

Good Versus Good

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

Titus 3:5

In Paul's day, as in ours, the issue of the gospel had become clouded by philosophy and religion. In the above verse, Paul reminds Titus to keep the issue clear for his congregation: no one is saved by their works of righteousness. Then, as now, many sinners led a more moral life and did better deeds than many Christians. Sadly, the issue of works makes witnessing difficult, if not impossible, because moral sinners have the appearance of not needing salvation or of already possessing special favor with God.

Many Christians are confused. We often judge the unbeliever by his sins and thus target only some of those who need salvation. *Yet, moral sinners are headed toward hell as well as immoral sinners.*

If you ask most sinners today if they believe they would go to heaven if they died, most of them would say “yes.” Because they have done a certain number of good works, they believe they deserve eternal life. They believe that since they have been relatively good and have not sinned as badly as others, that they will get to go to heaven.

However, the Bible makes it very clear: the problem with man cannot be settled by his own good works or his own self effort. If being good would save you, why did Jesus have to die? Paul tells us man's condition is so bad, he needs a “washing of regeneration.” This is a supernatural cleansing of sin by a new life. To have life begin all over again would take a miracle.

Man cannot produce such a miracle — so he must accept God's supernatural plan. Next, there must be a “renewing of the Holy Spirit.” The new birth has two parts. “Washing” takes care of the sins of the past, and “renewing” gives us life and power for the future.

Good versus Evil

Religions, philosophies and humanistic studies today are all trying to solve the issue of good versus evil. The world appears to be locked in a war between two sets of values. Wars rage between nations while statesmen sit at the peace tables trying to bring an end to the conflict. AIDS is destroying millions of lives, while doctors are racing against time to discover a cure. Crime is on the rise in our cities while citizens are forming neighborhood watches to protect their friends and property.

The continuing battle between good and evil accounts for most of the news programs we watch. The first half of the news tells us about war, disease, crime, drugs, and pornography, while the second half shows stories of national and local interest where cities are taking matters into their own hands. With fund raisers, benefit performances, and charity donations, they raise money to fund programs to win the war against disease, crime, homelessness, and war. We see the battle between good and evil before our eyes every day. But is this the real issue or a disguise to cloud the true problem?

Good versus Good

There is a battle between good and evil, but another battle is also raging. This battle is much more subtle, but will prove equally deadly to millions of moral sinners. This is the battle *of good versus good, of divine good versus human good*. If human goodness were enough to triumph over evil, man could solve his own problems. But since the answer can only come from divine good, man must look to the Cross. Divine good begins with the redemptive work of Jesus.

To understand the issue of divine good and human good, we must first find the origin of good and evil. We won't have to look far, because it was placed in full view in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God placed a tree in the garden called the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Until the man and woman disobeyed the command of God and tasted of the tree, they had never experienced good and evil. You are probably thinking, "They knew good, because they fellowshiped with God all day long and He is good." Yes, but God is *divine* good. The tree allowed man and

woman to experience a good they knew nothing of: *human* good.

Human good is Satan's counterfeit for divine good. From human good comes every religion, brotherhood, charitable organization and good deed known to mankind. Human good is man's attempt on his own to merit favor with God. Its sole means of production is self effort, i.e. works.

Our Source of Good and Evil

In the Garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was more than a test for the man and woman. It was a symbol for a curse which would plague man until the eventual destruction of the earth, *the nature of the flesh*.

What Adam and Eve did not have in their state of innocence was the nature of the flesh. They were created in perfection and did not know of the fallen nature of Satan. The moment they failed the test and ate of the tree, they discovered the curse, the nature of the flesh. In essence, the tree, symbolizing both human good and evil, took up residence in them. That flesh nature would now be passed down from generation to generation through natural birth.

Like the tree which offered knowledge of both good and evil, the flesh blossoms with both sins and human good. The problem is, *both good and evil come from the same source: the flesh*. Mankind is trying to solve the problem from the flesh with answers from the flesh. He is trying to overcome evil with human good and *both are the problem*.

Paul writes, "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good [divine good] thing" (Romans 7:18). The flesh cannot solve the problems it creates. God despises the flesh and everything it produces. This is why our own works will never save us — they are an abomination to God. Favor with God does not come by works of righteousness which we have done. Ephesians 2:9 clearly tells us salvation "is the gift of God [divine good], not of works [human good]."

All religion comes from human good. In other words, *all religion is produced*

from the nature of the flesh. Religion is the flesh's attempt to solve man's problems.

All religions are Satan's counterfeit for the gospel and for divine good. Divine good solves man's problem and offers the solution as a gift. Religion attempts to solve its own problems through good works, and offers them to God in exchange for eternal life in heaven.

God tells us in Isaiah 64:6 that "all our righteousness acts [human good] are like filthy rags" before God. Human good stinks to our Father. Every religion is a stench in God's nostrils. Only the work of His own Son, Jesus, will satisfy Him. The only righteousness God will accept is divine good.

Since man is fallen and incapable of divine good, he can only be saved through the work of Jesus on the Cross and afterwards maintain good works through the indwelling and infilling of the Holy Spirit. Human good is an abomination to God in the life of the unbeliever and the believer.

On Solid Ground

A man caught in quicksand may try to save himself, but every action he uses to solve the problem only causes him to tire and move closer to death. It takes a hand from the shore to deliver him. His own works worsen his situation.

This is the problem with human good. Man, by trying to solve his own problems, only worsens them. Comfortable in his own goodness, he never seeks for the righteousness of God. He is driving himself further away from eternal life and not closer.

Divine good is the hand from the shore. Divine good stands on solid ground and can pull every doomed person to safety.

As Christians, it is easy to miss the battle between Good and good, to see our unsaved, but "good" friends go through their lives without ever hearing of the divine good. But as Paul exhorted Titus, let us keep clear on the issues of the gospel: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us."

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