

## CAN WE BE GOOD?

By Bill Irby

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What makes somebody good? This is a tricky question. Remember that Jesus had a fellow ask him a question that went this way: *“Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”* (Matthew 19:16). This man wanted a formula to follow and specific thing to do. Jesus answered him...not to his liking. In the process of reply the Lord said this: *“Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God....”*

If no one is good, it makes it a bit difficult to then answer the question, “Can we be good?” As with all Bible matters the dilemma is solved by continual and cumulative study. We come to Matthew 12:35 which says, *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”*

The solution is apparent. In his reply of Matthew 19 Jesus was speaking in absolute terms. No one is altogether good but God. This fellow needed to hear this very thing as he was evidently the type of man who thought he was (or could be) a pretty good fellow.

In Matthew 12 something else is under consideration, behavior relative to that of others is the thing. The Lord also reveals the source of good or acceptable behavior in that chapter.

This is not the case in Matthew 19. In that passage the man tells the Lord that he has kept the commandments carefully. He sees himself as having done all the right things. So the Lord pushes him beyond his prior accomplishments. Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give it to the poor. It is as if the Lord called the man's bluff. He had to have thought that if he did this or that it would be good enough for the kingdom of Heaven. Not so. In Matthew 19 Jesus showed this man that though his behavior may have been exemplary, it had limits. His relatively good behavior was not nor could it be equivalent to absolute goodness. That is God's characteristic alone.

So, what are we to do? We cannot be absolutely good; nobody can. Should we give up on trying to be good at all? Should we modify our standards to fit the world's definition of goodness? No.

Go back to Matthew 12. Jesus is teaching the Pharisees a lesson. It is not a question of absolute goodness here. It is a matter instead of the source of good and evil behavior in this life. The Pharisees were bad actors (their behavior was evil) because they had allowed their hearts to become corrupted. They said and did evil things because they had evil in their hearts.

A good man cannot be good in all and every aspect of his life (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:5-10). But he can manifest good behavior in comparison to others by virtue of controlling the thoughts and intents of his heart.

We can never hope to be good in the way that God is good. God is good as a component of His character. His goodness is not just huge. It is infinite and absolute. No man can aspire to such a thing. But we can make our behavior good by making sure that our heart is right.

What then is to be considered good? Goodness is to be as much like the Lord as we can be (Matthew 12:37, 7:12). We'll miss it, but we'll do well to try.

