

## ROMANS 5:6-11

### WHY CAN'T WE BE GOOD ENOUGH TO SATISFY GOD?

“While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a common myth that one can be good enough to satisfy the righteous demands of Holy God. How often have you heard someone assert, “God will weigh my good deeds against my bad deeds, and I will be allowed into Heaven?” The one making such a statement frequently asserts, “I never killed anyone. I never robbed anyone. I never did anything terrible.” In making such assertion, they thoughtlessly claim that they have met the standard of perfection set by the infinite God.

It is doubtful that such people actually think before making these absurd claims. People who actually think, rather than simply talk, would realise that if they are perfect they will never die. Death is a stunning reminder that we are not perfected. The Apostle will shortly stress this point when he writes, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” [ROMANS 5:12-14]. Though we who are Christians now possess eternal life in Christ the Lord, we know that we must nevertheless set aside the flesh. Our days on this earth are numbered. Therefore, we seek to “number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” [PSALM 90:12].

Let’s tease apart what the Apostle has written so that we will be prepared to encourage friends and family members to consider the mercies of our God, and so we may grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**OUR CONDITION** — “While we were still weak... While we were still sinners... While we were enemies...” The Apostle will not let us dismiss what we were. He ensures that the reader that we begin our journey toward new life in a dreadful condition. At the outset, let’s establish a truth—an uncomfortable truth. None of us will ever be good enough to satisfy the righteous demands of the Living God. God is perfect; man is fallen and imperfect.

Let’s begin with an “innocent” child. Of course, the child is born in sin. It doesn’t mean that the child is a dreadful sinner seeking to rebel against the grace of God, but it does mean that the child is born into a fallen race with all the deficits of that fallen condition. The child is from the moment of conception disposed to all the ills that can and do befall mankind. Thus, though they are not rebels against grace, even little children are subject to death.

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During the days that I was preparing for post-doctoral studies, I received an invitation to conduct studies at a major medical school on what are called “inborn errors of metabolism.” These are most often metabolic conditions resulting from a deficit in one enzyme. Since these conditions represent serious deficits, they commonly result in death. Frequently, the deaths resulting from the failure of one of the systems in view occur at a very young age. I recall a lecture I attended on one occasion, in which the lecturer stressed the point that the children with the particular deficit he was studying were frequently among the most beautiful children one could ever expect to see. His contention was emphasised with pictures of beautiful children. As the disease progresses, the accumulation of toxic by-products transform these lovely children into hideous caricatures of what they once were. The disease is a dreadful sentence that inevitably leads to death.

Listening to the lecture, I thought of how the accelerated progress of the disease, ensuring that these children would die between six months and one year after birth, was a parable of our lives. We are born with a deficit, and as time passes the toxic accumulation of sin only accelerates the inevitable death. Ultimately, death reduces the beautiful woman to a wizened hag. It transforms the strong man into a weakling that needs assistance to transfer from bed to chair. It reduces the powerful individual to one who begs for consideration.

David would say of his birth,

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

[PSALM 51:5]

David is not saying that his conception was sinful, but that from birth he was born into a sinful race, subject to the limitations of this fallen condition.

I do believe it important to point out that children do die—infants and toddlers alike are subject to death. Their sentence is not because of their choice to rebel, but it is what the theologian calls “original sin,” or “adamic sin.” I believe it important to point out that God has made provision for the death of the innocent. In **1 CORINTHIANS 15:22** Paul speaks of God’s provision for the innocent. “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

While it is not technically proper to speak of a child as being saved, it is evident that a child is kept safe. The child hasn’t understanding of good and evil, and is therefore incapable of choosing to believe, but God make provision that a child that dies because they are part of this fallen race is taken into the presence of the Lord God.

This same confidence is conveyed through David’s response to the death of the child that was born to Bathsheba. David had committed multiple sins, and resulting from his sin was the birth of a child. However, the child became sick. David mourned and prayed, fasting and pleading with God to spare the child. Inevitably, the child died. David became aware of the change in his servants, and he knew that the child had died. At that, he commanded them to bring him food. He washed, anointed himself and changed his clothes.

The servants were mystified. Listen to the exchange found in **2 SAMUEL 12:21-23**. “[David’s] servants said to him, ‘What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.’ He said, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, “Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?”’ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.’”

David's words are not a statement of despair; he is making a statement of confidence. So, we are assured that God will care for the children. However, it does not alter the condition affecting each of us—we are under sentence of death! If innocent children are under sentence of death, how much more are we who are of mature age under sentence of death? We are identified as weak, or perhaps more accurately helpless, as sinners and as enemies. There is nothing about us that would make God desire us. Were we to attempt to present our best thoughts or our best efforts to induce God to accept us, we would be rebuked in sternest terms:

“We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

[ISAIAH 64:6]

**GOD'S PROVISION** — “Christ died for the ungodly... Christ died for us...” You will recall that Jesus stated of His ministry, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” [LUKE 5:32]. If you think of yourself as a good person, you likely will never be saved. Why, if you imagine yourself to be a good person, would you believe you need a Saviour? God sent His Son to die for sinners. Paul was adamant concerning the purpose of Jesus' coming into the earth. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” [1 TIMOTHY 1:15]. The Apostle testified to the Romans that “Jesus our Lord ... was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” [ROMANS 4:25].

We memorise JOHN 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” That is undoubtedly a wonderful verse. However, the verses that follow are equally glorious; they, also, are worthy of memorisation by the child of God. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned” [JOHN 3:17, 18].

God loves fallen man; and the evidence of His love is the sacrifice of His own Son. John testifies, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:9, 10]. God supplies His power, because we are helpless. Because we are sinners, God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the World. Because we were enemies, God has reconciled us through Christ Jesus His Son.

If we could be good enough, it would not have been necessary for Christ to present His life as a sacrifice. However, we cannot be good enough! Therefore, Christ Jesus presented His life as a sacrifice because of our condition.

**OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP** — “We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Outsiders are yet under condemnation. They have not received the grace of God, and so they live in fear of death. Think about that, they know they must die, and yet they shove the thought far from their minds in hope that somehow the inevitable will not happen. However, that is not the situation for the one born from above. The Apostle concludes by stating that “Now that we are reconciled, [we shall] be saved by His life. We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” [ROMANS 5:10, 11].

I am no longer what I once was; and this is because of God's grace. This is the testimony provided in the Letter to the Ephesians. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" [EPHESIANS 2:1-7].

Let me point to one final passage that speaks of our new relationship in Christ. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, 18]. This is what God has done; and this is why we can't be good enough—we could never do this for ourselves. Amen.