise to you. Take Him at His Word.

Critique

WE HAVE FEARS

by Ben Wigger

Fear is a powerful human emotion. And each one of us has experienced it at some time or another. Also consider the many different examples of fear that we read about in the Bible. Adam hid himself in the garden because of it; Abraham lied about his wife, saying "she is my sister" because of it; Jacob spaced others between himself and Esau because of it; Elijah fled from the face of Jezebel because of it; Peter denied his Lord because of it; and on and on the list could go.

Today it is not at all uncommon to hear of those who have fears which to us may seem completely groundless and in some cases even very foolish. For example, you hear of those who are so afraid of germs that they stay indoors at all times, a prisoner of their own fears. Perhaps they even fail to realize it, but the "fear" itself was far more devastating to their life than any germs they may have avoided ever would have been.

Many of the fears which we are to experience are groundless. They spring from our imagination more than from reality, and we ought to do our best to simply put these fears behind us quickly and firmly as possible.

This is not to say, however, that all our fears are groundless. Many real possibilities for pain, injury, and loss in our lives do exist. And we really never do know what tomorrow will bring. But at this point we take a different path; while the world sees only doubt and confusion, we see the hand of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is He who holds the future.

With that thought then as our constant focus, let's look at three fears which we all share, and which if not dealt with properly, can have a very negative influence on our Christian walk.

A major fear which is experienced by almost everyone is a fear of being disliked. Perhaps this is especially true of you young people. It is so very painful to be rejected or disliked by

those around you, those whose favorable opinion you most want. We all have a very strong desire to be accepted by our peers. And this desire often causes us to do things which we know are wrong simply to gain acceptance.

The first question which ought to be asked when a decision is being made shouldn't be what will others think or say, but is it right? We should be concerned about what others think. It's natural to want people's acceptance and approval; not at any price however.

A strong commitment to Christ is exactly what we need to rid ourselves of this kind of fear. Doing what is right in Christ's eyes will be our greatest desire. He is our Light and Salvation, whom shall we fear?

Another fear which is quite common among all of us is a fear of failure. No one wants to strike out with the bases loaded. Failure can be embarrassing. We admire those who are successful. But we all have to make mistakes. We shouldn't forget that we all must go through a learning process. However, we must be willing to take the initiative when it comes to the learning process. After all, you can not expect to pass a History test if you don't study the assigned chapters in the book.

Fear of failure can immobilize us, and we certainly don't want to rush headlong into any situation before considering all the possibilities of failure. But neither can we afford to be paralyzed by our fear of failure.

Another fear which is very common among us is a fear of the future. Will we have a good job after school? Will we have enough money? Suppose our health fails. Will we be getting married?

Christ, however, knew that these concerns would be very real to us; and He addresses them for us in Matthew 6 and Luke 12 where He says, among other things, not to be anxious for your life, but rather "seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you".

It is not God's plan for us that we wring our hands in fear about tomorrow. We should work and plan and do all that we can about tomorrow, but then we should just leave the rest at the feet of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

And this is exactly where our confidence comes from. We know that it would be wrong to say that if we just serve the Lord our future will always be bright and totally free from sorrow or pain. The Lord has not promised this. Often the Lord does send His children through some deep water. Why, isn't always clear to us. We do know though that God cares so much for us that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. So we cast ourselves upon Him, placing our future in His hands. It is simply a matter of trusting Him to do what is best. When this is done, our anxiety over the future will go away, and we are overcome with peace.

As Christians it is inconceivable that we would both trust and fear at the same time. Fear and trust are like water and oil, they simply do not mix.

Fear can not be removed with a simple operation. There is no medication we can take to rid ourselves of it. But trust in the Lord can. "I will trust" said the Psalmist, "and not be afraid . . .I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears".

Peace comes from knowing that God is in control and through knowing that He has a purpose for allowing everything that touches our lives.

Truth Vs. Error

APOSTASY IN THE LAST DAYS

7. Apostate Angels Reserved For Judgment

by Rev. Robert C. Harbach

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."—Jude 6.

With no article before **angels**, a contrast is formed between "having saved people" (v. 5) and "angels, too, those not having kept the first place belonging to themselves." The text goes on, "but having deserted their own dwelling place, He has kept for a great day's judgment in everlasting bonds under darkness" (v. 13, blackness).

Here we have Jude's second instance of apostasy from the faith, that of the fallen angels. The difference between these two instances lies in the fact that as for the company of mankind, all fell into sin and death, God having ordained that Fall only after having first predestinated out of the unfallen lump of mankind a church chosen to everlasting life, the vessels of mercy, and ordained the rest to condemnation, the vessels of wrath; and, as for the company of angels, He has sovereignly ordained some as elect, confirmed in holiness, and the rest to fall irrecoverably. The verse before us calls attention to two things: (1) the sin of the angels, and (2) the punishment for their sin. Their punishment was both proximate and ultimate. Immediately they had to leave their own habitation. Now they are presently kept in everlasting chains under darkness. Ultimately, their final judgment will occur at the last Great Day.

We consider first that "angels, too, having kept not the first place belonging to themselves. . ." Their first estate, first place, could be translated "their principality," or "their origin." The great excellency and dignity of angels is expressed by Paul: they are called "thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" (Col. 1:16). The fallen angels, demons, in their satanic power and wicked subtilty are still called **principalities** and **powers** which we Christians must wrestle against (Eph. 6:12). If we translate it "their origin" or, as in the Authorized Version, "their first estate," then more forcefully underscored is the misery of their fall from their original righteousness, holiness and truth. (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 8:44).

The angels' first estate was a happy one. Our happiness is expressed by the condition of the angels: "They are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). The manna was called

"angels' food" (Ps. 78:25), which means for Israel's necessary food there could be no better. The "tongue of angels" (I Cor. 13:1) means a language of the most beautiful sound and highest intelligence. By their language they contemplate God, communicate with Him and embrace Him in holy delight. Furthermore, the elect angels were chosen in Christ, their Head (Col. 1:16), from all eternity, to infallibly remain in the holiness, truth and love of God in which they were created.

Peter speaks of "the angels that sinned." Most likely, this was the sin of pride (I Tim. 3:6), Satan's original sin, in which he aspired to be as the Most High God. (Isa. 14:12, 13). So with him they desired to "be as gods," the effect of this being a purpose to reverse the immutable Creator-creature relationship! Satan since has been viewed as the usurper "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). So the angels' rebellion was against the empire and sovereignty of God. Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. But these deviant angels were dissatisfied with their extremely high station of being heavenly ministers. They thought they deserved higher position. As **ministers** they aimed at being **sovereigns**. Their sin, in effect, was to make their Sovereign their minister. Thus pride goeth before a fall.

How did they, sinless beings, come to sin? There was no tempter to influence them, no temptation outside themselves. They sinned of their own free will. This is a mystery, as to how an intelligent being with a good will can will to become evil. However, their will was created mutable, so that it could change and fall with no chance for recovery. That is what happened. Of their own free will they kept not their first estate, left their heavenly habitation and remained no more in the truth.

As to when the angels fell, we would have to say, not before the sixth creation day. They may have been created on the first day when the heavens, their habitation, and light (they were angels of light) were made. Yet on whatever day they were created, on the sixth day, when all the creatures had been made, "God say everything that He had made, and, behold, it was (and continued to be) very good." "Now if the angels had sinned before, this could not have been said; and yet they must have fallen before Adam fell, because it was the. . .devil. . .that beguiled Eve, and so was the. . .means of the fall of man." (John Gill). They did not fall in the very instant of their creation, lest it appear they were naturally and inherently evil. A very little time elapsed between their creation and fall to show the mutability of their perfection.

Their immediate punishment was that **they** kept not their first estate, having deserted their own dwelling place. Peter tells us that "**God** spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell" (II Pet. 2:4). It was both **their** act and **God's** act. (Cp. Joseph's being sold down into Egypt and Christ's crucifixion. Gen. 45:8; 50:20; Acts 2:23). Then John writing on this point of the angels' fall says, "their place was found no more in heaven" for "the devil. . .and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev. 12:8).

Their continuing punishment is that God has reserved and still does reserve them in everlasting chains. The translation "chains" is accurate and

very graphic. The chains may be said to be chains of stricken conscience bound upon them by divine justice. Conscience strikes them relentlessly with the knowledge that their damnation is just. These are also chains of despair of any deliverance. For their expectation is of more judgment to come, Matt. 8:29, while they must be held in their lost estate for ever and ever. Therefore, we could also say that they are bound in the chains of God's eternal decrees which never release them from their imprisonment, punishment or the condemnation to which they have been inexorably and irrevocably ordained.

The remainder of their present punishment is their being kept in these everlasting chains **under darkness**. This is hell: the blackness of darkness for ever. But their full judgment has not yet been executed upon them. They are like condemned criminals kept in prison awaiting on "death's row" their capital punishment. God keeps them **for great day's judgment.**

This will be their ultimate punishment. Sentence is to be executed upon them in eternal misery and torment (Matt. 8:29). So the worst of their judgment and punishment is to come. Added to the chains of darkness is the judgment of the great day. This shall come to pass before an assembled universe, before the tribunal of Christ and His saints. Christ shall come with the glorified saints and the holy angels, while the evil angels shall still be His prisoners. Their ultimate prison is in the hell "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Hell is a double hell, that which it is now, a being "horrible tormented in flame" (Lk. 16:24), and what it is ultimately to be, "cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8).

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of all the apostates throughout the ages and of the judgment to be executed upon them all at the second coming of Christ (Jude 14, 15). Abraham, too, believed in the Judge of all the earth who will do right (Gen. 18:25) in final judgment. Also in those early patriarchal days, Job prophesied that his living Redeemer would stand on the earth in the latter day, raise the dead, himself among them, and therefore Job's friends, and all men, must know that there is a judgment. (Job 19:25, 26, 29). Hannah, too, prophesied that "the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth and shall give strength to His King, and exalt the horn (power) of His Anointed" (Messiah) to accomplish this. (I Sam. 2:10). Solomon prophesied that "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for" that. Also he warned young men that for merely rejoicing in their youth and living in their own ways, for all these things God will bring them into judgment; indeed He will bring every work of each man to judgment. (Eccles. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14). Jesus denounced worse judgment on some cities than on others, in fact, it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for such heathen cities as Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah than for those just denounced. (Matt. 11:22, 24). One of the principles of the doctrine of Christ is that of the final "eternal judgment." (Heb. 6:1, 2).

One of the marks of the true church is the exercise of Christian discipline in admonition and, if necessary, excommunication. Because the church continually becomes defiled with the presence of impenitent sinners it must be purified and cleansed. The unclean thing must be put away from

among us, lest Christ's church, like the apostate angels, become an abomination in His sight. In the reading of the "Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper" we, in effect, charge sinners living in our midst in open and secret sins to go out from among us of their own accord, if they will not repent and amend their lives. For we do not excuse them, but excommunicate them when they refuse to be reformed. We lovingly call upon the wicked doer to forsake his evil way and return to the Lord, but if he will not do this, then he must know that he cannot be allowed to dishonor Christ's name and His church by his hypocritical profession of faith and his corrupting influences on God's people. The watchmen on the walls of Zion have it as their work to detect these deceivers and corrupters, unmask them, then purge the church of them. Our aim in the churches is to "admit only. . .that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God." (Belgic Confession, XXXII). So let every true Christian church member daily practice walking near to God, daily seeking His preserving mercy (v. 1, 2), kneeling at the foot of the Cross, there seeking daily forgiveness for daily sins. Then from the instance of the apostate angels reserved for judgment, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

From the Pastor's Study
THE PRINCE OF LIFE

by Rev. D.H. Kuiper

> **"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." Genesis 45:5**
>
> **"And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Genesis 45:7**

As we continue to hear the Word of God on the life of Joseph we ought to ponder the old truth that "It is man that proposes but it is God that disposes." Acting with wisdom and power, God demonstrates to us most clearly in the life of Joseph that without destroying or ignoring the will of man He carries His great and marvelous purpose through to completion. No life evidences more clearly than does Joseph's life that "all things work together for good to them that love God who are the called according to His purpose." If we continue to bear in mind that Joseph's struggles and suffering are a picture of what every faithful child of God must undergo, then we shall be instructed by these lessons from Genesis, but more, we shall be comforted as well.

We would remind you at this point that the life of Joseph was a life divinely designed to be a type of Christ. The details, experiences, and utterances of Joseph's life in many cases reflect the same in the Life of

Jesus. We have seen Joseph as the beloved son, the hated brother, the slandered alien, and the prophetic captive. In each case we found striking fulfillment in the life of Jesus, the Son of God, Who came unto His own and they received Him not, Who was slandered by Jews and Gentiles alike, and Who proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. We must have an eye for this once again as we look into the events recorded in Genesis 45. May our faith be as Joseph's faith, a mighty, indestructible, glorious power that leads us on to a quiet walk of trust in God, no matter what betides.

Last time we found Joseph in prison, interpreting dreams for the butler and baker of Pharoah. Now we find him in his exalted position in the court of Pharoah, and we want to look at him in that position especially as he comes into contact with his brothers who have come to buy food. How did Joseph come to such a high station in life? What has happened to him since we saw him in charge of the prison? Two years have passed since the incident with the butler and baker. At this time Pharoah himself has two dreams in one night, the well-known dreams of the fat and lean cows, and the good and bad ears of corn. (Confer Genesis 41.) After the wisemen and magicians of the court had shown themselves incompetent to interpret the dreams, the butler comes to his senses and says to Pharoah, "I do remember my faults this day." And he recounts his being in jail with the chief baker, their dreams, and Joseph's interpretation of them. "And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was: me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged."

After Joseph is summoned from the dungeon and Pharoah relates the dreams to him, God, to Whom all interpretations belong, once again gives to His servant-prophet the power to reveal His perfect will to Pharoah. In the dreams, which are identical in meaning, God shows that He is about to send seven years of prosperity and abundance upon the land, after which there will follow seven years of famine; so severe, in fact, that the abundance of former years will be consumed and completely forgotten. And there are two dreams, says Joseph, because the thing is established by God and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Then Joseph goes beyond the meaning of the dream. Still speaking as the prophet of God, he advises the king to seek out a man who is wise and discreet, to set this man over all the land of Egypt, and have him see to it that twenty percent of the abundance each year is laid away for use during the famine. Pharoah pondered the advise briefly, it seemed good to him, and he immediately appoints Joseph to this high position. The young Israelite receives the king's own ring, a golden chain about his neck, linen clothing, and the right to ride in the king's second chariot, to which the people bowed the knee! He is the second most powerful man in all the kingdom!

As the prosperous years roll by, Joseph shows himself a very competent overseer. Under his administration, "corn is gathered as the sand of the sea, very much, until they left numbering, for it was without number." Then came the seven years of famine. It was widespread and severe, touching all the surrounding countries, so that many came to Egypt to buy corn. Among those multitudes, in the second year of

the famine, were the brothers of Joseph. When they come to stand before Joseph, he recognizes them immediately, although they do not know who he is. "And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them." What an impressive scene! The mighty ruler Joseph, second in all the land; before him, ten men with empty sacks and empty hands. Doesn't it seem as if the tables are turned? What will Joseph do? Will he pay back in kind, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, for all the evil treatment he had received? Will he begin to recite his dreams, and say, "Didn't I tell you?" Or, will he practice those lessons his father had taught the family at home, the spiritual law expressed in I Peter 3:9, "Render to no one evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are hereunto called that ye should inherit a blessing." Do **you** know that lesson, and do **you** practice that in **your** life? Since vengeance belongeth unto the Lord, we are not to strike back at people when they look at us the wrong way, say something unkind, or treat us evilly. Rather, we are to answer with the soft answer that turns away wrath! That will usually bring an end to the fracas, and prevent things from blowing up. That was true of Joseph, wasn't it! He always had a higher purpose in mind than his own selfish, little purpose. In all his dealings with his brethren, he showed himself to be a real prince; a prince of peace and a prince of life!

In Genesis 42:25-26, we may read of the care that Joseph showed his brothers, and this was a natural kind of care, first of all. They departed with their beasts of burden laded with corn and other provisions. He did not have to help these Hebrews, and he certainly did not have to **give** them food, restoring their monty unto them. But Joseph is the divinely appointed means through which Jacob-Israel will receive their necessary portion. God had sent him to Egypt beforehand with the purpose of preserving this precious posterity. The power of life and death is in Joseph's hands, and as the prince of life he provides for his brethren.

But there is more. Joseph's actions reveal that he understands a deep principle that was spelled out by Moses, and later by Jesus, that "Man shall not live by bread alone." The young man understood that his brothers had a deep need that earthly corn and bread could not touch. In times past they had been wicked, cruel men and as such they could not represent that posterity which the Lord would preserve for His own glory and praise. There was a famine in their souls, because things were not right between God and themselves nor between their neighbor and themselves. And if this matter was not put right, they would **die**! For this reason, before Joseph reveals himself to them, he knows he must bring them to understand that true life consists not in food, raiment, or possessions, but in the proper worship of God, in confession of His sovereignty and goodness, in obedience to His will, and in the acknowledgement that He must be thanked in all things.

The fact that his brothers were carnal, unspiritual men bothered Joseph very much; that would bother us also wouldn't it, if we had family members who showed no spiritual life? He understood, however, that he could not change his brothers' hearts, but he did put into operation a plan to **try them** in order to determine whether

there had been any change in the past several years. This plan originated not in Joseph's heart, but it came from God Who had raised up Joseph to this high position for this very purpose! What stands out, therefore, in this dramatic history is that Joseph's pre-eminence does not reveal itself in lording it over others, but in seeking the welfare of others and **serving** others! How we need to learn this lesson! God puts us in various positions and offices in His church and kingdom. He does that, graciously, in order that we may be servants there. But often times we make of those offices and positions opportunities to serve ourselves! Not Joseph! He functions humbly and willingly in God's plan to preserve a spiritual posterity. And in this sense, too, Joseph is the prince of life!

So the young ruler sets himself to the prodigious task of proving their spiritual character. In Genesis 41-44 we see that this test consists of four important steps: 1.) First, the test of their attitude; was it proud and haughty or could they be reasoned with? 2.) The test of their integrity; did they really have a brother at home? 3.) The test of their covetousness and jealousy; would they object to Benjamin's greater portion? 4.) The test of their love for Jacob. From the history of these chapters we learn that a tremendous change had taken place in these brothers! Very plainly they were sorry for what they had done in respect to their father and Joseph. They had been living shallow, carnal lives apart from God, but now with new hearts they began to enjoy life with God in the way of His commandments. But since life with God can be enjoyed only in the way of repentance, conversion, and sanctification, God raised up Joseph as the prince of life to bring his brethren to the consciousness of these things! Through him God gave corn, but also through him God gives life!

In all this history, Joseph is a very beautiful picture of the Prince of Life Whom God raised up in the fulness of time. We read in Acts 3:15 that Jesus is "the Prince of Life Whom God hath raised from the dead." Jesus is the Prince of Life in the natural sense in that God rules through Him so that all things (prosperity and famine, health and sickness) come to pass by the hand of Jesus. But He is the Prince of Life especially in that "God hath exalted Him with His right hand to be a Prince and Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31) He is the Good Shepherd Who gives His life that the true Israel of God, the precious posterity of God, might have life by a great deliverance! That great deliverance is the salvation of our souls through the terrible suffering and death of the cross. With wicked hands He was nailed to that cross, that He might become the exalted Prince of Life!

As such, He knows how to deliver His people. He gives life through amazing regeneration, He maintains us through the means of grace, and He leads us onward in such a way that we **reveal** that life unto the glory of God at the appearing of Jesus. As in O.T. times, the people of God sometimes show themselves to be selfish, covetous, worldly minded, and altogether unworthy. Then the Prince of Life, in great love for His own, sends the hardships and the judgments that will bring us to our senses and to our knees, quickening in us a spiritual attitude, and leading us into the enjoyment of His salvation.

BIBLE MATH

How many changes of clothing did Joseph give his brother Benjamin? To find out:

1. Take the number of pieces of silver Judas received for betraying Jesus (Matthew 27:3). _____

2. Multiply by the number of camels Abraham's servant took when he went to find Isaac a wife (Genesis 24:10). x _____ = _____

3. Subtract Isaac's age when he died (Genesis 35:28, 29). _____ = _____

4. Divide by the number of pieces of silver Joseph's brothers received for selling him (Genesis 37:28). + _____ = _____

5. Add the number of Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:14). + _____ = _____

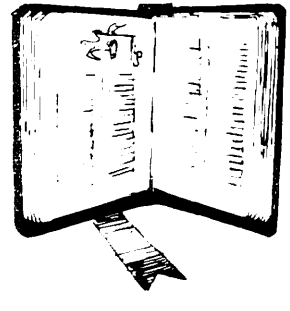
6. Multiply by the number of books in the New Testament. x _____ = _____

7. Divide by the number of men thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:20). + _____ = _____

8. Subtract Abraham's age when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5). - _____ = _____

9. Subtract Jesus' age when He stayed being at the temple (Luke 2:42-46). - _____

You now have the number of changes of clothing. = _____



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