

Christians have often been derisively called goody two-shoes, goody-goodys or goo-goos. On one level, this may have to do with the tendency among some Christians to be annoyingly self-righteous and critical of others. But on another level, Christian goo-goos, can change the status quo for the benefit of everyone in a world where machines, both political and otherwise, continue to dominate. Paul's instructions to the Galatians offer us a handbook for Christian do-gooding that can truly change the world.

Goo-goos recognize when something is wrong. Christian goo-goos who are wired into the Holy Spirit sense when something is wrong in the life of another person or a community, detecting "transgression" as well as pain (v. 1). Such detection can certainly lead to judgmental, self-righteous indignation, which causes a lot of outsiders to refer to Christian do-gooders in a sarcastic and pejorative way.

But Paul isn't suggesting that the Galatian goo-goos simply point out the wrong in their neighbors. It's not with a spirit of vindictiveness or accusation that Christian goo-goos point out the wrong, but with a "spirit of gentleness." We recognize that we are just as flawed as the next guy, and we must, as Paul says, "test our own work" before we can scrutinize the work of others (v. 4). We shouldn't be "tempted" to think that others are worse sinners than we are; rather we know that everyone, including us, needs to be "restored" to a right relationship with God and others. Christian goo-goos are thus humble and gentle observers of human brokenness, who work to make the broken whole (v. 1).

Goo-goos bear one another's burdens. After Paul left, the Galatians heard a different gospel message from other missionaries: a gospel that required Gentile converts to become ritually Jewish before they could become Christians. Adherence to the Jewish "law," which Paul critiques in this letter, meant following all the food restrictions, festivals and even undergoing circumcision before becoming a member of the church. Paul is furious that the people of the church were subjected to these heavy-handed, machine-like religious politics. The Galatians were being governed by the wrong law, and Paul, the goo-goo reformer, points out to them a much more universal law: the "law of Christ" (v. 2).

We get a clue of what Paul means by this term back in the previous chapter where Paul urges the Galatians to "become slaves to one another" through love (5:13). In fact, says Paul, the whole Jewish law is summed up in one of its commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40)." We love God with everything we are, and then, because we love God, we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The law of Christ is the law of love, and

love does not place obligations on others. Instead, says Paul, Christian goo-goos help to alleviate the struggles of others by "bearing one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

Goo-goos live in the Spirit. Paul recognizes that a life that relies solely on our own efforts isn't going to amount to much. He uses the word "flesh" to describe a life that is devoid of any ability to do good on its own, a life that leads to "corruption" of not only the soul but the body as well (v. 8). In chapter 5 (vv. 20-21), Paul lists a bunch of symptoms of trying to live life in the flesh, many of which can be the result of compassion fatigue as much as outright sinfulness.

Paul's solution to the life of the flesh isn't simply a prescription to do more good deeds, or to be more religious, or to fire up the willpower to do better. Instead, Paul proposes a completely different kind of life: a life that is lived in the Spirit; a life that isn't dependent on the meager reserves of our own resources and abilities; a life that is animated, empowered and motivated by the Holy Spirit. The life of the Spirit gives the Christian goo-goo a wealth of reserves from which he or she can begin to do good all day, every day.

Paul describes the "fruit" of that life in the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness and self-control (5:22-23). These are the necessary resources a Christian goo-goo needs to restore hope, to forgive people, to bear burdens, and to do good. These resources emerge from nurturing a relationship with God on a daily basis, remembering that we cannot change the world unless we ourselves are being changed by the Spirit through prayer, studying the Word with the help of good teachers (6:6), and other internal work through which the Spirit plants and brings forth fruit.

Once that fruit is in us, it will begin to create seeds of its own that can be spread. If we are broadcasting these resources, like a sower broadcasts seed, then we will reap a bountiful harvest of good that characterizes the eternal life and purposes of God (6:8). We do good because God is willing and doing good for the world: a good that, in the end, will reap a harvest of redemption for the whole creation (6:9).

It's a good message for us to hear on this Labor Day weekend: the work we do as Christian goo-goos is vital to the restoration of the world. It is the Christian goo-goos who heal the broken places in the world. It is the Christian goo-goos who share the burdens of others. It is the Christian goo-goos who live in the Spirit of God and bear good fruit in the world. This is meaningful and transforming work; and it's the work you and I are called to do.

Over and over again during our visioning process, we heard you say that you want to be more involved in the community, making a bigger impact, serving the needs of your neighbors, and sharing the good news we have in Jesus Christ with the world. This congregation is filled with Christian goo goos, ready and willing to roll up their sleeves and to go about doing God's work. As we start the new program year, this congregation is poised and itching to break out of these walls and to do some good.

The world of politics may look at goo-goos as idealistic rubes, but in the politics of God's kingdom, it's the goo-goos who succeed in the end. Sometimes it seems like the task is overwhelming, but we're not called to fix everything at once. We begin by being goo-goos with our neighbors, not by knocking on their doors and showing them our goody two-shoes, but by offering a hand of help to those who need it. We offer a word of grace in a world that seems to only offer condemnation and ridicule. We bring an abundance of good spiritual fruit rather than throwing rotten fruit at each other. Being a Christian goo-goo is all about showing the love of Christ one day at a time.

Prayer: O gracious God, we ask that you bless our congregation and enlarge our border, and that your hand might be with us, and that you would keep us from hurt and harm. We pray for the spiritual and emotional healing of this congregation. May your Spirit so fill us that we are able to forgive those who have hurt us and leave behind old quarrels. Inspire our hearts to new levels of love and trust so that we may become a living and visible example of your Kingdom. We pray your Spirit be upon the leaders of our congregation, that they may be able to discern your will and help us move in the directions you would have us go. We pray for our youth ministries and for those who serve on our Christian Education Committee. May the Spirit enable and lift up teachers for our Sunday school and leaders for our youth groups. May our youth be filled with your Spirit and make the faith their own. We ask these things, O God, even as we give you thanks for all that Jesus and his Church have been in our life. May all who worship with us find the peace, love, comfort, and strength that are ours as your children. Amen

Sources:

- "Goo-Goos." Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goo-goos>. Viewed January 18, 2013.
- "The history of Little Goody Two-Shoes." Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_Little_Goody_Two-Shoes. Viewed January 18, 2013.

The Christian Goo-Goos

Sunday, September 4, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Galatians 6:1-16

Have you ever been called a "goody two-shoes?" It's usually not a compliment. It's usually a title reserved for someone who's so good as to be annoying to regular, imperfect people. But did you ever wonder where that expression comes from? Turns out it's from a 1765 children's book about a poor, orphan girl named Margery Meanwell (so named because she “means well!”). In the story Margery walks sadly about the town with only one shoe until a wealthy benefactor gives her a new pair of shoes, after which Margery runs around knocking on doors and telling everyone she can find that she now has "two shoes." See? Annoying.

Of course there are other variations on being a goody two-shoes. You can be a "do-gooder," which conjures up images of the old cartoon Canadian Mountie Dudley Do-Right, or you can be a "goody-goody," which sounds like something that fell from an ice cream truck.

If you're a politician, however, you might be called a "goo-goo," which is short for "good government guy." It sounds funny to our ears, but it wasn't so ironic in the 1890s when the term referred to members of the "Good Government Clubs" that rose up in opposition to the political "machines" that dominated many city and state governments. Political machines, like Tammany Hall in New York City (1790s to the 1960s) controlled governments through a hierarchical system of patronage, rewards and punishments. These political machines were more interested in benefitting their own members than in actually helping the general public. Think of it as a kind of legal, political mafia.

The good government guys - the "goo-goos" – challenged these political machines through a series of reform movements driven by idealism and a desire for change. They were purposely annoying, but with a good reason. So, being a "goo-goo" can be a very good thing because it turns the focus from what's expedient and self-serving to what is right and beneficial for everyone.