

Christian Living Series 2, sermon # 58

The Fruits of God's Holy Spirit

Goodness #2

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Edited Sermon Transcript

Greetings, brethren. Once again, we are going to continue with the fruit of God's Holy Spirit: goodness. It's been a very marvelous thing to go through rather exhaustively the specific fruits of God's Holy Spirit. We have covered so many of them up to this point, yet, we have a goodly number of them to go, for all of them are not listed in Galatians five. But you will find the specific fruits mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, and we are going to try and cover them all before we conclude the series on the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. But this time, we are covering the fruit—the subtopic—of "goodness." Goodness, obviously, is the product of being good. In other words, it is something that transpires as a result of being good. Now, I shall more elaborately explain the word "good" itself at the conclusion of this particular subtopic of goodness—I am going to expand upon that appreciably at that time. But let us think for a moment on the meaning of the word "goodness." The definition, I think, is significant. It is a state or quality of being good. Now, we know that the Bible says that there is none good, no, not one, but God Himself. Even Jesus Christ Himself made that statement when He said, "Why call you me good? There is none good but God the Father who is in heaven." So, "good," then, is a quality—a trait or characteristic that belongs to those living in the Spiritual domain. It is a characteristic, or a quality, of God the Father. And Jesus Christ, being born at that time into flesh, did not classify Himself as good. He said there is none good but the Father.

So if goodness, then, is the state or quality of being good, what it means in the ultimate analysis is the very nature which God Himself possesses—that is, God our Father. What is that nature? What is that virtuosity that is experienced by God the Father that human beings just cannot possibly experience? Yet, it is something for which we must struggle because we must ultimately manifest the trait or the characteristic of goodness.

Now, obviously, when we think about it, every force, of whatever nature, has its opposing force. You know, why are objects at a state of rest, scientifically speaking? Because there is an equal force opposite to that of an object's tendency to move—in the form of inertia or whatever—that keeps it in a state of rest. That is, there are opposing forces that keep it that way. That is why you and I walk in the midst of pressure, but we don't sense, or feel, that pressure, do we? How many of you realize that there is a very great amount of pressure exerted within the atmosphere? Well, it's because there is an equal pressure on the inside of you which is commensurate with the pressure that is exerted on the outside by the atmosphere. So there is a state of equilibrium, and that is what allows us to feel that we are operating completely at liberty. Well, everything else manifests forces and opposing forces in exactly the same way. You cannot have one cardinal principle if you do not have an opposing one. In other words, you cannot have hate, for example, if you do not also have love. Or, you cannot have love if there is not the possibility of the opposite. Now, character is the ability to choose the one over the other. So, therefore, in order to develop the kind of character that God wants us to possess, human beings had to be subjected to the forces that are exactly contrary to that which God wills or purposes in our lives. So, the state of being "good" then, is a force, and it has an exact opposite compelling force in our lives which produces all the wretchedness, the pain, the anxiety and the suffering so demonstrable in this world.

Yes, the act of goodness is a motivation. It is a behavioral pattern. It is a choice—a decision—on the part of an individual in opposition to some other capability. To further define it, it means "kindness" as opposed to being contemptuous, bitter, resentful and hateful. It means "benevolence" as opposed to being self-centered and taking all the advantage for self—truly benevolent.

And, yet, interestingly enough, all the fruits and characteristics of God's Holy Spirit can be the basis for hypocrisy. How many organizations are called "benevolent" organizations today that are not benevolent at all? It is a front behind which nefarious, evil characters are working. Therefore, sometimes, we as human beings can do exactly what organizations are doing: We put up a front which is not literally true and it is hypocrisy in the sight of Almighty God, and God does not like hypocrisy. God wants us to be true at heart. He wants us to honest.

Now, let's not put on a facade. When we exhibit a trait or characteristic of kindness, of generosity, of benevolence, or whatever it is, let's make it genuine—coming right out of the heart—because we truly want to be self-sacrificing; to give our lives for somebody else, to be spent for them in whatever way necessary; to make the sacrifice; to give up something that we want to do; to sacrifice our own time; to circumvent the things that are compelling in our lives in order to fulfill something that has a trait of humanity within it. Another meaning is "generosity." We give of our substance; we don't close our fists—our hands—we don't wrap ourselves around what we have made and done, our possessions, our lives, but we are very generous with our time, with our money, with our circumstances, with our love, with our affection, and with everything else. You can be generous in a thousand different ways, or you can be "tight" in an equal number of ways. It just depends upon what our will is—the direction we want to go, what we want to do.

And the Bible very clearly explains to us that if we begin to anticipate the future and we think into the future and say, "Well, if I live to be ninety, or I live to be a hundred and five, or if I live to be eighty, I am certainly going to have to keep so much for this or that," or whatever it is. And then we close our hands and we will not render the daily service that God requires of us. God is not going to consider that lightly. God says to live unto the day: "The just shall live by faith"—which means we anticipate that by the power, by the motivation of God, by God's love and mercy, and by His concern, that God Himself will take care of those needs tomorrow. Jesus Christ spent a considerable number of words and energy expounding and explaining that principle—especially in the last several verses of Matthew chapter six. We can all read it and study and understand it. The biggest problem is, of course, applying these principles. And the unique problem with human beings is separating out our own imaginations, our subtlety, our rationalization, if you please, that somehow allows us to carry along with us certain defensive, protective traits and characteristics of the self, so that we can safeguard ourselves with respect to our interhuman relationships of the future.

Let me illustrate what I mean by that: In other words, I know that God expects me to be extremely kind and benevolent and generous with respect to people—it is a matter of faith and God says the just shall live by faith, not by your bank account, by your insurance policies, or by anything that human beings have designed whatsoever. But then, I begin to look to the future and I turn to the

principle back in Proverbs where it says, "Go to, thou sluggard, and consider the ant." So I go back and I say, "Well, now, God tells me right there that I am supposed to accumulate this and this and this and this." All the while, my intent and my purpose is to justify a deficiency of faith with respect to the future. That's what I am referring to. Now, obviously, the principle in Proverbs is there. It is not even wrong to be wealthy. But it is wrong to have confidence in that and to attempt to safeguard the future by that means, because it is not going to save anyone. That is what I am referring to.

So, let's not, above all, play cat and mouse with God. Let's, above all, be honest and genuine, right down from the heart. We had better look into our lives and see whether or not we are justifying certain human traits—carnal proclivities—because of a deficiency of faith and trust in God with respect to the spiritual requirements for which we are going to be held accountable in the future. So we had better evaluate very, very carefully. Now, that is the meaning of "generosity." It is a very, very broad principle.

Then, also, it means "virtuousness." Virtue is the exact opposite of dissipation, degeneration, immorality, indecency and all of these other traits and characteristics. Because of the natural, lustful appetite of the flesh—its wretchedness, its own nature and so on—it has a proclivity to live in the way of all of those bad and evil traits and characteristics rather than to live virtuously. Virtue is a choice—we must choose it. It does not come spontaneously.

Now, the biggest problem with these things—as I have said so many times in the past—is that we use them as a cloak for something that we are doing behind the scenes. All human beings are wrong in the sight of God. Now, we know that gentiles—or heathens, or pagans, or whatever you want to call them—do by nature certain things contained in the Law. To that extent, thank God. But, to what extent are they using this as a camouflage for something else? Only by an intensive evaluation of the self can we possibly comprehend or understand so that we can avoid hypocrisy and come truly and honestly before God. That is what the word "goodness" means—absolutely devoid of camouflage, absolutely devoid of a screen or a cover, no deception whatsoever. Deception is a superficial approach that makes everything look acceptable—that makes all of the wretchedness, the villainy, the hate, the contempt and the ugliness of this world seem acceptable on the surface. It is glorified by the act of deception. It doesn't mean, whatsoever,

that because one is deceived, he is simply, openly, honestly, and candidly living the wretchedness that he is capable of living right from the self. Deception means that he has constructed a screen, a camouflage, an act of hypocrisy, so that he presents himself in one way, but in reality he is living another. And, for that reason, we are told by God that we should either be hot or we should be cold. If we are going to live the carnal way of life, just live it and say, "I know it is wrong. But I am not going to put on any screens. I am not going to put on any airs. This is what I am." But people are deceived by an arch-enemy that is compelling them to put up this kind of screen—this kind of front—and they are not honest. Now, brethren, I can understand it as far as this world goes because they do not have any other direction that they can go—hypocrisy, camouflaging, screening the self, safeguarding the self, are indigenously a part of that nature, those characteristics with which we were born. But what about us who have been alerted? What about those of us who have come to see and to recognize—if truly we have—what we are, what our natures are? Have we accepted it for what it is? And have we begun to work on those traits and those characteristics so that we may truly be virtuous in the sight of God? That's what God wants out of us. That is the meaning of "virtuousness." It isn't men's definition, it is God's definition. So, virtuousness, therefore, means the plain avoidance of all forms of deception. It means to live truly what we purport to live. Now, brethren, none of us are living up to it one hundred percent—not a one of us. Therefore, if we recognize that, why should we hold somebody else accountable? Let's be very careful that we do not do what the Apostle Paul said: devour one another. We need to be careful. We have so many things on which to work in our own personal lives that we have little time—if any—to be concerned negatively with the lives of anyone else. And this is the interesting thing, it really is a very interesting principle: The extent to which we, personally, work on the self is the extent to which we give honor and respect to the other party. And it works exactly the other way around, too.

The last principle in the definition of "goodness," is "moral rectitude." In other words, we don't allow the impulses of our minds and our hearts to dictate. Men live wretched, immoral lives, doing what comes to them naturally, and so do women. You know, it's an absolute hypocritical thing to say that women are, just by nature, more virtuous in that sense. That's one of the things I had to learn by some long, hard experiences in my many years in the ministry. There isn't any difference. It's an absolute front that has been erected—the idea that women just live more morally clean lives than do men. That is not the case. Now, that doesn't

mean that women cannot live a more virtuous life—oh, yes, she can, if she wills it that way. I am talking about what actually exists in contrast to what capabilities may exist. So women can live very clean and very moral lives, but that doesn't mean that there are a greater number of them living that way. And as time goes on, the absolute dictate with respect to womankind today is to try and walk in the footsteps of men—whatever they think that was in times past. Now, do they think that men had all of the advantages in times past? No, they had all the advantages for sin, I guess. Now women are wanting to walk in those footsteps. How tragic. So one of the basic, cardinal principles of goodness is moral rectitude—moral rectitude. In other words, the resolve to control all of these carnal thrusts—the mind and the lustful flesh itself.

In the past, up to this present time, we have covered one Greek word—that is *agathosune*. Under that particular Greek word we find goodness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit over in Galatians the fifth chapter. We can best comprehend these things in relationship to our own natural selves. That is, in order to understand the fruits of God's Holy Spirit, you can comprehend their value in relationship to the natures with which we were born. It's always much better to see a comparison—and I do not mean to compare yourself with somebody else. I am talking about you comparing yourself with the characteristics of God. You evaluate your own personal life as I must evaluate mine and then you compare it to the life of Jesus Christ and to the exact, Biblical requirements of God.

So, what we find in ourselves is a nature of wrath; we find it is seditious; we find that it individualizes, it is constantly involved in that—elevated by its own thoughts. But that isn't the way into the Kingdom of God. You know, people will come and say to me, "Well, what do you think about so and so?" I couldn't care less what I think, and neither do I care what anybody else thinks. I want to know what God thinks. Now, how in the world am I going to know what God thinks? Is it because I am capable of picking up the Bible and proving it for myself? No. Let me assure you, brethren, that is not a possibility. Where you start is at the call of Almighty God and the inspiration of His Holy Spirit when He reveals that Truth to you, and until God reveals it to you, you can hear it—you can hear the Word, you can hear somebody proclaim it—but you cannot comprehend it, and above all, you cannot live it. It just cannot be done.

So the first thing that has to happen is a call from Almighty God. And then you are given the influence of God's Holy Spirit initially, and ultimately, at

baptism, the receipt of His Holy Spirit to dwell within you, by which you, then, can do this comparing. Then you can truly "prove"—then can you truly try and experience these various things.

So we look at our natures because God has called us—the natural nature of wrath, or being seditious. Because of individualization we have sedition, we have hate, we have strife, we have envy, we have heresy. All these traits and characteristics come from that one common thrust: individualization. In other words, "I trust my mind." And what we have to understand is that no human being can trust his mind because the natural mind is a carnal mind. And the only mind that can prove the Truth of God is the mind of Jesus Christ, and that mind is one and the same. It is absolutely not schizophrenic. It is not divided. There is no such thing as division within the Truth of God. Division is a proof of carnality, and any time we justify division we are justifying the whim of Satan, the Devil, himself. Oh, brethren, let's not justify individualization or division. Division is contrary to the mind of Jesus Christ. Christ is not divided. Christ is not schizophrenic. That Truth was revealed to us—to somebody in the last days. It now becomes our moral obligation to be faithful to it.

The next principle of carnality is a nature of contempt. We manifest contempt. Why? What is contempt—in other words, our disgust for somebody else? It means we are comparing those people with ourselves. How are you going to have contempt unless what you are doing is comparing yourself with somebody else? And he who compares himself with somebody else is unwise—very unwise. "Comparing ourselves with ourselves, we become unwise," said the Apostle Paul.

Now, brethren, we have covered that one word, so we want to continue. The next word is the word *chrestos*. Now what I want you to understand first are a couple of basic principles here: 1) Do not confuse a spiritual orientation in life with condonation of wrong. Do not confuse a spiritual orientation in life with condonation of wrong. Now, remember, a spiritual orientation means that you negate the self, but you do not judge another. So don't confuse that with the condonation of wrong. And 2) remember that the judgment—which is the ultimate evaluation of how well anyone has done—belongs to God only. It is not our responsibility. It is our responsibility to carry out only those duties imposed upon us. As a minister, we must preach it. As laymembers, we must live it. As ones who bear responsibilities somewhere in between, we must carry them out judiciously and acceptably before God.

Now let's notice this word *chrestos*—and you will remember that word from other subjects which we have covered, but let me not get ahead of the subject. What is the definition? It means "useful"; it means "suitable"; it means "worthy"; it means "good"; it means "pleasant"; it means to be "kind" or "kindly"; to be "easy," that is, to be "acceptable, palatable"; and it is "morally reputable." Generally speaking, the word was covered under the subject of "gentleness." But I want to pick it up now as it is used with respect to "goodness." And as I've said a number of times, if we break one of God's laws—and thereby break all of them—it shows an interrelationship between all of them so that it is an impossibility to separate one out from the other. If the fruits of God's Holy Spirit are all manifestations of marvelous traits and characteristics proceeding from one common foundational premise, then, obviously they are inseparable. So you cannot separate goodness from faith. You cannot separate gentleness from goodness. You cannot separate these from joy, yet, they are individual and distinct traits or characteristics; there is an interface one with another that is absolute—you cannot avoid it. So we are going to see some overlapping as we go along. It's obvious because there is an interface between one characteristic and the other. And that makes it all the more beautiful because they tie into one common fabric.

Now let's get into it very quickly, brethren, before our time elapses here because I want to complete this word today. First, here is its usage: 1) The comfort, beauty and graciousness of Christ's Way of Life. It means the comfort, the beauty, the graciousness of Christ's way. Now, when we stop and analyze that principle alone—the Way of Life which we have been called to live—do we manifest comfort? Do we manifest beauty in the conduct of our lives, or do people look at us and say, "Why is he constantly agitated? Why is he constantly in turmoil? Why is he constantly in doubt? Why is he constantly plagued and troubled in this or that way?" Or do we live confident, gracious, kind lives? Do you know why we can live that kind of a life? Because our hope is in the assurances and promises of Jesus Christ. No one who does not do the Truth of God is ever going to make it into His Kingdom. Do we forget that principle? Then every other adversity is a catalyst for the development of faith, confidence and the fruits of God's Holy Spirit today—whether adversity from within or without of the Body. I don't care which it is or where it is. So wherever they transpire, let's learn to handle them wisely and discreetly, and thereby exhibit the sort of traits and characteristics that are acceptable in the Kingdom of God. So it

means, then, the manifestation of comfort, of beauty, of graciousness in the way of Jesus Christ.

I want us to turn to Matthew the eleventh chapter and let's begin in verse 27. Matthew 11, beginning in verse 27: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." So we do not know the Father nor Jesus Christ until an act of revelation takes place. That is our call. And when we know them, then we come to recognize those traits and those characteristics as the nature by which they live, and in so doing we can live up to those same traits and characteristics by the power of God's Holy Spirit that is promised to us.

Now, when we come to know Him—and I want us to recognize that He is talking about revealing Himself—He pleads to those to whom God and Jesus Christ are revealed, "Come unto me." Which we need to do. And we need to come much, much more close to Him. We need to accept more infinitely. We need to accept more absolutely. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." What are these labors and heavy burdens? Circumstances—our problems and perplexities of life, our difficulties, our troubles, our anxieties, our frustrations, our concerns, our disappointments and disillusionments. All of our deep, abiding troubles. ". . . and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you." That means there is no way of becoming what people call an independent individual. You are either going to be the slave of your own nature—and if you are, you are a slave with all of humanity—or you are going to be the bondservant of Jesus Christ, whichever the case may be. Take your choice. You are not going to gain what people call freedom—by which they mean you can do as you blank please. That doesn't exist. You are going to be a slave of something, regardless. You are the slave of your own nature—with all of humanity—and you are subject to its dictates until you are given the opportunity to free yourself by the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and then in so doing, you take upon you the yoke of Christ ". . . and learn of me [that is, learn His will and His Way of Life]; for I am meek and lowly in heart." Christ was meek—not arrogant, not self-assertive, not conceited, not lifted up in pride. No, but lowly in heart—a teachable individual, humble, pliable, kind, and affectionate: all the marvelous traits and characteristics of God. "[F]or I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." You shall find rest unto your souls.

Brethren, if we have not found that rest yet, it means we are hanging on to too many of the frustrations of our own self-bondage and servitude. Oh, let's not say, "Well, if it weren't for so-and-so—if it weren't for the people of this world, if it weren't for my neighbors, if it weren't for the government, if it weren't for this and it weren't for that—I could live the Truth of God." Well, so could the publicans. If they hadn't had any antagonists, they would not have had any problems either. No, we do not prove our value until we live contrary to the dictates of our own natural minds and natures. So when we learn of Christ and we accept Him—because He is meek and lowly in heart—we can find rest for our souls. Why? Because we are laying down all of those frustrations. We cease fighting—we cease the struggle against the odds we find ourselves facing, and we throw ourselves upon the merciful, kind, benevolent shoulders of Jesus Christ.

"For my yoke is easy." The word "easy" here is this word *chrestos*. "For my yoke is [good]." It is goodness. And what does He mean by goodness? "For my yoke is a yoke of kindness; it is a yoke of benevolence; it is a yoke of generosity; it is a yoke of virtuousness; it is a yoke of moral rectitude." Is that the yoke that we have taken? Are those the traits and the characteristics that we manifest in life? Or, are we still struggling? Are we still fighting? Are we still resisting? As long as we resist—as long as we fight, as long as our carnal minds and natural natures rise up in defiance and rebellion—to that extent, we are not going to find the rest and ease that we really want. Can we in faith lay it all down—I didn't say forget responsibility, I'm talking about the struggles of life—and just simply, with conviction and with dedication, set about the spiritual responsibilities incumbent upon us?

"[M]y yoke is easy." You are going to be within a yoke. It is going to be upon you. It is the yoke—or the bondage—of love and affection, of the totality of God's Law, and you are going to find it an extremely light burden in comparison to all of the wretchedness, the difficulties, the agitations, the trials, the terrifying, tragic things of life which we have previously experienced. Oh, brethren, let us accept the goodness of God. Let us accept the goodness of Jesus Christ, for within the life of Jesus Christ—who lived and walked in the flesh, the same as you and I are living today—He walked moral rectitude; He walked benevolence; He walked the kindness of God; He walked all that is the virtuousness of God Almighty Himself so that He might live it in you and me. And indeed His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is extremely gracious; He is extremely kind; He is extremely good. Let us live it, brethren. God Almighty is holding us accountable.

God Almighty is observing us on a day-by-day basis because God is looking for those moral servants that are worthy of inheriting everlasting life—to be seated upon thrones of glory and dominion tomorrow—so that we can do the same thing that Jesus Christ has done for us: We can help people, we can serve them, because then we will have the power, the capacity—the mental capacity, the physical capacity, nothing to impede or restrict us—to look down into the lives and the hearts of human beings. That is right, we will be able to actually look into their hearts and their minds. We will be able to anticipate their evils, yet, we are not going to do that. We are going to look into their lives for good—to help them, to encourage them, to inspire them, to say, "This is the way, walk you in it." To give them a pat on the back, to encourage them—not condonation of sin, but an encouragement. Do not we all now recognize that there is no mortal on the face of this earth who lives perfectly God's will and God's Way of Life? Not at all. Then why do we expect it of others? Because of that evil tendency to compare. Because we think that we don't do that, or that what somebody else is doing is worse than what I'm doing. And we make a tragic mistake when we do that. Don't do it, brethren.

God is giving us a glorious, a beautiful, opportunity, now, to develop the traits and the characteristics of the Holy Spirit—to be prepared for an awesome work tomorrow. That is why we are still here today—that is why God has kept us alive in faith and in confidence, despite everything that has happened. Nobody has experienced a greater tragedy than anybody else—all of us went through those difficulties and those sorrows and those anxieties. And how many of us think back upon friendships and our love for and relationships with relatives and others whom we loved so deeply, brethren, and that affinity and regard of the past left scars upon our hearts and upon our minds due to the circumstances that have now come to pass? How many of us experienced those things, brethren? Yes, there isn't any question that we must simply place our very lives into the hands of God, but pray with our hearts, with all of our might, with all of our minds, that God may ultimately intervene and allow them to see the same things that we see and comprehend and understand today. And we must just live it. God is going to bring them back, but maybe they are waiting for you and me. You know, I cannot help but believe that many, many, many people are out there in the wings—in the leas, here and there someplace—watching you, watching us, just to see what is going to happen. Are we the lights that we should be, or are we leaving an impediment? Are we truly, negatively, a rock of offense? Not like the Truth of God—as Jesus Christ said, He was a Rock of offense because He was the Truth,

an impediment. But are we an impediment because we are a bad example—as a group, as a family, or as an individual? What about our words? What about our actions and our behavioral patterns? Have we left the finest example possible? Brethren, my heart just cries out at times for all of us to learn what it is to have deep, abiding affection for one another despite the failures of each other—we are going to have to learn to do that. We need it and we need it desperately. After all, God the Father and Jesus Christ so awesomely loved this world that God the Father sent His Son Jesus Christ, and He was willing to come. It was because of such love for you and me. Did we deserve it? No, while we were yet sinners they did it. Then why can't we, above all, recognize the call of God and manifest that same goodness—that same love and affection—toward everyone else, not by our own abilities, but by the power of God's Holy Spirit. "[M]y yoke is easy [*chrestos*], and my burden is light." His yoke is the burden of goodness. It liberates us from the tragedies of our own minds and our own lustful, greedy appetites and hearts. It liberates us from the bondage of self. And the burden, then, of spiritual obedience is incredibly light by comparison.

Secondly, goodness is undergirded with age, experience and refinement. Let's turn to Luke the fifth chapter. Luke 5 and let's notice verse 30:

But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

In other words, what He is saying is that the arrogant, the conceited, the self-righteous, you can't call anyway. He didn't come to call any of them. He came to call sinners—that is, those who know what they are—because they are the ones who will repent.

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them [now, I want you to notice the comparison here]; No man

putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

The old is "goodness." The word "better" here is this same word *chrestos*. The old is "goodness." What is He saying by these things—the old pieces and the new pieces and the various things that He is talking about? He is giving some parables. Why? What is He talking about? In other words, if righteousness is likened unto clothing that human beings wear, then we are talking about the old way—the old clothing—the same as the old wine is much better than the new. It has to be aged—it is tried and it is proven. In this sense, I want you to notice that the Bible clearly teaches degeneration—not improvement—of human nature. In Jeremiah the seventh chapter, let us note it. Back here in Jeremiah 7 and beginning in verse 21:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

Now, you will remember that back in Psalms 12 and 18, and in Proverbs and various other places in the Bible, it says that God's Word is tried and proven. It is the *old* way.

"But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart . . ." And what were these imaginations and counsels of their own hearts? It is no different, brethren, than the thing that is going on today—which means that we think we have learned by our long track record of experience. So the idea is that human beings improve—they get better and better—that we are capitalizing on the things we have learned in times past. Technologically, there may be some value to that statement. But morally, it is

exactly the opposite. Sure, there has been an increase in knowledge, but has that increase in knowledge been beneficent to man? The answer is, "No." For the "smarter" man becomes, the more morally defective he becomes. He has gone downhill. He really doesn't have value at all, and, you know, this matter of how much better, supposedly, knowledge is today is a serious question. They are learning through the excavations of archaeology that the people of old were not as ignorant as they thought they were. They had done some magnificent things in times past—things that human beings cannot do today. They have a different form of knowledge today, yes, but I'm not sure that knowledge is always better. Oh, I know knowledge has been increased—so said Daniel, inspired by God. Knowledge has been increased, alright enough, but is it superior knowledge to the other? It does raise questions.

Now, notice what he said: "But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward." There is what the Bible says. Human beings, for at least one third of the total span of human life, on the basis of what Jeremiah was inspired to write by God's Holy Spirit, went backward and not forward. Now, if they went backward during that period of time, do you think it was any different in any other period of time? No, human beings have been retrogressing—there has been a continual state of regression, degeneration, dissipation. It certainly has not been improvement—not at all. So they have been going backward

"Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them." They will not even receive instruction. So, not only are they going downhill, but they are also disobedient, defiant and rebellious.

Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee.

So this is really a prophecy for our day. So, here it is applicable from our day back to the time of Moses. Now, we are talking about well over half of human existence—in the neighborhood of 3,500 years, at least 3,500 years. So, we haven't existed quite 6,000 yet. What did he say?

Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction.

How different from the act of goodness that we have just uncovered. "[T]ruth is perished . . ." Why? Because they have turned to their own mental capacity. " . . . and is cut off from their mouth."

What did He say back here in Luke 5 and verse 39? Luke 5 and verse 39: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better." The old is "goodness." Now, we recognize that in wine; we recognize that in antiques; we recognize that in many things human beings have done, but we refuse to recognize it in spiritual things. And, yet, what did we read? Men have degenerated—they have gone downhill, they have dissipated, they have become worse.

Yet, there is a day coming, God reveals, when they are going to finally recognize their plight and they are going to admit it. Here in Isaiah 25 and verse 1: "O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." You see, they are finally going to recognize it—not the modern-day perversions, not the warpings that have been advocated by demented minds, but they will admit the things that have been proven from time immemorial—the old wine, which is better. They are finally going to recognize this.

Isaiah 46. Isaiah 46 and verses 5 through 11: "To whom will ye liken me [God speaking], and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance . . ." That is, they create their own gods and they decorate them with the finest metals, but the gods they have generated and designed are a woeful counterfeit. They are repugnant in comparison to the True God. Can you liken God to gold and silver? To what can you liken God? There isn't any substance; there is no likeness; there is no similitude; there is no image; there is no statue; there is nothing on the face of this earth that you can make that would even remotely compare to God. Yes, "[they] weigh [their] silver in a balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they

fall down, yea, they worship." Why? Because *they* made it—that is, a figment of their own imaginations. They created it out of their own hearts and out of their own minds. What they are doing is bowing before the gods of their own minds. Let me assure you, brethren, the number of them are equal to the number of disobedient and rebellious people extant on the face of the earth today.

"They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place"—that is, they nurture him, they pat him on the back, they do all of these things. Why? Because it is their own creation. ". . . and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer . . ." You see, he can't do anything. He's created out of the imagination of man, but he has no power because men cannot create gods. That's why. ". . . nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors." Let's stop and remember it, brethren. Let's think of the things we have created out of our own minds—let's recall those things. "Remember the former things of old." What are the former things of old? The Truth that God gave when He revealed Himself—as He did to ancient Israel, but also as He did in the day of Jesus Christ and then, thirdly, in our day. But they have all turned away from God.

The things of old which were given are just as glorious today as they have ever been. Eternal things never change. That is why they are awesome in glory; they are awesome in power; they are awesome in beauty and in character. They are the epitome of the Truth of Almighty God. That's what God is. God Himself is the very essence of those thoughts, those concepts, those beliefs that He gave to us. It is His thinking. But men have assumed that their thoughts are superior to the thoughts of God because they have been influenced by a deceiver. God uttered into existence a Way of Life, and human beings now sit back and decide which of it is valuable and which isn't—and what they are going to do and what they are not going to do. Oh, if we could only think; if we would only evaluate. What we are doing is sitting here trying to evaluate the mind of God Almighty Himself. But, let me assure you, you have taken on one awesome task if you try to do that, and I am afraid you are going to fall mighty short of its objective.

[Yes], he standeth; from his place shall he not remove [he can't get around; he isn't going to do anything]: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this,

and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.
Remember the former things [when God was revealed] . . .

Let's go back and recall those things. Isn't that what we were told to do over in verse 32 of Hebrews 10? "Remember the days of old." Let's remember our days of old—when we were called; when God gave us the Truth.

"[F]or I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning . . ." And, yet, they have Him declaring error. I didn't say that we are not to grow. I have never said that. But I want to assure you that you cannot be a true servant of God until He calls you and gives His Truth to you. To whatever extent God gives the Truth, it cannot be altered or changed. And if it has to be altered or changed, then it was not of God. It is that plain and that simple.

"[But God declares] the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Yes, the Truth of God, God's purpose, God's will—shall stand. From time immemorial it can never alter—it will never change; it is absolute. It is the manifestation of every one of these traits and characteristics of God. Goodness—goodness as defined by kindness. You know, God would have been unmerciful to us if He had changed His Way of Life. He never did it. The fact that it has never changed is an act of kindness—and He is the same loving and compassionate God today that He has always been. The same thing with respect to benevolence. The same thing in generosity. He is an impartial God. God has determined His times. He is a virtuous God. He is kind and He has absolute moral rectitude. These are the traits and the characteristics God wants in us—these are the ways of old—the wine that is better, "good."

Next time, brethren, we will pick up subtopic number three and proceed from there.