

Never Good Enough

'One day God was looking down at Earth and saw all of the rascally behavior that was going on. He decided to send an angel down to Earth to check it out. So He called one of His angels and sent the angel to Earth for a time. When the angel returned, he told God, "Yes, it is bad on Earth; 95% are misbehaving, and only 5% are not". God thought for a moment and said, "Maybe I had better send down a second angel to get another opinion". So God called another angel and sent him to Earth for a time, too. When the angel returned he went to God and said, "Yes, it's true. The Earth is in decline; 95% are misbehaving and but 5% are being good". God was no pleased. So He decided to email the 5 percent that were good, because He wanted to encourage them. Give them a little something to help them keep going. Do you know what that email said? ... I didn't get one either ... '

Though ridiculous, this joke illustrates one of the most fundamental facts of humanity. We are sinners. There's not even 5% of us that are good. As God's Word explicitly states, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." (Romans 3:23). Since our first father Adam sinned, and through his descendant Noah we are all descended, we inherit Adam's sin nature, every last one of us. Adam didn't originally

have a sin nature. His nature was pure, innocent, and sinless. But when he sinned that first time by eating that forbidden fruit, which was most definitely not an apple(!), his human nature was darkened, and forever stained with a sin nature. It's our nature.

Our Creator, Who first formed Adam with His Own fingers out of the dust of this planet Earth, as the infinite and perfect Being that He is, could not, and would not even if He could have, created Adam as anything less than perfect. For God can not look upon sin. For anything tainted with sin will be destroyed, extinguished in a whiff of smoke, if ever God's direct gaze falls upon it. Since Adam and Eve's first sin in the Garden of Eden, no longer could they know the perfect and intimate fellowship with God for they would have ceased to exist if they ever came into His direct gaze. There has been this separation ever since. For "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18) directly face to face. Even Moses, as close to God as he was, could only see the back of God's being. Yet even then, God's glory, His presence and radiance, was so overwhelming that Moses' face itself glowed with divine glory for days and days after each time he met with God.

However, even someone as great as Moses sinned. Lest we forget his rap sheet, he was a murderer. But he was hardly alone. Israel's greatest king, David, also had a rap sheet. Adulterer, deceiver, and, yes, murderer, too. Though the Biblical accounts don't record any names, it appears likely that the greatest of Lord Jesus' apostles, Paul, was also a murderer. The way he had vio-

lently persecuted the early followers of Christ was known wherever there were believers. One might get the notion that God likes murderers. Well, in a sense, that's true. But there's one vitally important caveat. God dearly loves *repentant* murderers. Recall King David's repentance in just the first five verses of Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your unfailing love. Because of Your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against You, and You alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in Your sight. You will be proved right in what You say, and Your judgment against me is just. For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me". David acknowledges his sin and the fact that he has always been a sinner. He doesn't try to cover anything up or find any excuses or extenuating circumstances to lessen his guilt. No he 'fesses up completely. And with empty hands, with nothing to offer offended God in exchange for his sins, he simply throws himself on the mercy and love of God. "Because of Your unfailing love", "because of Your great compassion", he totally humbles himself, and lays himself bare before God's seat of judgement, prepared to accept the full measure of God's righteous judgement. And God forgave him, covering his sin so that he would not immediately physically die (II Samuel 12:13). For God knew that His amazing love for sinners will cover their sins thousands of years in the future, once for all time, when

He Himself would offer Himself in a perfect, sinless human man as Immanuel, God With Us, Christ Jesus, the One Who Saves, to effect the penalty for David's and Moses' and all of Adam's and his descendant's sins, if they but simply repent.

So it's not just repentant murders, but repentant sinners of any and all stripes that God loves. The first two verses of our reading from Joel continually command us: '... the Lord says, "Turn to Me now, while there is time. Give Me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead". Return to the Lord your God, for He is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.' These words were first addressed to God's Chosen People, those who were supposed to automatically, by birthright, know Him from birth to death. Yet they had sinned and sinned, and all needed to *return to God*. Even many of them had lost the sense of the horror of sinning against God. Just as in the world today, and especially modern America, most people have a flippant attitude about sin, assuming they even think they are not already good enough for both this life and whatever life or not that might lie in the future.

You know, most Americans, of those who believe in the after-life, think both they and most everybody else who's "good enough" will go to Heaven. After all, God loves us, so all of us will just automatically go to Heaven. But tragically, this is one of Satan's fundamental lies. For no one is ever "good enough" to get to

Heaven. From the moment we are conceived in our mothers' wombs, we are sinners and are automatically destined for hell after we reach the age of accountability. Unless we repent. It's not just confession, it's a permanent turning away from our known sin. And if we should ever fall back into it, we repent again, and draw closer to Christ Jesus, begging Him for more of His glorious Holy Spirit power to work in us to bring us finally to the complete deliverance of all the sin that trips us up in this life. For without giving complete control of our lives to Lord Jesus, we will never ever be good enough. As Lord Jesus taught us in Mark 8:35: "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it".

The season of Lent reminds us of this every year. To join our wills with our Savior's will for us in order that He may deliver us and heal us from all that ails and assails us in this life. James 1:19-21 puts it this way: "You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls". All sin is deadly. Don't let the world fool you by taking advantage of God's immense forbearance. Sin not repented of will necessarily be judged. But those who answer Lord Jesus' command in Mark 1:15, "Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!", will absolutely be saved. Gloriously! 