

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you."

Psalms 16:1-2 ESV

Being Good

ONE OF THE HARDEST TEACHINGS of Jesus, indeed of the whole of Scripture, is something He said one day to an inquisitive aristocrat. Jesus did not even bother to answer the young man's query at first. His immediate—even abrupt—response was to just one word the man had used in greeting.

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."

Luke 18:18-19



Ask just about anyone standing on a street corner, "Are you a good person?" and they will answer in the affirmative. Of course we *all* think we are good; even people who behave badly believe they are good at heart. "Sure, I've made some mistakes along the way, but I'm basically a good person."

Here is the chasm-like divide between the philosophy of this world and the teachings of God and His Christ. The world says that people are essentially good—that is, they are born good and must learn evil. Scripture says the opposite: people are essentially evil—that is, they are born sinful and must find their good in God alone, through Christ.

The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there are any who understand,
Who seek after God.
They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even one.

Psalms 14:2-3

The reason the deep chasm will always be there—the reason the two philosophies will never see eye-to-eye—is that they will never agree on the definition of “good.” This world grades goodness on the curve, while God grades it on one irrevocable, unchangeable standard: Himself.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

James 1:17

God Himself created the device by which man could be shown how bad he really is. It is called the Mosaic Law; the condensed version is called The Ten Commandments. God said to man that if he would keep the law He would gain His blessings. The problem is, *no human being is capable of keeping the law.* Man protests that, after all, he keeps *some* of the law. And God answers

that that is not good enough.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:10-11

The standard of “good” in the economy of a holy God is perfection. Do you want to be declared good by God? Then be perfect, as God is perfect. Do you want to go to heaven, rather than hell? Then be perfect, as God is perfect. And, at this point, the average person on the street throws up his hands and shouts, “What’s the point? That’s impossible!”

Exactly.

Man cannot be good by keeping just some of God’s laws, and it is impossible for man to keep *all* of God’s laws. Yet man cannot enter the presence of God without being good. Then what is man to do?

There is one “man”—just one—who was and is perfect: the God/Man Jesus Christ. His death on a cross was to atone for our sin—our innate, natural inability to be good as God is good. Afterward Jesus rose from the grave

and ascended to heaven so that those who believe in Him as Savior would rise from their graves and ascend to heaven.

The only way we can be good is to be good in Christ—to receive His goodness as ours, to clothe ourselves in His perfection. Only then does God look down from heaven, and instead of seeing our sin, our imperfection, He sees the goodness of His Son.

Then, and only then, can we be declared “good.”

But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Hebrews 10:12-14