

# INTRODUCTION

He thought he saw a good man—the best man he had ever seen—a truly righteous man. He thought to himself, *Surely if anyone can tell me exactly what it takes to be right with God and gain eternal life, this man can.* So, he ran up to Jesus, *knelt down before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Mark 10:17) You would think that Jesus would have been eager to answer his question directly—“Well, let me tell you the A-B-C, step 1-2-3, of getting saved.” Instead, Jesus asked him a seemingly off-the-wall question and followed with a seemingly critical statement: ***“Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One—God.”*** (Mark 10:18)

Jesus took issue with this man’s way of sizing people up: “What is your standard for determining that I am good? The only way you should see Me as good is if you see Me as God, because no human being is good.” And I don’t think Jesus was jumping points when He went to the issue of the commandments: ***“You know the commandments: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.”*** (Mark 10:19) He was propping up His point: “You know the commandments from God and how they prove that no one is good but God.” Jesus was taking this man to the core issue of where he was with God after failing to obey His commandments—to be good enough.

He thought he saw a good man when he looked in his mirror. I can see him frown a little as he listened to Jesus and then lift his eyebrows as he responded, ***“Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.”*** (Mark 10:20) Now, either he determined this with some defensiveness as he got the point, or he exclaimed this with some enthusiasm as he missed the point. I lean toward the latter, but either way, he wasn’t given over to the point. So, Jesus lovingly

pressed the point painfully home: *Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, “You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.” But he was stunned at this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.* (Mark 10:21–22) Right there Jesus shot down his self-goodness—shattered his self-righteousness—as Jesus revealed the idolatry of his heart, which was separating him from God and the eternal life he wanted.

I thought I saw a good man when I looked in my mirror—in spite of the evidence that said otherwise. I reached the age of moral culpability early on. I was first exposed to pornography at eight years old. I instinctively knew there was something wrong with it, and I wanted to look at it anyway. I did look at it anyway—until my sister told on me, my mom threw a fit, and my dad took it away from me. At eleven, I started building my own collection and an addiction that lasted into my adult years. I went socially sexual at twelve. At fifteen, home invasions became a past-time as I started going after men’s wives. I got one woman pregnant twice and agreed to abortions both times, not wanting the babies to interfere with our plans for her to leave her husband. After moving to the city to go to college, and my plans with the other woman did not work out, I broke up two, if not three (not sure about the third), engagements. All of that is not counting the single women I was involved with, leaving behind me a trail of emotional carnage.

Yet, the people who knew me, and were aware of my “exploits” (not counting the other things I did), called me a good boy—“Bela is a good guy.” How could they come to that conclusion? Oh, I was nice enough—kind and compassionate even. You could have a pleasant, rational conversation with me. For the most part, I was socially respectable by all common standards. I wasn’t one of the

dregs of society—a gross pervert or a violent criminal. But could someone rightly call me a good guy? ***“No one is good but One—God.”***

How do you define right and wrong—“good” or “bad”? Opinions vary. Detailed definitions of right and wrong have become as diverse as the people who hold them. People are even avoiding concrete terms in favor of more popular and vague generalities, which do not back anyone into a moral corner (Be as good as you can. Love everybody. Don’t hurt anybody.). In our culture of moral relativity, morality and immorality are personal preferences. According to President Obama, sin is “being out of alignment with my values” (Cathleen Falsani, “Barack Obama: The 2004 ‘God Factor’ Interview Transcript,” <http://falsani.blogspot.com/2008/04/barack-obama-2004-god-factor-interview.html>, accessed May 14, 2009). So, according to the President, he ultimately decides for himself what sin is, and, thereby, what kind of man he is. He can use his value scale. I can use mine. You can use yours. Osama Bin Laden could have used his. Hitler could have used his. That is the extreme we cannot avoid if we stretch the President’s viewpoint all the way out to its logical conclusion: Everybody decides for himself or herself what is right and what is wrong.

Okay, yes, our society still has an overarching sense of basic morality—basic goodness that one human being shows another—as I am sure the President claims in not approving of Bin Laden or Hitler. We need to recognize, however, that our culture grades the goodness of man on a curve, and it is a very broad curve. If you are not among the worst, you are a good person; if your lifestyle and habits do not violate the generally accepted standards of what is not perverse and mean, no one should try to force his definition of wrongness on your choices. Why, you can even rest assured that you are heaven-bound, because a loving God grades on the same curve. That kind of

thinking has infected even the visible church to the point that the Gospel is being watered down to nothing more than a life-improvement methodology. (“Do you feel like something is missing in your life or are things out of place? Get Jesus and He’ll make it all better. You deserve a life-lift.”) The root of this problem is very simple: ***when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding*** (2 Corinthians 10:12 ESV). People foolishly hold themselves up against other people and think they have an accurate measurement of themselves. Too many people do not realize that how we stack up against one another is not the eternal issue, but how we stack up against God. ***“No one is good but One—God.”***

The bottom line is that most people’s holistic view of right and wrong does not line up with the biblical revelation of right and wrong as God defines them out of His own character. And they don’t understand the devastating repercussions of that misalignment, although we all live in those repercussions every day. In the beginning, God gave His own distinction of what was right and in turn, His creation went terribly wrong, bringing terrible wrong into our world. Thankfully, He didn’t leave us to our wrong, though. In the beginning, He foretold a way He would make everything right again.

Looking from the beginning forward through the rest of God’s revelation to us, we can learn some critical things about what is really going on in our world—what is really going on between God and man. We can learn what wrong really is, where evil really began, how to really “get right” with Him, and what we really gain in doing so. We start with something seemingly insignificant: a bite out of a piece of fruit.