

## What If I'm Not Good Enough to Be a Christian?

January 2023

Many people don't feel good enough for God. They are ashamed of their past and embarrassed to be around Christians. If this describes you, consider this: What if your biggest mistake is not that choice from years ago that still haunts your memories, but what if your biggest mistake is thinking that unless you are "good enough" God will never love you?

To explore that question, let's consider *from whom* and *for whom* Jesus came. As we do so, we'll discover what's at the center of the Christian worldview: God's grace—yes, even for you.

### **From Whom Did Jesus Come?**

Jesus is true God, eternally begotten of the Father. Jesus came to earth *from God the Father*.

Jesus is not only true God but also true man. Jesus came not only from the Father, but also *from a long line of human ancestors*. Who were those ancestors? What sort of people were they? The answer is shocking, for we discover that the Son of God received a shameful ancestry on earth.

The Bible does not hide the faults of Jesus' family line. Within the first five verses of Matthew, two prostitutes are named: Tamar and Rahab. (Matthew 1:3,5) By verse 7, the polygamous and idolatrous Solomon also is mentioned. And we all remember that his father David had committed adultery with his mother Bathsheba, having her first husband killed off. (2 Samuel 11) Then there's King Manasseh, mentioned in Matthew 1:10, who worshiped the Canaanite god Molech by burning his children alive on the altar. (2 Kings 21)

Jesus also was raised in a town of low reputation. When Philip—one of the first believers—told Nathanael that Jesus of Nazareth

was the promised Savior, Nathanael scoffed. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)

The Old Testament prophets had foretold that Jesus would be "lowly" and unattractive by ordinary standards. (Isaiah 53:2; Zechariah 9:9) When a typical king is arriving, a well-dressed herald sounds the trumpet with regal fanfare. When Jesus began His ministry, a man wearing camel fur and eating locusts and honey cried out, "Prepare the way for the Lord." (Mark 1:3)

Think about it. When God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), He came as a humble man from a family with a checkered past.

### **For Whom Did Jesus Come?**

Even more surprising than *from whom* Jesus came, consider *for whom* He came. He did not seek out rich people, powerful people, or educated people—or even nice people. He was not thinking, "I'm the Son of God, so I'll visit only those people who are good enough for Me." He spoke with fishermen and farmers, with ethnic minorities and social outcasts, with prostitutes and tax collectors. Jesus was living proof of Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."

The first time Jesus entered a synagogue to read Scripture, He did not emphasize some list of rules Christians should follow. Instead, He focused on the healing words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me ... to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18–19, quoting Isaiah 61:1)

The self-righteous, who thought they already were good enough for God, were constantly surprised to learn that Jesus regarded them as sinners. But the humble, who already knew they were sinners and needed forgiveness, were constantly surprised to discover how willing Jesus was to be with them, to forgive them, to love them.

Jesus' attitude has a simple name. It's called "grace," and grace is at the center of Christianity. No one is "good enough" to be a Christian, but rather every Christian becomes a child of God purely by God's grace. Jesus welcomes you: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

**Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson** is the director of the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews, and professor of history, philosophy, and legal studies at Bethany Lutheran College.

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