

## **ARE PEOPLE BASICALLY GOOD?**

### **Romans 7:15-24**

**Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible**  
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**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

Perhaps you've heard about one of the latest Hollywood fads—which is the so-called ancient religion of Kabala. This supposed form of ancient Judaism, with a sprinkling of other various religious ideas and thoughts, is being embraced by such notable celebrities as Madonna and Britney Spears.

Now as much as they claim that this is an ancient Jewish practice, many Jewish scholars have said that this present day practice is nothing of the sort. Rather, it has been labeled to be another attempt to use a religious practice to proclaim people good; to justify their free sexual and extravagant lifestyles; to declare that you should never have any guilt about anything you do.

One major truth today is that there are an abundance of new age philosophies and religious practices that are declaring that everyone is good in their nature; they reject all the religions and beliefs which talk about sin, failings, guilt, darkness. Their claim is that it is really the fault of all these negative religious ideas that there is so much hurt in this world.

Therefore the answer for them is to declare everyone good and to claim that by certain forms of meditation, of getting in touch with your inner self, that your goodness can break through. Also by getting rid of the thinking that any behaviors are sinful and bad, then a person can do whatever feels good to them and never feel guilty.

In essence this whole “new age” thinking is the epitome of selfishness; of a bunch of people who don't want any rules to guide them; people who don't want to be accountable to anyone. It is the classic “me” worship where we want to be our own god; then we in turn can design our own religion that helps us worship whatever we want to be important.

This of course is a major contrast to the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 7—our next New Testament book in our Walk Through The Bible. Paul says in this passage, verse 15, *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*

He also goes on to say in verse 18, *“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”* Then he concludes in verse 24, *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

The question my friends is which one is more freeing and life-giving, Kabala or Christianity? Is it more life-affirming to declare everyone good rather than look honestly at our human nature? Does living for my own pleasure, as well as building religious practices around what I like, make this world a better place to live?

There is an often terribly misunderstood and misused word today—grace. What most people say is that it simply means that God loves us no matter what; that anything we do in life is okay with God. Yet the truth is that it is only when we understand our sinful and lost condition that we can really understand what God's grace is.

In other words God's grace is not cheap, it cost him his life on the cross. The truth that he offers us his love and forgiveness even in our sinfulness, and rebelliousness, shows just how deep his grace and love is for us. Yet even though he accepts us by his grace no matter what we have done, he also loves us way too much to leave us there.

God calls us to a forgiven and new life that turns away from our sins; turns away from our own selfish desires; that follows him and his paths. Living our lives in God's purposes shows us a better and more joyful way to live; we now live for God and for others, not for ourselves.

Paul says, *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* This, I believe, is a key passage for each of us to remember. The truth is that in my sinful nature, in my life in this flesh I often end up doing what I know is wrong; I do not do what I know is right.

The importance of this is to not only know God's forgiveness and grace, but to also remember what my human nature is all about. Being truly honest with the sinful person that I am helps me to be more understanding and caring to others.

The ancient theologian, Augustine, once said as he saw some prisoners being led away in chains, *"There but for the grace of God go I."* Augustine knew that in his human nature, in his sinfulness of so often doing the exact things he knew were wrong, that he could very easily have been one of those prisoners.

Today as we look at the terrible things happening in our society: like teachers and/or coaches having forbidden intimate relationships with minors; a public official taking bribes; professional athletes being abusive; business executives cooking the books; a youth basketball father fighting with a ref; what we should say is, *"There but for the grace of God go I."*

If we are truly honest with who we are; truly honest with what the power of our sinful desires can do for us; we can then admit how close to the edge we may have been sometimes. Perhaps some of us here done something—have shoplifted that item; have taken something from your business; have driven your car or truck when you have had too much to drink; have hurt your spouse or child in a verbal or physically abusive way....yet you were never found out.

My friends, each one of us have skeletons in our closets, things we regret we have done, things that people might be shocked if they knew these things about us. The really sad thing is that rather than face these sins head on, we often put on a mask. We often use denial and rationalization to explain that we really aren't like others; we are better than they are.

It is this kind of thinking, of course, which lead to self-righteousness. It easily leads to us thinking that we've got it all together, while everyone else has it all messed up. It can lead to us judging, condemning, accusing others and acting like we are the real example of doing these

things right. Either that or we surmise that we would never make the mistakes like this other person did.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to gossip about others, to point our fingers in accusation, to think we are right and have everyone else analyzed? Yet Jesus himself said to the religious men who were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery, *"You who are without sin cast the first stone."*

It is only when we are truly honest with ourselves; only when we truly admit our sinful nature that we can be truly caring of others. It is only then that we can truly understand why there is so much pain and hurt in our society. It is only then that we can attack this sin that is the root of these problems; then we can find forgiveness, healing and new life.

There is an old saying that says, *"The ground at the foot of the cross is always level."* At the foot of the cross no one stands taller; no one has it all together; no one is more holy. As we stand in the shadow of Jesus' suffering and death we realize that our only hope is in Jesus. Our only hope is to confess our sinful nature, our failings, and find forgiveness, healing and new life.

Back to my initial question at the beginning of this message: does this focus on our sinful nature, on our lack of ability to always do what is right, does this simply fill us with guilt and hurt? Is this thinking the source of many of our problems in society? Should we try to minimize, or not talk about sin, so everyone will feel better about themselves?

No, because that is a false happiness and sense of security. It is only as we know and acknowledge ourselves as we really are; only as we admit that we really aren't that different from others who may have hurt us or from those who may have made terrible choices in what they have done. It is only then that we can come to find God's forgiveness and freeing power.

Jesus suffered and died on the cross, he rose again on Easter so that we might be forgiven and renewed each day as we live. He died and rose again so that we might know that in the pain and trouble of this sinful world, that there is freedom and new life in him.

In Jesus, he gives us a vision beyond our human failings; he shows us how we can be loving, caring, people of integrity to others who may be burdened by their sin. It is true that there but for the grace of God go I.

My friends, which of these two do you think provides more hope to our world today—a self-help religious experience like Kabala that provides a shallow explanation of life and which simply condones, and affirms, one's selfish lifestyle? Either that or a faith that is honest with our sinful and fallen nature; one which provides hope only in the love of our Savior and Lord?

The Apostle Paul in his honesty said, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"* He answers himself, *"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* It is that truth too, my friends, which is the only hope for you and for me; and for our world today.