



"It is a grand mistake to think of being great without goodness ... there was never a truly great man that was not at the same time truly virtuous."
—Benjamin Franklin

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Good to the Core

I vividly recall an incident that occurred before my fourth birthday. On the dining room table, my mother had placed a bowl of wax fruit containing realistic bananas, oranges, grapefruit, and apples. I bit into the apple, discovering a hollow interior and an unpleasant paraffin taste. This incident proved the first of many experiences in which something that looked substantive and delicious on the outside proved empty and disappointing on the inside.

We possess a mental map of what an apple should feel and taste like when we bite into it. These expectations become shattered when we buy a bag of large, firm-looking, dark red apples in the supermarket only to find them woody or mushy, lacking the crisp, juicy texture and sweet taste we have come to expect. Again, the good-looking exterior hides an inferior core.

When Mother Eve observed the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, she became convinced that it looked desirable to the eye ([Genesis 3:6](#)),

having an outwardly pleasing form, but she soon found out that the inner core contained death. By looking at surface appearances only, the entire human race has fallen for deceit, duplicity, and slickness ever since.

By contrast, [goodness](#) or genuineness does not reside on the outside but deep within the core. Whether looking at fruit, automobiles, computers, or people, we must concern ourselves more with the subdermal, what is under the hood, rather than the outward appearance.

Sometimes, we use "sincere" as a synonym for "goodness" or "genuineness." *Sincere* has an interesting etymology. Two Latin words, [sin](#), meaning "without," and *cerus*, meaning "wax," make up the composite term. In ancient times, when a marble column or a statue began to show cracks, the fissures would be masked with resin, pitch, or a type of wax. The artisan intended to deceive by concealing the cracks. *Sincere*, however, means "having nothing to hide"—what you see is what you get. *Insincere* suggests that someone is concealing a flaw, making something appear to have quality when it, in truth, is defective.

In its raw, natural state, the inner core of mankind is rotten and detestable, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). [God](#) realized that the human heart would incline to evil, even though human lips would outwardly proclaim its goodness ([Deuteronomy 5:29-30](#)). The Almighty thus designed human beings so that character development would proceed from the inside out. In [Hebrews 8:10](#) and 10:16 (a quotation from [Jeremiah 31:33](#)), God reveals the process through which the wickedness of carnal human beings may become transformed into the wholesome goodness of godly character: "I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts."

We cannot expect goodness to emerge any other way than from the inside out. In scientific terms, we could say that the *genotype*—the inherent, genetic constitution of a thing—always determines the *phenotype*—its visible properties. [Jesus Christ](#) suggests this in [Matthew 7:18](#), "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." James similarly comments, "Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?" ([James 3:12](#)).

Motivational expert Stephen Covey states the same principle in aphorisms: "You can't have the fruits without the roots," and "You can't change the fruit without changing the roots." The conversion process begins on the inside and works outward, beginning with a regeneration by God's Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)), which automatically resets our genotypes to begin displacing our innate carnality with godly character.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey identifies two warring paradigms that now compete for our society's hearts and minds: the *personality ethic* versus the *character ethic*. Public figures from the President to the city commissioner have attempted to discard the character ethic, replacing it with the personality ethic. In this context, character no longer matters, as charm and personality can win the support of the gullible masses. We have now experienced a whole generation of "press box politicians" who, having no ethical core or genuine convictions, rely totally on opinion polls, buzz words, or current trends for leadership direction, pandering to the basest of human instincts.

Contrasting the results of the personality ethic with the character ethic, Covey warns, "If our words and our actions come from superficial human relations techniques (the personality ethic) rather than from our core (the character ethic), others will sense that duplicity." In other words, an individual relying only on personality, even if he is trying to express goodness, will be seen as a fraud.

Under the character ethic, character still counts. The demise of Ambassador University in the early 1990s largely resulted from an insidious paradigm shift from the character ethic, emphasizing the inner core, to the personality ethic, stressing pragmatic conformity to whatever has become popular. Dr. Donald Ward, the university's former president, eloquently described the dichotomy between the character ethic (encapsulated in the oft-quoted slogan, "While other institutions teach people how to make a living, Ambassador teaches people how to live") and the personality ethic by using an analogy of a baseball as compared to a basketball.

Representing the character ethic, a baseball has a firm core, a hard-rubber center that he compared to God's law. Around this foundational nucleus, layer upon layer of string (representing instruction) is wrapped over time.

The horsehide cover compares to the personality, which is firmly stitched to the teaching and the essential core by God's Spirit. Conversely, a basketball stands for the personality ethic. While it may have a handsome leather cover, nothing supports it but air. Lacking a core, it is inflated, vain, and ostentatious.

Without God's Spirit, the heart of man is hostile to God and His law ([Romans 8:7](#)). As we saw earlier, Jeremiah opts for a godly heart transplant, a procedure that Ezekiel also describes:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people and I will be their God. ([Ezekiel 11:19-20](#), NIV)

He considers this principle so important that he repeats it in [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#).

True goodness can neither be faked nor externally attached to impress others. Without a change in the roots, we cannot hope to see a change in the fruit, yet with God's Spirit placed at our core, the spiritual fruit of goodness ([Galatians 5:22](#)) will emanate from within.

- David F. Maas

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Displaying Virtuous Character](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Self-control has both an inward and outward dimension, the latter concerned with human relationships, deportment, manners, reflecting Almighty God's orderly mindset, and His concern for Creation. We must emulate our Savior and Heavenly Father, replacing the self-centered mindset with outward service-oriented behavior focused on edifying rather than dominating. According to the apostle Paul, God's people must 1.) be subject to law, 2.)

obey civil laws as long as they do not clash with God's law, 3.) be ready for every good work which does not compromise with God's law, 4.) remain separate from the pulls of the world, 5.) refrain from contention or conflict, 6.) use judgment in moderation, preferring gentleness and mercy, and 7.) show courtesy and humility to all men, realizing they have the same potential as we have had. This amazing potential includes: 1.) having His plan revealed to us, 2.) having never earned this divine favor, 3.) having been granted a spiritual renewing process, 4.) having been infused with the mind of Our Heavenly Father and Savior through His precious Holy Spirit, 5.) bringing us unmerited forgiveness for our past sins, 6.) giving us an excellent way of life (here and now), and 7.) the hope for a greater life to come. With this capacity, we should pay attention to the important little things regarding the use of the tongue, avoiding gossip, incessant talking and discussions of no value, the importance of fulfilling commitments and promises, demonstrating integrity (matching words to deeds), apologizing when we have acted foolishly, and showing unconditional love matching the behavior of God the Father and Our Lord and Savior, developing a compassionate and forgiving heart.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Commonly, goodness is a nebulous concept, used to describe everything from a tasty confection to God's sublime character. However, it is God's character that defines what goodness is! John Ritenbaugh explains this enigmatic trait of God's Spirit.

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