

Naughty or Nice?

December 18, 2016

Welcome to where we're learning to discern who's naughty or nice!



This is the week before Christmas, when the shepherds were saying, "Nothing exciting *ever* happens to us. Why'd we settle for being *shepherds*?"

A week before, when an absent star left the Wise Men asking, "Well, where do we go now?"



When a very pregnant Mary, riding a bouncy donkey on a bumpy road, to an overcrowded town, was saying, "*This* is God's big plan?!"

When that Innkeeper was saying, "If business keeps up like *this*, I could rent out that stable!"



Whether you're Restless, lost, despairing, or distracted, welcome to the week before Christmas!

On to the big question: ***Are you naughty or nice?***



If Christianity is true, shouldn't believers be obviously nicer than *nons*? Let's be honest, we all know *non-believers* way nicer than some who claim to know the Way.

Ever find it difficult to share your faith with someone, simply because of a mutual *Christian* acquaintance who is a real *snot*?



This guy's a real Bible-thumper!

Wouldn't it be nice if we could point out the fact that all Christians are nicer and better adjusted than all non-believers?

Well, we can't; 'cause, they're not. Know why? **A big part of the problem is *Copyright infringement!* The Christian label has been grossly overused and abused and misused.**



Like if a bunch of clothing companies started using the NIKE label. Nike's own name could no longer *guarantee* quality.

We'd have to identify authenticity by examining the product.

This is something that Jesus wants us to be aware of.

No ~~good~~ [nice] tree bears ~~bad~~ [naughty] fruit, nor does a ~~bad~~ [naughty] tree bear ~~good~~ [nice] fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. [No matter what label they wear] ... The ~~good~~ [nice] man brings ~~good~~ [nice] things out of the ~~good~~ [nice] stored up in his heart, and the ~~evil~~ [naughty] man brings ~~evil~~ [naughty] things out of the ~~evil~~ [naughty] stored up in his heart. – Luke 6:43-45a NIV (*This is a special Christmas paraphrase*)



A bad tree lobbing bad apples.



When Jesus healed people He often sent them to the skeptics to have ‘em checked out. (Mat 8:4)

He likes His work examined. Just understand that **we’re looking for improvement, not perfection.**

Like whitening strips. It’s not fair to compare a yellow-toothed user with the naturally white teeth of a non-user, and conclude that the product doesn’t work.

You only see that by lo oking at the before and after.

Any believer who practices their faith faithfully, will grow in the fruit of the Spirit, and become nicer than they *were*.

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. – Philippians 1:6b NIV

So, look closely at your own before and after.

We’re on a sliding scale.

Question is: **Which way are we sliding?** Paul warns us to examine ourselves to see if we’re even *in* the faith. (2 Cor 13:5)

Remember, “Junkyard Wars”?

I loved that show; because, *I’m* from a junkyard.

They had a challenge to overcome, a race of some sort, and they had to scavenge a junkyard to cobble together a contraption; and then they’d be cheered just to make it across the finish line.

Jesus knows the cobbled contraption you’re trying to drive.

We’re on a scale of yellow to white, A to Z, and sanctification moves us up a few shades and letters as we near *our* finish line.

But, there’s only One who made it from Alpha to Omega!

Only One to ever make it to the truly nice list by His own merit.

I'll throw out some names and you say, "naughty" or "nice".

1. **Zacchaeus the tax collector** who overcharged. (Lk 19:8)
2. The **woman caught in adultery**. (Jn 8:3)
3. The notorious **sinner at Matthew's party**. (Mt 9:10)
4. The **demoniac who ran naked** at the tombs. (Lk 8:27)

Yet, **everyone on this naughty list had a profound encounter with Jesus**. And, hopefully they each whitened and brightened because of it; and, *by that* became a witness to their world.



Alan the devout atheist is very nice; whereas, Christopher the true Christian is ill-tempered and irritable (though he's *slowly* improving).

Nature and nurture produced a pleasant psychological pattern in Alan; for him, nice is natural. *However*, nature and nurture also produced Christopher's frayed nerves and distrust of others.

But, understand that **Alan's niceness is not Alan's gift to God; it's God's gift to Alan**.

Salvation has nothing to do with who's naughty or nice, but who surrenders whatever pattern of pleasantness or unpleasantness they have, and follow the Lord with their cobbled contraption.



The Lord *does* have a list.

It's ***The Lamb's Book of Life***. (Rev 21:27)

And, **it's filled with all those who are on the naughty list and know it, and humbly acknowledge it, and embrace His mercy, and grow in His grace ... at least a few shades while we're here.**

***That's* the witness that wins over a watching world.**

Now, *of course* God regards a naughty nature as a bad thing.

And, *of course* God regards a nice nature as a good thing.

But, beware the trap: **if Alan sees his niceness as his own doing, it'll be his *undoing***. He'll see no reason to turn to God. **Nice isn't all it's cracked up to be.**

It's good, but it can blind us to the real issue, which is how holy I am compared to Jesus.

Those who trust in their *own* goodness are those who have failed to examine themselves in the light of *Christ's* holiness.

That's why we shouldn't be surprised to find more naturally nice folks *outside* the church and more naturally naughty ones *inside*.

It's an advantage to *know* you're on the naughty list.

That's when we stop trusting in ourselves and turn to the Lord.

This is what the self-righteous-nice disliked about Christ: **He attracted such awful, naughty, people! And still does!**

The self-righteous nice are *always* on His case.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" [naughties] were eating with him ... for there were many [naughties] who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were [nice] Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" [naughties] ... they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners' [naughties]?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy [nice] who need a doctor, but the sick [naughty]. I have not come to call the righteous, [nice] but sinners [naughties]." – Mark 2:15-17 NIV (*This too is a special Christmas paraphrase*)

We're all ailing and ill, whether naughty or nice.

The question is: ***Do you know it?*** And: ***Are you seeking the only cure for it?***



He doesn't stamp out nice religious cookies.

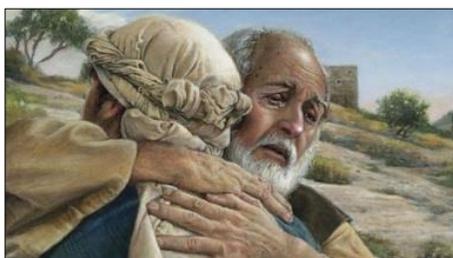
He's into redeeming the Restless, the lost, the despairing, and the distracted; and then bringing good fruit from formerly bad trees.

Some of the strongest warnings target the nicest people.



From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. – Luke 12:48b NIV

We should do all we can to be as nice as we can, while keeping in mind (and, this is key) which list we *deserve* to be on.



Think of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:20-24)

God watches and waits for His naughty children to come home, to the Lamb's list; because, we have such a special place in His heart.