

“Why Do You Call Me Good?”

by Wayne Goff

“Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments’ — Matthew 19:16-17

Only God Is Good

Someone came to Jesus and called him “Good Teacher.” Jesus apparently knew that this did not include a confession of faith in Him as the Son of God, and thus taught him that “No one is good but...God.” The questioner did not yet know that Jesus was God, but Jesus went on to discuss who is “good,” which has always made me wonder.

Defining “Good”

The Greek language has many nuances which ought to be considered, and the various words translated “good” is an example of it. The word in our text is **agathos**, is used as an adjective, and means “that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect” (*Vine’s*, II:163). Thus, when Jesus affirms **only** God is good, He means in a moral sense only “God is essentially, absolutely, and consummately good, Matt. 19:17...” (*ibid.*). Paul quotes Psalm 14 and says “As it is written: *‘There is none righteous, no, not one’*” (Rom. 3:10).

The question remains: **“What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”** Jesus’ reply under the Law of Moses was “...*If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments,*” and specifically, the Ten Commandments (vv. 17-18). How many people are concerned with that question today? I have never had anyone come up and ask me that question in particular.

Jesus is teaching us that “good” (**agathos**) is based upon how we treat our fellow man. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your parents. In summary, love your neighbor as yourself. Yet, Jesus and the Scriptures say of this quality, *“there is none good, only God.”* We all fall short in some particular or another, and thus are **sinners** in need of forgiveness so that we can once again strive to be “good.” Those baptized to wash away their sins indeed arise to *“walk in newness of life”* (Rom. 6:4).

The word **agathos** appears one hundred and eight times in the New Testament, and to study all of these references would give you a clear picture of what God considers good among men.

Good In Character

Matthew 7:11 records Jesus saying, *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”* Evil people know how to give their children good gifts? Isn’t that a bit harsh? But from God’s eyes this is absolutely true. Read again Isaiah’s self-assessment as he stood before God (Is. 6:5)! When we stand before the august Presence of Absolute Goodness, then we will agree with Jesus’ words.

Matthew 7:17, *“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit,...”* The “good (**agathos**) tree” bears “good (**kalos**) fruit.” The word “good” (**kalos**) refers to that which is intrinsically good, and thus, good, fair, beautiful (*ibid.*). If we **are** good, then we will **act** good. There is no exception to that rule!

Matthew 12:35, *“A good (**agathos**) man out of the good (**agathos**) treasure of his heart brings forth good things (**agathos**), and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”* Are you good?

Matthew 25:21, *“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good (**agathos**) and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”* One can heard God say to him, *“good and faithful servant”!* And while we understand that such a statement is *relative*, it is still much desired and attainable to you and me.

What do you want to hear God say to you in the Judgment? **Strive to be good.** Do not act like the world and see just how much you can “get away with” and still be okay. That is not a good thought, that is not a good standard, and that is not what God expects of us ever! I certainly hope this message falls on “good ground” (Lk. 8:15).

