

Best Foot Forward

Charles Fry

A couple of years ago, my oldest brother, Dennis, broke a toe, and he was sent to a podiatrist. This business is a big, bustling medical facility specializing in treating feet that's been heavily advertised with a memorable jingle. We started with a positive impression. The parking lot and waiting room were full up; business was booming. The podiatrist who saw Dennis that day and later again to monitor the injury mentioned that we could bring Dennis back every six weeks to have his toenails trimmed. That's not a popular chore, so we were glad to set it up. Subsequent visits persistently had really long wait times for short appointments, often an hour or more in the waiting room. Obviously the facility was very busy, so I wondered if our timing was bad, with appointments always on a Friday morning. I asked a receptionist if a different day might work better, and she wasn't very assuring but told me we could try a Monday next time, so we did. The wait time was just as bad and I was questioning whether it was really worth it, and generally was developing a bad attitude toward this particular medical facility. Perhaps they had an undeserved positive reputation or had gotten too big and lost their drive. But then, we were arriving for an appointment one Monday morning, and I saw the podiatrist who treated Dennis arriving at about the same time. It dawned on me when I saw him arriving at work that the real problem probably wasn't the podiatry business; it was the individual Dennis was assigned to for treatment. I surmised he had some unfortunate personal issues that resulted in him being careless and late and just not doing a good job. He had training and ability but wasn't wholly on board with his job. I had been blaming the business and facility for this fellow's problems. He made them look bad. Lots of other workers in that facility were doing a good job, but the patients seeing this particular guy were getting poor treatment. Not too long after that we learned that this podiatrist was no longer in Dennis's insurance plan, and he'd be seeing a different doctor. The next appointment was prompt, the attention given to Dennis was courteously professional and attentive, and we came away with a whole different feeling about the place. A subsequent appointment was similarly pleasant and efficient.

Those two podiatrists, he and she, each in turn were the face of that business for us and substantially determined how we would view the whole establishment. He made the place look slow and uncaring; she helped it appear efficient and concerned. Overall, she, most likely, is giving a more accurate picture of a business that otherwise has all the signs of success in what they do in service for lots of patients. She helps them look good by doing well.

Christians everyday and everywhere are representing Jesus Christ and his church, for good or ill. People are getting some notion of who Jesus is and what his church is, moment by moment, word by word, deed by deed, encounter after encounter, from people called Christians. Unbelievers' thoughts about Jesus and his church depend enormously on what they think about you and me if they know the least bit about our faith. With that in mind, Jesus repeatedly instructed his disciples to do good works and shine the light of glory on God and to bear desirable and attractive good fruit in his name. Luke in Acts extolled the love, kindness, and generosity of the believers in the first generations of the church. Paul, in his letters, repeatedly taught Christians to hold on to what is good and overcome evil with good (e.g., **Romans 12:9, 21**). Persistence in good works is required of church leaders and those supported by the church (e.g., **Titus 1:8, 2:7, 1 Timothy 5:10**).

One of the multitude of reasons for always doing good in word and deed is to make the Lord's message attractive. That's a motivation Paul described in instructions for bondservants, or slaves.

*Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior (**Titus 2:9-10**, ESV).*

Christian behavior, even in difficult circumstances, is intended to make the teaching about God attractive. We are supposed to dress it up by doing good all the time. What people see in the everyday behavior of Christians — right or wrong, good or bad, submissive or assertive, humble or proud, patient and forgiving, or anxious and upset — affects their perception of the Lord, the gospel, and the church. This isn't the only reason for always doing what pleases the Lord, even when it's hard or costly, but it's an important one.

Peter wrote about tough times for Christians as aliens in the culture, unwelcome and vilified. In his letter, he repeatedly stressed the requirement that Christians not respond in kind to hostility but always live obviously good lives demonstrated in good deeds.

- **1 Peter 2:12**, *“Keep your conduct among the nations honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*
- **1 Peter 2:15**, *“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”*

In the Lord's kingdom, there is no substitute for doing good and no option for joining the crowd in doing wrong. It isn't acceptable to go with the crowd; it's necessary to be like the Savior himself. The way to make Jesus look good is to be like Jesus because he is good and calls us to be like himself, in the strength of his Spirit.