

Looking Good

God creates us in His image and God is good. However, we also have the potential for the opposite because we have choice for good or evil. At some point in life, most of us do something against our code of ethics and realize that we are not automatically good. Try as we might, we cannot keep all the rules. We may be able to fool the people around us, but sooner or later, if we are honest human beings, we can no longer fool ourselves. The Bible makes it very plain:

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Romans 3)

As we grow in life, understanding what it means to do good and be good gets more and more complicated and vague. As a five year old we're considered good if we share our toys, mind our parents, don't pinch, don't whine, and use tissues. For adults, goodness is more elusive. We do some things that seem good but there are often other motives hidden below the surface. We give a gift to someone in hopes of getting a favor in return. We try to help someone out have to tell a lie to do it. We look and act politely and friendly to someone's face but watch what we say about them behind their back as we gossip and complain. We sell things quickly that are a "real bargain" because we know they are pretty much ready to break down. Our behaviour is often tainted. Our motives are often mixed.

God, who knows our hearts, invites us to do good things for the right reason: ***Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*** (Matthew 5) We are taught to have pure motives and compassionate hearts and to live our actions out of that motivation alone.

Another part of the sickness of our culture is our need to be good, or to seem innocent where we should admit guilt. As long as no one catches us, we really haven't done anything bad. As long as we can find some problem in our background to explain our pain, we're not responsible for our lives of addiction and irresponsibility. As long as some lawyer can find a reasonable judge or a technicality that can get us off,

we don't have to worry about cheating, stealing and assaulting that we've committed. If we deny we do bad things, we suffer on the inside even if our reputation seems to hold together for a while on the outside. God clearly tells us that one of the great gifts of true goodness is the cleansing we feel after we've admitted our faults and our sins.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and God's word has no place in our lives. (1 John 1)

Keeping the rules and checking the "balance sheet" is another favorite method of tricking ourselves into thinking we are good people. We follow the rules but push and shove anyone who gets in our way while we do it. We use all the times we've done the right thing to excuse ourselves from taking responsibility for the rules we break. We do good things for others and tell ourselves we are "pretty good people" even though we know we have bad attitudes and hidden resentments.

The Bible makes a clear distinction between doing good things and goodness as a character quality. Jesus taught His follower, ***"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."*** (Luke 18)

In spite of the challenges and mixtures, as Christians we are taught to choose good. We're also told that one sign that the God lives in us is "goodness." God has created us for good work, flowing from a good heart. The challenging question for us is: Are we just "looking good" or are we really good?

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Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What's an easy trap for me to fall into when I look good on the outside but have something else going on inside?
2. In what areas am I growing so that what goes on inside me, matches the good I do on the outside?
3. Is there any hope for us to live as good people? If so, what is it?
4. How do we make the move from looking good to being good?