

ONLY THE GOOD ARE GOD'S, LUKE 5:27-32

Liar Liar #9

◆ **Intro:** My son asked me once, “Can you be gay and be a Christian?” I thought for a moment and then asked him, “Can you be greedy and be a Christian?” I think his response was, “Well Bam! That answers that!” Do you follow? We could lengthen the list: Can you be a gossip and complainer in your Bible study about other people and still be a follower of Jesus? Can you lie to people and still be Christian? Can you be a person with a temper and still claim you love God? Can you be selfish with your money and still call yourself God’s? Can you be lazy ... Basically the question wonders if we can sin, disagree with God, or do wrong, and still belong to him. Put it another way, have all Christians conquered all their sins? The short answer is “No we haven’t conquered all our sins and yes we you can have moral battles raging and be a God-follower at the same time, but by the grace and because of the love of God, all followers of Christ do make progress in goodness!”

◆ Today we’re going to talk about lies we believe in regard to goodness.

◆ **Goodness lie #1: Only the Good are God’s**

◆ A. This lie automatically assumes that those of us who do bad things have no chance with God. It assumes that God has standards (he does by the way) and that those standards are up there bumping against the clouds (they are by the way). And if you’re not a straight-A God-follower with moral AP and NHS recognition (you’re not by the way), you don’t get in to Sky High University. But this is a lie. Jesus himself said that he did not come for the good and the healthy. He came for the sinner and the sick. That’s who he invites into his kingdom. Jesus is the the Coast Guard. He’s

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sailing after the drowning! To think the opposite is like expecting the Coast Guard to be there only for happily visiting with buoyant, floating vessels!

◆ Do you realize how different this is from most of what we experience in life? Jesus' statement in verse 31 is something like a professor who says, "I want all the lowest grade students in my class." Or, "I have come to teach and graduate drop-outs. The rest of you need not apply!" We don't expect God to be that kind of person. It's easy to believe that God is like everyone else; that he only wants the best of the best. One reason we find it easy to believe the lie that God only loves the good is that many of us have learned this in our human relationships. Some have had abusive parents who could not seem to approve of us, or who spoke affirmatively only on rare occasions when we achieved greatly. Some of us had fathers who never seemed satisfied with our performance. Or mothers whose normal mode of operation was to critique and correct. Disappointment showed easily on their faces. Affirmation, not so much. Or we've had teachers or coaches at times that ran class like a drill sergeant. Emotion was for the week. Commendation was for the top of the class. Respect was reserved for those in the winner's circle, and that's about it... So it became easy for us to assume that God is the same way.

◆ That, friends, is not the nature of God. If you are a sinner and sick, and struggling, and drawn to things that God very clearly says are not his good will for you, you are the one he's inviting to eternal life! If you have blown it in life, you are the type God wants! Jesus came to offer spiritual drop-outs,

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and the morally-challenged a way to get their spiritual GED. We call it salvation!

◆“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”” Luke 5:30-32, NIV.

◆The context of the story, Jesus has just called Levi, a tax-collector, to be one of his disciples! You need to understand that tax-collectors, the IRS, were not as well-liked in Jewish culture as they are in ours! The Romans farmed the job out to the highest bidder and then gave that bidder military power to get the money. As long as Rome got what the bidder promised, the local collector could keep whatever more he could squeeze out of people for himself. Tax-collectors were citizens who preyed on their neighbors instead of praying for their neighbors! Nobody liked them. They were not popular in Hollywood. Nobody liked them on Facebook either. Nobody followed them on Twitter. Now, Jesus has just asked a IRS agent to be one of the Disciples! You know, “the Twelve”. The guys who would win the West and change the world! And Levi has thrown a party and invited all the other redneck, bloodsucking types he knows to come and meet Jesus. The Pharisees are like, “Do you really want to do that? They are not good people, like us. Be careful about making labels!

◆Two brothers were notorious Chicago mobsters back in the day. They had reputations for being shady, murderous, greedy, oppressive, threatening and the like. One of them caught in a shoot

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out died and the brother went to the priest who would be doing the funeral. He said,

◆“Now Fadder, youz probly knows about my brother and me, see. And I don’t care all what youz does in this here funeral, see. Just youz make sure of one thing: I want you to tell them folks that my brother was a saint! Just youz make sure o dat, ok Fadder? You tells them folks my bother was a saint and we’re good.”

◆The priest was feeling in a tight spot. He felt obligated to speak truth and support what was right. But he’d been threatened. What would he do? On the day of the funeral he stood those assembled and said, “This man who lies before you was a cheat, a thief, and bully, and a murderous man and everyone knows it. He has reaped the consequences of his actions with little good to be said of him... but compared to his brother, he was a saint.”

◆Be careful about taking your cue from comparisons! It could make you look bad in the end! The leaders in Luke 5 complaining to Jesus were playing comparisons. Picture it. Verse 17 tells us that the Pharisees and lawyers were sitting there in the house where Jesus was speaking. These important folk has come from “every village in Galilee”. All these spiritual CEOs in a big summit where Jesus was the main speaker. We get the feeling they are evaluating just how good a speaker he might be. Verse 21 tells us they think he over-spoke. “This fellow is acting like God! Who does he think *he* is?” Jesus of course shows them his right and power by forgiving sin and healing the man on the spot; both of which are easy to say, and pretty

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hard to actually do! Then Jesus leaves, and next thing we know he's in another house having a party with more people, which kinda miffs the Pharisees. "What? He goes from meeting with us to eating with them? Those people are sinners... compared to us!" By meeting with them Jesus was giving them the same attention they had had earlier! And think about this: In the first house meeting Jesus asked no one to follow him (that Luke records anyway). In fact the only instruction recorded there was to "go home". In juxtaposition to that, in the second scene, Jesus has instructed a bloodsucker to be his disciple; "Follow me." All of it shows pretty clearly that our so-called goodness and achievement are not the criteria for getting God's love and attention.

◆B. The truth that God loves us in our dirtiness is an answer to our discouragement and despair that says "God only wants me *after* I've cleaned up my act. I can only come to the Lord's Supper *after* I've stayed off the bottle for at least 7 days, or *after* I've won the battle with porn, or *after* I've repaid the customers I've cheated. And since I don't see my perfection happening any time soon, I am clearly not God's type and he doesn't want me". Wrong friends! That is just the lie that satan wants you to believe. Jesus died for the dirty. If you're sinful, you qualify.

◆Besides, think of it this way: If only the good are God's, then nobody gets to God, because the Bible says there is none that are good. Not one.

◆"A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No-one is good--except God alone." Luke 18:18, 19, NIV.

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◆ But we also know there are many that *are* God's. Abraham was God's. He was called a "friend of God". But Abraham lied about his wife repeatedly and almost forced her into another man's bed! David was God's. He was called "a man after God's own heart". But David had the neighbor's wife over for more than a drink and when she turned up pregnant, he killed the husband. Peter was God's but Peter pretended he didn't even know Jesus because he was afraid. Not exactly stellar examples of moral prowess, wouldn't you agree? But God loves us in our dirtiness.

◆ *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ... And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" Romans 5:1-10, NIV. (Underline the above words in your Bible: powerless, ungodly, sinners, enemies)*

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◆ God loves you right where you are, though he loves us too much to leave us where we are. But more on that in a minute. *Friends, do not let your lack of perfection keep you from the hope of salvation. Do not let the continuing of your battles make you believe the war is lost. The continuing battle means the war is on! There are two opposing sides! You are on one of them.* In a Classic study a pike fish was placed in a tank with feeder fish and a glass wall between them. After making repeated runs at the feeder fish, hitting the glass and not being able to reach them, the glass was removed and the predator and prey swam side by side unaffected by each other. The pike had learned to lose hope. It had given up on what he came to believe was unattainable so that even when *it was*, he no longer tried. We do this with goodness. We try, and we try. And satan lies and he lies. He says, because you haven't reached perfection, you are not going to. And we believe the lie. No, none of us will be perfect this side of heaven, but we can progress! We call that sanctification.

◆ *"he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6, NIV.*

◆ Jesus did not come for the good. Jesus came for the bad, to give them his goodness! So don't give up. Don't learn hopelessness.

◆ **Goodness lie #2: Goodness doesn't matter. Just believe.**

◆ Mark was having an affair with another man's wife. A Christian friend confronted him on it and he readily admitted it was true. But he said, it didn't matter. He was going to continue because he liked it and after all, we are saved by faith and not by works according to the Bible. Chuck, another fellow, also reasoned that if goodness doesn't save us then it doesn't

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matter if we're good. So Chuck said he "believed in God" but he never went to worship God. He took advantage of people before he became a Christian, and he took advantage of people after he became a Christian. He eventually also abandoned his wife and family, all the while maintaining that he was saved by grace alone.

◆A. Again, in every lie there is a shade of truth, or a distortion of truth. Goodness isn't the criteria for God's love and attention. But goodness is always a result of God's love and attention. Believing, or what we call "faith" is the criteria. The Bible does not say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be pro-Life." "Ask Jesus to forgive your sins AND vote republican." The Bible doesn't even say "Trust Jesus as your savior AND share your wealth." good as that may be. What the Bible says is...

◆"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
Romans 10:9, NIV.

◆"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no-one can boast." Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV.

◆But now we must ask, "what is at the core of believing?" Repentance is at the core of believing! Again in our text with Levi and the taxmen, what did Jesus say? He came to call the sinners *to repentance*. The greek term is (μετανοια) metanoia, or to "know with" or to think along with. Repentance is to agree with God about how we have gone wrong. When I "believe" in Jesus I mean I agree with him that my sin is wrong and that I need his

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forgiveness and want it. That's what it means to believe! Just notice how the two terms appear together in Scripture:

◆ *“For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”*

Matthew 21:32

◆ *““The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near.*

Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15

◆ *“Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”*

Acts 19:4, NIV.

◆ B. A popular statement in Reformed theology is, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.” What does Ephesians say right after it says we’re saved by faith?

◆ *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Ephesians 2:10, NIV.

◆ God does desire our goodness. We were meant to become good and holy. Jesus saves us to welcome us into holiness!

◆ *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;”* 1

Peter 1:15, NIV.

◆ **Conclusion:** Can you struggle with homosexuality and be Christian? Of course. Can you struggle with greed and be Christian? A lot of us do! Do Christians sin? Absolutely. Should Christians sin? Absolutely not. Will Christians sin less and less as they walk with God? As a matter of fact,

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they will by God's grace! For in Christ, the dirty are made clean, and the bad and the ugly are made good through and through.

Call to Worship: 1Pet 1:1-5

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