



[Romans 3:12](#)

(12) All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."

New International Version

English writer G.K. Chesterton, known for his wit as well as his insight, once wrote, "The word 'good' has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man."

His words strike at the heart of a question theologians, philosophers, artists, and many others have debated for millennia: Are people good or evil? Is man's nature on the side of the angels or the demons? Are we beings of light or darkness? Why do otherwise good people do evil things?

People are split on the subject. A few years ago, Debate.org, a website devoted to arguing such questions and polling the public on them, asked, "Is human nature good or evil?" Their results, which are not scientific, show 49% of respondents answering that it is good and 51% saying that it is evil.

Some Christian churches teach a doctrine of total depravity. *Theopedia* defines this doctrine in this way: ". . . as a consequence of the Fall of man, every person born into [the world](#) is morally corrupt, enslaved to sin and is, apart from the grace of [God](#), utterly unable to choose to follow God or choose to turn to [Christ](#) in [faith](#) for salvation."

This belief does not mean that humankind is utterly evil, that is, that people are totally incapable of good. It means that, while not all of human nature is depraved, all human nature is totally *affected* by depravity. Even the goodness that we do, then, is tainted by

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our sinful nature. This agrees with God's description of the tree from which Adam and Eve partook in Genesis 3: It was a tree that allowed them to know good *and* evil ([Genesis 2:17](#); [3:22](#)). Human goodness is insufficient to satisfy the righteous requirements of God.

It is somewhat surprising that more people, especially Christians, do not know the basic nature of mankind. It should be evident from the lives of men and women throughout history. For Christians, who should know their Bibles, a cursory survey of Scripture brings out many plain statements that show what God thinks of human nature. No philosophizing or critical thinking, even by the greatest of human minds, will change God's view into something else.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Are Humans Good or Evil?](#)

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