

# GODLINESS

BY: BRAD CULLEN – MARCH 9, 2003

## GODLINESS AND PURITY (SOMETHING TO STRIVE FOR?)

Religious terms of human goodness. (Yuck...)

Jesus' retort to someone sums up his own feelings on the topic.

"Why call me good? Only one is good... God!"

The separatist Jewish group called "Pharisees" ... was fond of a system of self-righteousness. Today's equivalent is Christian Evangelicals... One heralded spokesman for today's version of the Pharisaical, Jerry Falwell, clumped them together along with what he referred to as the "moral majority."

For a follower of Christ to get sidetracked into trying to look "good" as some sort of testamentary evidence of Godliness falls far short of being who and what Jesus "the Christ was as an example or our Elder Brother. At least if we want to take the italicized quote above seriously.

Some years ago I had a fellow tell me that his idea of the best testimony he could give for being committed to Jesus Christ was the fact that he neither drank nor smoked. Am I against morality? Of course not. Am I advocating that anyone overindulge in alcohol and tobacco? Of course not. Overindulgence in anything is a matter of degrees within any individual. If someone abstains from certain foods, or indeed, alcohol and tobacco as a personal discipline in dedication to Christ – that is his or her choice and may well be perfect for that individual. Generally, however, it is a false standard. It should be remembered that the Pharisees ridiculed Jesus on the basis that he was a drunkard and a glutton because he ate and drank in that day's equivalent to bars, taverns or pubs – and horrors of all horrors – with sinners no less. Not only was Jesus not a Pharisee... he derided them for not entering the Kingdom of God... and laying up a bunch of false rules on the backs of others that kept them from entering the kingdom as well.

The writer of the New Testament book, Colossians (2:16), said, "Let no one judge you in food or in drink." His freedom extended not only to drinking wine, but even eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He also admonished his readers to not eat meat in front of vegetarians who are convinced that eating fruits and vegetables alone is a sign of spirituality... so as to not make them "stumble." Perhaps by causing them to judge the person eating meat as being "unspiritual." (?)

If we love our brothers we are neither going to judge what they eat nor what they drink... though he did make some rather broad statements against sexual infidelity...

The fact remains that if we use Jesus as our example for living... it has to do with wanting and declaring daily that we want only the Father's will... and that the Father in us does the "good" things. And when we find ourselves not doing what we should do... or doing what we know we should not be doing... we say along with the aforementioned writer, "I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The rules Jesus laid out were seemingly impossible to meet. Consider just a few... "If somebody abuses you treat him with kindness. If somebody hits you on one side of the face turn your head so he can take good aim at the other side. If somebody takes something that belongs to you, don't demand it back. Love your enemies, don't judge others, lend without any hope of return... etc. etc.

Now, if you want to "kiss off " this particular group of Jesus' list of rules – you may want to consider what he said immediately after declaring them...

"So, why do you call me, 'Lord,' and not do the things I say? Whoever comes to me, and hears what I say and does them is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was well built. But he that heard and did not do what I said is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently and it immediately collapsed. And the ruin of that house was total."

These words used to bother me greatly... until I understood something. The false rules of "Christian morality" are absolutely nothing compared to what Jesus is laying out here.

But the good news is contained in the story he told about the two men that went up to the Temple to pray. One belonged to the moral majority. He said... "I thank You, God, that You have made me better than other men. For I don't lie, steal or cheat. In fact, twice each week I don't even eat. I give ten percent of everything I own. I do not commit adultery and I am totally honest in all my business dealings. I thank, You, especially for making me better than that tax collector over there.

The tax collector (notorious cheats and adulterers) was standing a ways away... beating on his chest and crying out, "Oh God, have mercy on such a sinner as I. Jesus capped this story with an amazing statement... the tax collector went home righteous in the eyes of God... now here this, oh you righteous ones... INSTEAD of (literally, rather than) the other guy that looked so good in the eyes of the rest of the moral majority as well as himself.

The one method that Jesus gave for becoming Godly... that is attaining God's righteousness is beating on one's chest and crying out for mercy. It works every time!

Forget rules of human piety – let us measure ourselves against the "impossible" stuff that Jesus laid out... and beat on our chests and cry out for mercy because we see how far short we really do fall.

God then picks us up, views us as righteous in His own eyes... and all of a sudden the by- product begins... we no longer hate anyone... we do love our enemies and our neighbors as ourselves... because we begin to see how much God loves us. It all starts with... "God be merciful unto such a sinner as I" (perhaps for following a bunch of false rules and ignoring what our Lord and Savior has told us to do).

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