

HOW GOOD ENOUGH?

October 28, 2007

Introduction.

Please turn to *Mark 10:17-22*. (read). Are you a good person? Do you consider yourself to be a good person? If you listen carefully to the comments that are made in a funeral you would hear words like these : *“he was a good person. It is sad to see him go.”* *“She was a good person. It is sad to see her go.”* It is not often you hear the whispered comment, *“he was a crook. I’m glad he’s gone.”* The general view is that there is some good in every person, even if that good is very small. And if we want people to change, we must find that good and help to develop it.

What is a good person? What do we mean when we say a person is a good person? How do you define **“good”**? The grandparent says about a grandson who has robbed and murdered someone, *“I have always known him to be a good boy.”* We say beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Is goodness like beauty? Is goodness a moral quality that cannot be objectively defined and so without an objective standard? You are shocked that a robber and murderer can be described as good. Is that grandparent seeing something that you do not see?

The dilemma we are facing here is a dilemma we will always face when we are dealing with moral qualities from a human perspective. Consider the following – The **Humanist Manifesto** states : *“We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures.”*

How do you define goodness? According to the **Humanist Manifesto**, you must define goodness based on your personal experience, need and interest. You must define goodness as you choose without any reference to theology or ideology. The argument is that this freedom to define moral qualities as you choose gives human life meaning. The reality, however, is that if we live by these ideas, we will end up in moral chaos. And moral chaos will give rise to social chaos. The fact is, the world has been living by these ideas. And we wonder why there is moral and social chaos in our world.

Let me illustrate. One man sees goodness as working hard, providing for his family and taking measures to protect his property. Another man is not prepared to work and he wants a share of what you have worked for. He decides that it is wrong when you refuse to share with him and take measures to protect your property. So, to correct that wrong, he sets out to rob you of your property and may even murder you in order to achieve his goal. For this man, robbing and murdering you is good. The parent or grandparent who benefits from the robbery and murder sees their son as a good boy. And if he is shot and killed by the police, he is a good boy who was callously murdered by the bad police.

Personal and / or group definitions of goodness, based on human experience, need and interest have resulted in the redefining of almost every human institution, moral code and conduct in our society. The things we once knew to be good are no longer good. The things that we once knew to be bad are no longer bad. As a matter of fact to speak out and publicly defend traditional definitions and standards of goodness can result in you being charged with hate crimes or with the inciting of hate crimes. *Isa.5:20* says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness."

The Unchanging Factor.

Man is constantly changing. In the matter of morality and spirituality, the changes are not good. The changes are in keeping with what the Bible has predicted. Jesus said that

as the end draws nearer, religious apostasy and lawlessness will increase. In *Matt.24:11* we read, “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.” *Vs.24* says, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” *Vs.12* speaks of the increase of lawlessness. In *2Tim.3:13* Paul wrote, “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Why will this spiritual and moral deterioration take place? *Rom.1:18-32* makes it clear that this spiritual and moral deterioration is rooted in the deliberate rejection of God. When men reject God and the truths He has revealed, they become spiritual and moral fools and turn to idolatry and immorality. *Rom.1:18* tells us that men are constantly trying to suppress God’s truth. *Vss.19-20* tell us they are trying to pretend there is no God. In *vs.21* they turn away from God and the result is that they become “**futile**” in their speculations and their foolish hearts become darkened. *Vs.22* adds, “Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

Take note of the word “**futile**”. It means that the speculations or reasoning of moral fools do not produce anything of worth. What is produced is worthless both spiritually and morally. When man rejected God and His revealed word, what man’s speculations and reasoning produced was degrading idolatry and increasingly depraved immoral conduct. *Isa.5:21* says, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.” *Prov.3:7* exhorts us, “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.”

Man’s spiritual and moral condition today has its roots in *Gen.2 & 3*. Let me summarize what happened. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the tree of moral decision. Man was warned that he must not eat from this tree. In other words, man was not given the authority to define morality and determine his own conduct. God is the One who will define morality and determine man’s conduct. Man was warned that if he ate from the tree, if he arrogated to himself the authority to define morality and determine his own conduct, that he will die.

Satan came along and convinced the man and the woman that they will not die. He convinced them that God was lying to them and holding them back from achieving their full potential of becoming divine. Satan told them, “God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (*Gen.3:5*). In other words, you have here the golden opportunity to become equal to God, to cast off God’s authority and to decide for yourself the moral and religious principles of your life. You do not need God to do this for you. You can do this yourself.

Consider the following quotes from the **Humanist Manifesto** : “We begin with humans not God.” “We reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities.” “We believe that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species.” “We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility.” In case you missed it, that last statement is contradictory. The reason I shared these quotes with you is to show you that the serpent’s deadly hiss that was heard in *Gen.3* is still being heard today.

Adam and Eve believed the devil’s lies and took from the fruit and ate it. Adam and Eve reached for equality with God and maximum individual autonomy. What they got was the fall into sin, spiritual death and physical death. (cf. *Rom.5:12*). That fall sent the human race into a downward spiral of sin that has only one destination, hell. There are several facts to note here.

Firstly, man has never given up his quest to be like God, to be equal to God, yea, even to replace God. The desire for maximum individual autonomy is a nice way of saying you want to be the god of your own life. Time will not allow me to fully demonstrate the truth of man’s never ending quest for equality with God. On the other hand, support for this fact will be seen in the other points I want to set before you.

Secondly, when man disobeyed God, he rejected God and went his own way. And man has not stopped going his own way and away from God. *Isa.53:6* says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." *Rom.1:18-21* points to man's continued rejection of God and His word and going his own way. The heart-beat of this maximum human autonomy is this rebellion against God. **Frank Sinatra's** song, "I did it my way", immortalized this maximum human autonomy of rebellion against God. He ended his song with these words, "*For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels; The record shows I took the blows and did it my way.*" In other words, a man has nothing but himself. He does not kneel before any god. He must live unto himself and do everything his own way.

Thirdly, God revealed Himself to man and revealed His truth to man. God revealed to man what is true spirituality and how God must be worshiped. The truths God revealed are recorded for us in the Bible. However, man rejected what God revealed and man proceeded to formulate his own religions and define his own spirituality. The many religions we have in this world are man's attempt to define God, religion, worship and other spiritual values. The sad reality is that every religion devised by man, without exception, is a rejection of the true and living God, idolatrous and blasphemous in God's eyes.

Fourthly, despite the revelations of God man has not stopped trying to define his morality and determine his own conduct. Man's moral definitions lack objectivity for two reasons : (1) man has rejected the only true objectivity for morality, God; (2) man roots his moral definitions in himself, that is, in his changing experiences, needs and interests. It ought not to surprise us that man's definitions of morality and the interpretations of his definitions are as many and varied as there are experiences, needs and interests.

The lack of divinely revealed objectivity in religion and morals will result in religious and moral chaos. Religious and moral chaos has resulted in the redefining of accepted

institutions and behavioral standards. For example, the rejection of God's moral code for sexual conduct has resulted in the redefining of the family, the home, the value of human life, the purpose of marriage, parenting, and the roles of men and women. Let me give you an illustration. Recently a court in America declared that the primary purpose of marriage is companionship. In view of this new definition the court declared that homosexual marriages cannot be legally stopped since the supposed primary purpose of such marriages is companionship.

In the midst of man's rejection of God, man's inventing of his religions and defining of his spirituality, man's defining and re-defining of his morals and conduct, God has remained unchanging in His person and revelations to mankind. The Bible is a closed canon. Whatever God had to say to you He has already said. He has nothing more to add. In *Mal.3:6* the Lord declared, "For I, the Lord, do not change." *Jas.1:17* says that with God "there is no variation or shifting shadow." The word "**variation**" speaks of change from an established pattern. God's character is not subject to such variation. "**Shifting shadow**" is literally "*shadow that is cast by turning.*" James emphasizes that God is not characterized by "*shadow that is cast by turning.*"

The revelations God has given to us for salvation, spirituality and morality are unchanging for life on earth and they are the very revelations God would use to judge mankind on that final great day of judgment. In other words, mankind's rejection of God's word does not nullify God's word. To declare that God does not exist does not change the fact that He exists. To declare that God has not spoken does not change the fact that He has spoken. To declare that there is no final judgment does not change the fact that there is a final judgment. In that judgment God will use the very truths He has revealed to judge you.

God & Goodness.

We return now to the issue of goodness and man. Man has his own subjective definitions of goodness. As we saw, his definitions are rooted in experience, needs and interest. A good man may be a very religious person. A good man may be one who does works of charity. A good man may be a drug lord who spends large sums of money building up the community in which he lives. A good man may be a vigilante police officer or soldier. A good man may be one who works hard, obey the laws and provides for his family. A good man may be a thief who sees his work as stealing from others to provide for his family.

The question we want to look at and answer is : What does God have to say about goodness? We saw from *Mk.10:18* that Jesus asked the man, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” Here is a truth that man refuses to come to grips with : God alone is good. He alone is the sum and substance of all that is good. He alone is the objective standard of all that is good. He alone can define what is good. And He alone defines for us what is good. As an aside, Jesus is not denying that He is good. What Jesus is saying is that you cannot call Him good unless you are prepared to acknowledge that He is God.

In the Bible God has given to us two views about goodness. **Firstly**, God has acknowledged the presence of natural human goodness. In *Isa.64:6* the prophet acknowledged the presence of natural human righteousness when he said, “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” The point I want you to note here is that this verse is acknowledging that man is capable of doing righteous or good deeds. In *Matt.5:20* Jesus described the scribes and Pharisees as righteous men. As a matter of fact Jesus was acknowledging that the scribes and Pharisees were the most righteous men you could find in Israel. In *Lk.18:11-12* the Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other people : swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get.” This Pharisee was not lying.

He was telling the truth. From a human standpoint he was a very righteous man. The tax collector was seen as the evil opposite to the Pharisee.

In *Mk.10:19* Jesus told the man to keep the commandments. And the man responded with all honesty, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” Some say the man was boasting. I will not rush to say that. Remember this man was in search of eternal life. I believe his response to Jesus was honest. By the standards of the Law of Moses, he was a good man. Even though Jesus told him that he lacked one thing, as far as the Law of Moses was concerned and as far as human standards go, he was a good man. Bear in mind that the Law of Moses dealt with the outward appearance. Jesus was dealing with the man’s heart condition.

The apostle Paul made a similar claim when he described his life as a Pharisee. In *Phil.3:5-6* Paul listed seven points to prove that he was no ordinary good man. Paul’s seven points were : (1) circumcised the eighth day; (2) of the nation of Israel; (3) of the tribe of Benjamin; (4) a Hebrew of Hebrews; (5) as to the Law, a Pharisee; (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; (7) as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. In *Acts 26:5* Paul said, “I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.” In other words, when it comes to the standards of human goodness and righteousness, Paul was in the elite class among the Pharisees.

Are you a good person? Can you, with all honesty, make the declaration the man made in *Mk.10:20*? Can you put yourself on the same level with Paul’s Pharisaical quality of life? Would Jesus give you the back-handed commendation He gave the Pharisees? You may be thinking, well, I am not that good, but I am good enough. This brings us to the most important question we can ask.

And the question is : In the eyes of God, is this goodness found in the Pharisees, and to a lesser extent in others, good enough to give you entrance into the kingdom of heaven? Is your goodness or righteousness good enough to stand you in good stead when you face God in the final judgment? This question is most important because God’s final verdict

will have eternal consequences for you? If your goodness is good enough, you will spend eternity in heaven. If your goodness is not good enough, you will spend your eternity in hell.

Turn with me to *Matt.5:20*. Jesus said, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus’ declaration is more emphatic than the English translation conveys. Jesus said, **“For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”** Jesus made a most shocking statement here. The crowd listening to Jesus would have been stunned. And the shocked Pharisees would have responded with a quiet, *“What! What did He just say?”* The most righteous people around were the scribes and Pharisees. And there was no question or doubt in anyone’s mind about the scribes and Pharisees entering into the kingdom of heaven.

Let us note a few points. The verb “surpasses” or “exceeds” was used to describe a river overflowing its banks. The word “beyond” means **“in greater measure”** and is used as a heightened comparative. Lastly, Jesus used a double negative with the verb “enter”. Jesus was not speaking about an ordinary surpassing of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. He was speaking about a righteousness that reached the level of the banks of the river, that overflowed the banks and that overflowed in greater measure.

The reality is that no one could achieve the standard Jesus was setting, not even the Pharisees. The Pharisees had attained to the highest limits the Law of Moses had given to them. And so no one, including the scribes and Pharisees, had any hope of entering the kingdom of God. Jesus said if you did not achieve the standard He was speaking about you would **“not not”** enter the kingdom of heaven. This is what Paul discovered. Remember Paul had seven great points going for him, or so he thought. But when he came face to face with Jesus Paul discovered that $1+1+1+1+1+1+1 = 0$. Paul discovered that his gains were actually a loss. Paul discovered that in God’s books he was not in the

black; he did break even; he was actually in the red. Paul discovered that for all his personal righteousness he was hopeless before God.

The question arises : what was wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? The answer is in one word : **“sin”**. Let us back up a moment and develop the answer. All it took for mankind to fall and enter the broad road that leads to hell was one sin. (cf. *Matt.7:13*). Paul said in *Rom.5:18*, “through **one** transgression there resulted condemnation to **all** men.” The key words here are **“one”** and **“all”**. Adam’s one sin did not set him alone on the broad road to hell. Adam’s one sin set all men, the entire human race, on the broad road that leads to hell. That one sin infected all mankind. That one sin polluted all mankind. Man became totally depraved. In other words, no part of his being, however minute, was spared the pollution of sin. Every human being is totally and completely a sinner.

A sinner living a good life is comparable to a bad tree seeking to bear good fruit. Let me illustrate. There is a bad guava tree on the empty lot next to my home. Every year this bad guava produces an abundant crop of guavas. The guavas mature and ripen and the smell is magnetic. The first time that smell of ripe guavas came into my nostrils, I was irresistibly drawn to the tree. I went there and picked the best looking fruit within my reach. Past experience taught me to open the fruit before attempting to eat it. So I opened it. And oh, the smell made my mouth water. But it was all in vain because to my dismay the guava was filled with worms. In desperation I picked another and then another. But it was no use. The tree was bad and all the guavas were filled with worms.

This bad guava tree is the sinner’s reality. Regardless of how many good works he does each day and in his entire lifetime, they are all infected by the worm of sin and totally unacceptable to God. God’s verdict is as follows : *Isa.64:6*, “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” Note carefully the word **“all”**. In *Phil.3:8* Paul counted **“all”** of his righteous deeds as **“rubbish”** in God’s sight. The word **“rubbish”** was used to describe a half-eaten rotting corpse or human or animal filth. Note that : filthy

garment and rubbish. Unlike the guava, your righteousness does not even smell good to God.

Rom.3:20 says, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” By the works of the Law no person will be declared righteous in God’s sight. Obeying the Law may be good, but that obedience is corrupted by the worm of sin and totally unacceptable to God. That obedience will not bring to you the judicial verdict of “**righteous**” and entrance into heaven. **Gal.2:16** repeats this truth. It says, “a man is not justified by the works of the Law.”

The goodness of the scribes and Pharisees was not good enough to take them to heaven. And your goodness is not good enough to take you to heaven. The sad reality is this : every person who is depending on his goodness to go to heaven is wasting his / her time. Hell will be filled with untold millions of good people.

Let me pull together the picture for you. We have seen that Adam’s one sin brought about mankind’s fall into sin. Every human being is a sinner. Every human being is born a sinner. This is why you sin. You sin because you are a sinner. Sin has infected every part of the human being, be it physical, psychological, emotional, and whatever else you can add. From a human standpoint there are a lot of good people in this world. But, as we have seen, their goodness is infected and corrupted by the worm of their sinful nature. Because of these realities, God’s verdict is as follows : our righteousness is as a filthy garment. Our righteousness is rubbish. In **Rom.3:10** God said, “There is none righteous, not even one.” In **Psa.14:3 (53:3)** God said, “There is none who does good, not even one.”

But what is the response of good men and women to God’s verdict? They have rejected God’s verdict. They have rebelled against God’s verdict. **Psa.14:3 (53:3)** says “they have all turned aside.” **Isa.53:6** “Each one of us has turned to his own way.” Instead of humbly submitting themselves to God’s verdict and seeking to find God’s revealed way, these good people are ignoring God and doing their own thing. They are

following their own way, their own ideas, their own beliefs. They are ignoring and rejecting God's standards and setting up their own standards worship, spirituality and morality. They are no different to the Jews Paul described in **Rom.10:3**. Paul said they are seeking to establish their own righteousness and not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God. Note that word **"own"**. Trace its use in the Bible. That word **"own"** is the summary of man's rebellion against God.

I want you to know today that as good as you may be, if you are depending upon your own goodness to take you to heaven, you are a rebel against God. You are a rejecter of God. You are setting up yourself as God in your own life. And your favorite hymn of self-worship is **Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way."** I want you to know that the true and living God whom you are rejecting will cast you and all your goodness into hell.

The Righteousness That Saves.

If your righteousness is not good enough to give you a good standing before God and save you, then what hope do you have? There is hope. Paul discovered that this hope is the righteousness of Christ. Turn to **Phil.3:7-9**. (**read**). What you need to have a good standing before God and salvation is the righteousness of Christ. Let me make myself clear here. It is not Christ's righteousness plus your righteousness that will give you a good standing before God. Your righteousness has zero value because it is infected with the worm of sin. When it comes to your salvation, your righteousness is utterly, totally and wholly useless. It is Christ's righteousness alone that will give you a good standing before God.

Let me sketch a brief picture here for you about the righteousness of Christ before dealing with the final question. The Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God and God of very God, came to this earth as a man. His birth was a virgin birth. He is the only human being to be born on this earth without sin. He lived a perfect life. **Heb.4:15** says He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Peter said He "committed no

sin.” (*1Pet.2:22*). He was born under the Law (*Gal.4:4*) and obeyed the Law perfectly. Paul said in *Phil.2:8* that “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Christ’s human righteousness is the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Christ’s human righteousness exceeds because His righteousness is perfect, untainted and uninfected by sin. Remember, He was born without sin and He knew no sin. (cf. *2Cor.5:21*).

How can you, a sinner, get this perfect righteousness of Christ which will make you acceptable to God and give you entrance into the kingdom of God? Paul’s answer in *Phil.3:9* is “through faith in Christ.” God’s way for your salvation is Christ and His righteousness. God’s way of making you, a sinner, acceptable in His sight is Christ and His righteousness. God’s way is simple. God’s way is a free gift. From the poorest to the richest can receive this free gift of the righteousness of Christ. All you have to do is humbly ask. “Ask, and it will be given to you.” (*Matt.7:7*).

But what are good men and good women doing? They are saying “no” to God’s way. They are saying, “we’ll do it our way.” There is no “our way” with God. Jesus said, “I am THE way, and THE truth, and THE life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (*Jn.14:6*). As good as you may be, “no one” includes you. Your religion, your rituals, your ceremonies of worship may be highly praised by the best of men, but keep this one fact in mind, “no one” includes you.

Satan lied to Adam and Eve when he told them that they can decide for themselves apart from God. Do not believe Satan’s lie. You may claim the right to decide for yourself. You may go ahead and decide for yourself. But in the final analysis your claims and actions do not change this one fact : God alone decides. His decisions are final and irrevocable. And He will judge you based on what He has decided and revealed to us. And His decision is : if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, you need the righteousness of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. All you have to do is put your trust in Jesus to save you. All you have to do is humble your proud heart and ask the Lord Jesus to clothe you in His perfect righteousness.

There is not a person in the history of this world who has been good enough to enter heaven. There is not a person alive today who is good enough to enter heaven. From prophet, to apostle, to church father, to pope, to priest, to whatever religious leader one may be, to king, to queen, to president, to prime minister, to rich, to poor, to educated, to uneducated, no one qualifies to enter heaven because of that infecting defiling worm called sin. If anyone, regardless of religion or status in life, does not bow to the Lord Jesus Christ and receive His righteousness, that one will have absolutely no hope of entering heaven.

You must come to understand and come to grips with this clear fact : God alone decides. You must do this God's way or hell will be your portion. Good man, good woman, good boy, good girl, what will it be for you? Will you choose to remain a good rebel against God and end up in hell? Or will you choose to humbly submit to God and receive by faith the righteousness of Christ that saves you?