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“Being Good Isn’t Good Enough”

Matthew 19:16–22

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According to recent polls, the majority of Americans see themselves as being basically good. The Bible teaches otherwise. When people believe the narrative that they are basically good, they will not see their need for God. In Matthew 19 there is an account about a rich young man, who is a picture of the majority of people in the world in that he thinks doing good things is the key to getting into heaven. He was wrong and so are those who believe as he did. In this message Pastor Gary shares the answer to this man’s question, *‘What good thing must I do to have eternal life?’*

### Historical Background

1. The Rich Young Man
  - a. This account is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
  - b. The man’s name is not known.
  - c. It’s likely that he was a ruler of a synagogue.
  - d. All three Gospels tell us he was wealthy.
  - e. He was seeking eternal life.
  - f. He was doing a lot of things well.
2. Eternal life
  - a. Eternal life is the belief that there is life after death.
  - b. Eternal life is the belief that every human soul lives on after physical death.
  - c. Eternal life is the belief that every soul will spend eternity in heaven or hell.
3. Heaven and Hell
  - a. Many people believe in heaven, and they hope to get there one day, but they aren’t sure how to get there, nor are they sure if they will get there.

b. 2014 CBS Poll <sup>1</sup>

- i. Polling data revealed that sixty-six percent of Americans believed heaven and hell exist.
- ii. Remarkably, eighty-two percent believed they would go to heaven, while only two percent thought they would go to hell.
- iii. Nine percent didn't think they are going to either place.
- iv. Seven percent had no opinion.

4. Death

- a. Pastor Gary said, "I find it intriguing because most young people don't think about their own mortality. Most young people are just living their lives, and they don't think about the reality of death. [Everyone] needs to think about [the reality of death]. Everyone needs to understand that we will all [die one day]. ... The fact is that nearly two people die every second; more than six thousand people every hour; approximately one hundred fifty-five thousand people die every day; and approximately fifty-seven million people die each year. No one outruns it and no one outmaneuvers it. The finest surgeon might be able to enhance your life, but he or she cannot eliminate your death. Pop all of the pills you want, eat all of the green vegetables you want, stay out of the sun, exercise regularly, and you might improve the quality of your life, but you cannot eliminate the inevitability of your death. We all die, and then what? Well, **you need to figure it out because you cannot have a peace in life until you have an answer for death.**" (Emphasis added)
  - i. **Ecclesiastes 8:8a** - *"No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death."*
  - ii. **Psalms 89:48** - *"Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave?"*

5. The Conversation

- a. **Matthew 19:16-22** - *"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.' He said to Him, 'Which ones?' Jesus said, 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/CBSNewsPoll\\_Apr2014c\\_Death.pdf](https://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/CBSNewsPoll_Apr2014c_Death.pdf)

- i. Jesus mentioned five of the Ten Commandments in this order: #6, #7, #8, #9, and #5.
  - ii. Jesus quoted [Leviticus 19:18](#), which says, “... *you shall love your neighbor as yourself,*” and in doing so he summarized the tenth commandment.
- b. Pastor Gary said, “At least [the young man] was saying, ‘Up until this point in my life, Jesus, I have kept these commandments. Matthew does not record Jesus’ reaction, but Mark tells this story [in his Gospel]. In [Mark 10:21](#) [we read that], “*Jesus, looking at him, loved him...*” ... I love [this] reflection of the Lord because sometimes we think that God is all about shaming us for what we are not doing right, and what we need to see about our Lord is that he loves us for what we are doing well, and he appreciates us for what we are doing well. He challenges us about what we are not doing well, as he [challenged] this guy, but he doesn’t shame us or disown us in the [areas] we fall short. He loves us and then he challenges us. ... [What he was doing was] commendable. He [was] seeking eternal life, and he [was] doing a lot of things well.”

## 6. No One Is Good Except God

- a. This man believed he had checked all of the boxes regarding the commandments, so to speak.
- b. Pastor Gary said, “Here’s where it breaks down for this guy. Since he [was] doing well in a lot of these areas... he [thought] of himself as being a good person. ... [He believed] that he had to do something good to go to heaven. That [was] his theology. Everything with this guy was about being good or doing good...
  - i. [Matthew 19:16](#) - “*Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what **good thing shall I do** that I may have eternal life?’*” (Emphasis added)
- c. A June 2020 survey by the CRC (Cultural Research Center), found that sixty-nine percent of Americans believe that people are basically good.<sup>2</sup>
  - i. Pastor Gary said, “This guy in the story represents millions of people around the world who see themselves as A) basically good, and B) [those] who believe they have to do good things in order to get to heaven.”
- d. Pastor Gary said, “Everyone needs to get this! No one is good except God.”
  - i. [Romans 7:18](#) - “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells...*”
  - ii. [Romans 3:10](#) - “*As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’*”
  - iii. [Romans 3:23](#) - “*[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AWVI-2020-Release-07-Perceptions-of-Value-of-Life.pdf>

- iv. **Ecclesiastes 7:20** – *“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”*
- e. Pastor Gary said, “If we believe the narrative that [people] are basically good, then we will not see [our] need for God.”

## 7. Doing Good Things Won't Get You Into Heaven

- a. We understand that generally speaking, if we work hard and apply ourselves, we will be successful.
- b. Many translate this to develop a “theology” that leads them to believe that if they work hard doing good things, they will go to heaven.
- c. Eternal life is not something anyone can work to get or pay to get.
- d. Jesus did all of the “work” for us on the cross of Calvary.
- e. Pastor Gary said, “[The] fact that [we] don't have to do any good works in order to be able to get to heaven or somehow [to] get on God's good side should be liberating to us. ... This means that you don't have to perform to get to God. ... Here's the difference between all of the world's other religions and Christianity. **All other world religions basically teach that it's about man's effort to reach God.** ... Christianity is different in that it's about a relationship... **It's about what God did to reach man.** ... It's not based on [our] performance, [our] effort or our works; it's based on what God has done for [us]. **Christianity is not a performance-based religion. It is a grace-based relationship. It's not based on the performance of what [we] do; it is based on what Jesus has done on the cross for [us].** ... [We] just have to respond to what was already done for [us]. (Emphasis added)

## 8. How Good Is Good Enough?

- a. Pastor Gary said, “What kind of confidence do you have in that system, if you believe that... do you believe that you will ever make it to heaven based on your goodness? ... Do you think God grades on the curve? Do you think God's going to throw out the lowest grades and just kind of equal the playing field in the class? ... Does God have a big scale in heaven? [Do you hope] that your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, and that's how God's going to let you in? ... Are you really confident in all of your goodness that somehow that's going to tip the scale in your favor? ... [This] philosophy... gives me zero confidence. I don't know how anybody can trust [this] if you have an ounce of honesty about yourself.”
- b. What's the answer?
  - i. **Matthew 19:17** – *“So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.’ ”*
  - ii. Pastor Gary said, “Jesus answered a question with a question. Why? Because he was trying to draw out this guy's worldview. Everybody comes at life from their personal perspective and their own worldview

that gets shaped by different factors. So, to answer a question with a question is actually a very good communication tool so you can understand [where] a person is coming from and what certain words [mean]. ... Here's the reason why [Jesus asked] this question of this young man: because [Jesus wanted to know if] he was calling him good because he believed [he was] God. And, if [he] believed [Jesus] was God, was he willing to do what [Jesus] was about to tell [him]? ... [Jesus] was trying to awaken this man's [understanding that he was in fact God]. ... Why [didn't Jesus] simply say, 'Believe in me and you will have eternal life?' ... Why did [Jesus] speak about some of the Ten Commandments? Because Jesus was about to show the guy that obeying the commandments won't save a person. ... Jesus was about to expose the guy's inability to obey all of the commandments. And if you can't obey all of the commandments, it shows that you are not that good after all, and if you are not that good after all, what's your hope of getting to heaven other than a Savior?"

1. **Acts 16:31** - *"[Paul and Silas] said [to the Philippian jailer], 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' "*

## 9. The Ten Commandments

- a. The commandments were written upon two tablets.
- b. Many believe that five were written on each tablet, but the fact is that there were four on the first tablet and six on the second tablet.
- c. The first four commandments are all vertical, meaning that they are about man's relationship with God
- d. The remaining six commandments are all horizontal, meaning that they about man's relationship with man.
- e. Jesus quoted all of the commandments to the young man that deal with man's relationship with man.
- f. Jesus knew that this young man's problem was not with the second tablet. This young man's problem was with the first tablet, particularly with commandments one and two.
  - i. **Exodus 20:3** - *"You shall have no other gods before Me."*
  - ii. **Exodus 20:4** - *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything..."*
- g. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is **Matthew 19:22**, which says, *"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."*
- h. His problem was not that he was wealthy.
  - i. **Deuteronomy 8:18** - *"And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the power to get wealth..."*

- i. Pastor Gary said, “You know what his problem was? **He had made money his god and success his idol.**” (Emphasis added)
10. What do we need to do?
- a. Humble yourself before the Lord. Repent, believe, and receive the forgiveness offered to everyone by faith in Jesus Christ!

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Matthew 19:16–22](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of Pastor Gary’s description of the rich young ruler. (See #1 above)
3. Read and discuss each of the outline points in Pastor Gary’s message concerning eternal life, heaven, and hell. (See #2 through #3 above)
4. Discuss the 2014 CBS poll that Pastor Gary mentioned. (See #3b above)
5. What was your understanding about these matters before you came to faith in Christ?
6. How has the Holy Spirit changed your heart and mind by revealing truth to you through the Scriptures?
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about death. (See #4 above)
8. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks about the young man’s understanding of keeping the commandments up to that point in his life. (See #5b above)
9. Spend time talking about the false notion that mankind is basically good. (See #6c above)
10. Read and discuss the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning the biblical truth that no one is good enough. (See #6d above)
11. How did the Holy Spirit convict and convince you regarding your personal need for a Savior? (See #6e above)
12. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks about doing good things and the belief that what we do is what matters. (See #7e above)

13. Why do you think people have such a high level of confidence in their own goodness, to the point that they believe their personal merit satisfies God's view of sin? (See #8a and #8b-ii above)
14. Spend time talking about the outline Pastor Gary shared concerning the Ten Commandments. (See #9 above)
15. Before coming to faith in Christ, what were your gods and idols?
16. How has the Holy Spirit helped you cast them aside?
17. What were some of the decisions and life changes you made to leave your old life or your old way of living and/or thinking?
18. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)