

Is Good, Good Enough?

(No, we need Jesus.)

Richard Garbi.

I have often heard someone say, “I think I am a good person,” or variations thereof: “They are a good person,” or “There are many good people in this world.” Often, this sentiment is paired with the notion that being good is all one needs to secure a place in heaven. This thinking is attractive because it includes our friends and neighbors in a broad sense of brotherhood while bypassing more challenging, introspective conversations. However, this belief contradicts the fundamental premise of the gospel: that Jesus came to “*seek and save the lost*” (**Luke 19:10**) and to save the world (**John 3:16–17**). Yet if goodness alone were sufficient, why then is there a need for a Savior?

To understand our need for Christ, we must first examine what we mean by 'good.' When people claim someone is good, they often refer to a relative human standard—a person who is law-abiding, kind to neighbors, friendly to strangers, benevolent to the needy, and diligent in work. But is this relative standard truly what it means to be good?

In the first chapter of **Romans**—immediately before condemning the practices of the Gentiles—Paul declares:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17).

In **verse sixteen**, Paul makes a statement that drives to the heart of our topic; it is the gospel which brings salvation to mankind (not our own good works). In **verse seventeen**, Paul references a passage from **Habakkuk 4:2** that reads, “*The righteous shall live by faith.*” Given his statement in **verse 16**, the thought of this passage is that the righteous shall live by their confidence in God. If the righteousness of the righteous were sufficient, wouldn't Paul have said the righteous shall live by their righteous deeds?

The reality is, the goodness of mankind is insufficient. **Isaiah 64:6** declares,

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that, “*No one is good except God alone*” (**Mark 10:18**). While we might be considered good by human standards, we still fall short of God's perfect standard. We are called to be holy, as God is holy (**1 Peter 1:14-16**) and are not. Having considered the human scale of goodness, we must now confront a sobering truth: in the eyes of Scripture, our best deeds do not measure up to God's perfect standard.

Since only God is truly good and our deeds fall short of His standard, we are not good. In **Romans 3**, Paul charges us with sin, declaring, “*None is righteous, no, not one,*” (**verse 10**) and “*no one does good, not even one*” (**verse 12**). Furthermore, he reminds us that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (**verse 23**). Although we are called to be holy like God, we fall short. In fact Paul describes us as “*without strength*” (**Romans 5:6**) in regard to the weight of sin laid against us.

Yet, there is hope—Jesus is the answer! God understood that we would be in need of a Savior, and He sent His own Son to pay the price for our sin.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (**Romans 3:21-25**).*

We are not good, but God is, and He paid the price for our sins. So, we are righteous because the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been applied to us.

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (**Philippians 3:8-9**).*

Those who follow Jesus are not just but have been justified. We are not righteous on our own, but we have the righteousness of Jesus.

However, our justification is not a license to continue in sin (**Romans 6:1-2**). Rather, we are called to cultivate our character and become more like our Creator (**1 Peter 1:14-16**). As Scripture instructs,

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Similarly, **1 John 3:3** reminds us, “*And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*” As we work on our character and produce good works, we know that our good works do not make us good; Jesus does that. But we also know that our labor is not in vain because we are in the Lord (see **1 Corinthians 15:58**). Through Jesus, and His sacrifice, we can be good! “*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (**1 Corinthians 15:57**).