

## **CHAPTER 1**

### ***Our Lord's Perspective***



I used to suspect all people of being basically evil. That way of thinking seems to have been programmed into my mind from years of associating with other Christians who hold this view. I erroneously had concluded that everyone is basically evil until they receive Jesus into their life. I considered the salvation experience as the transition point between evilness and goodness. This simplistic way of thinking seemed reasonable at the time.

However, I discovered that our Lord Jesus did not generalize that all non-Christians were evil. As I read through the New Testament, I found that He repeatedly spoke, comparing good versus bad people, without reference to any Christian experience. This surprised me!

For example, in Matthew 5:45 we read our Lord's words:

*“...He causes His sun to rise on the*

*evil and the good, and sends rain on  
the righteous and the unrighteous.”*

This assumes that there are both good and evil people in the world. Yet, Jesus was not speaking in terms of Christians versus non-Christians. He was speaking of the whole of humanity—people who had not even heard the gospel yet.

When I realized that Jesus recognized both good and evil people on the earth, I had to conclude that my earlier way of thinking was wrong. Not all non-Christians are evil.

Now, as I point this out, I am not denying that every human sins. I will make this point over and over again throughout this book, lest some wrongly conclude that I am teaching that people do not need Jesus as their Savior. Of course, *that is not what I am saying*. Please hear these words correctly. All people sin and all people need forgiveness for their sins.

Furthermore, when I talk about *good people*, I am not saying that they are good in the sense of *perfection*. The adjective *good*, as used in the New Testament, most commonly is interpreted from the Greek word *agathos*. *Agathos* can mean *good* in the sense of *perfection*, or it can be used in a less strict, but still very positive way.

For example, when a certain man came to Jesus and called Him “*Good Teacher*,” Jesus answered:

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*“Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”*

(Mark 10:18)

The goodness spoken of here has to do with perfection—a standard which no human being can attain.

We can see the word *good* (*agathos* in Greek) being used in other passages in a less strict sense, such as Luke 23:50, which describes Joseph:

*And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man....*

The Bible is not contradicting itself when it says in one verse that no one is good, and then in other verses points out certain people who are, indeed, good. Rather, the word *good* can be used in different ways.

If we use the term *good* the way the Bible uses the term, we can say that certain people are good, realizing that this does not necessarily mean perfection.

With this understanding, we can see how our Lord Jesus referred to some people as good and righteous, while He referred to other people as evil and unrighteous. The amazing point for our discussion is how our Lord used these descriptive terms independently of any Christian experience. Yes, non-Christians can be good.

Consider our Lord's words in the following Bible passage:

*"The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good...."* (Matt. 12:35)

The good man to whom He refers did not receive his goodness as a result of a salvation experience. No, Jesus was talking about people who never had heard His saving message.

We can see biblical evidence of goodness within man in other passages also. For example, the description of a Gentile named Cornelius reads this way:

*...a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household....*  
(Acts 10:2)

*...a righteous and God-fearing man....*  
(Acts 10:22)

At the time these words were spoken, Cornelius had not heard about Jesus. Yet, he is said to be righteous, devout and fearing God.

The term *righteous* also is used by our Lord when referring to certain people who lived during the Old Testament times. For example, when Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees, He blamed them and their forefathers for killing the righteous men and women who previously had

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been sent by God:

*...that upon you may fall the guilt of  
all the righteous blood shed on the  
earth, from the blood of righteous  
Abel to the blood of Zechariah....*

(Matt. 23:35)

This verse implies that there were *numerous* people in the Old Testament times who could be considered righteous.

The reason this is important to note is because many Christians think (as I formerly thought) we should use the descriptive term *righteous* only when referring to born-again Christians. What has been eye-opening to many of us is realizing how Jesus and the writers of the Bible used the term *righteous* to describe many non-Christians.

Of course, we should make a distinction in how we use this word. We realize that no one is perfect, and that compared with God and in His sight “no man living is righteous” (Ps. 143:2). In that sense, only Jesus Christ can be said to be perfectly righteous. However, the term *righteous* also can be used in a less strict sense. We can, as the Bible does, recognize that some people are righteous—not in comparison with God—but, indeed, they do have a quality of holiness and uprightness about their lives.

Many individuals in the Old Testament are said to be righteous and/or good; for example, Noah (Gen. 6:9), Josiah (II Chron. 34:2-3), Enoch (Gen. 5:22), Job (Job 1:1), and others whom we

will discuss later. Jesus had not yet died for the forgiveness of these people's sins. Men and women in the Old Testament times were not born again. Yet, many are referred to as being good, righteous, holy, blameless and fearing God.

This leaves us with an important question: What is man's condition in his natural state? Is man's nature basically evil? These are the questions which I will answer in the study to follow.

However, we cannot approach this subject fairly without an openness to truth. Many Christians have fixed so firmly in their minds the doctrine that says man in his basic nature is evil, that they cannot consider anything which contradicts their present beliefs—even if they are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The plain truth is that you cannot believe mankind is naturally evil and at the same time believe the words of Jesus.

Before we proceed, allow me to repeat: I acknowledge that apart from Jesus no one is *good* or *righteous* in the sense of being *perfect*. All people sin. Everyone needs forgiveness. We all need a Savior who is Jesus Christ. Whether people are good or bad, they all fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Having stated that again, let's continue on a course to discover truth.