

“All Good People Go To Heaven”

What does it take to get to heaven when you die? Who will be allowed inside the pearly gates? What will the Lord say to people on the great Day of Judgment? All of us who believe in heaven want to know the answers to those questions. In fact, people in nearly every culture on earth tend to believe in some type of afterlife, or existence after death. Our desire to understand the meaning and purpose of life is simply not satisfied with a ‘the grave ends all’ philosophy. But, what kind of existence will we have after death? Is heaven real, and is there really a hell? If so, who is going there?

Matthew 25:33-34 “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:”

Some years ago when several Pennsylvania miners were trapped underground awaiting rescue, one of them who was a young man began to think that he might die, and he started talking to one of the others who was trapped with him, about what would happen when he died. Later, in an interview with Dateline NBC, he said he asked the older man, “Will I go to heaven when I die?” He went on to say that he had never been baptized, and he knew the Bible says that one must be baptized in order to be forgiven of his sins. He said that the older man tried to comfort him by telling him that “*all good people go to heaven,*” then he added, “*No matter what.*”

Well, was he telling that young miner the truth? Do ALL good people go to heaven? We would like to think so; actually, I DO believe that all ‘good’ people go to heaven. I’ll explain why in this study.

Dealing with the death of someone we love is always difficult, especially in view of the afterlife, and the prospect of eternal reward or punishment. We tend to comfort ourselves by thinking about the positive traits and virtues in that person’s life. In fact, most of us believe that it’s important for a person to try to be a good person, and I suppose most would also say that there should be some kind of justice and punishment for those who do mean and wicked things to others.

Well, if we believe that there is a hell, we want to believe that it is reserved for the most heinous, mean and morally bankrupt people; villains and wicked men, who abuse and mistreat others. Hell is for people like Mao Zedong and Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin, perhaps Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Maybe we reserve a place in the flames for child molesters and murderers, Satanists and, of course, the devil himself. But, really, that’s about it. We can’t conceive or imagine our neighbor going to hell. We can’t grasp the idea of a loved one spending eternity apart from God in hell, regardless of whether a person actually obeyed the gospel and followed Jesus. If the person was nice, had good intentions, was charitable, lived a respectable life as we think of it, or did some virtuous thing in our eyes, then we tend to think, *Surely that person will go to heaven. After all, how could a loving God allow a ‘good’ person to be punished forever in hell? So what if they didn’t understand the Bible? So what if they really weren’t a Christian as we define the term? So what if they weren’t a part of the church? I just have to believe that all good people go to heaven, and if God is love, then it can’t be any other way.*

It may surprise you to hear a Christian preacher say that yes, it is true: all good people DO go to heaven. I really believe they do. In fact, the righteousness and justice of God demand that all good people go to

heaven. Did you ever think about the fact that God Himself wouldn't be good, if good people did not go to heaven?

Acts 10:34-35 "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Abraham asked God long ago to spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, IF righteous people could be found within them. And he reasoned with God like this:

Genesis 18:25 "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

We need to remember some things about God.

1. God is the lawgiver. It is God who makes the rules. God gives the standard of morality. He alone is the source for goodness and morality. He defines what is good and what is bad. Consequently, if there were no God, what possible basis for right and wrong would we have? It would all be subjective, at best, and man could decide that any kind of behavior—no matter how reprehensible you or I might think it is—is good and acceptable. How do we define good versus evil, if that does not come from outside of us? So, truth is transcendent. God is the source of truth, morality and He is the source and definition of all virtue, by essence of who and what He is.
2. Remember that God is perfect. God cannot sin, He cannot lie, He cannot go against His own word. He would not be God if He did.
3. God is just. Not only can God not refuse to punish sin and still be who He is, but have you stopped to think about the fact that He cannot refuse one who has NOT sinned? He would not be just, fair and righteous if He punished someone who had done nothing wrong.

Therefore, in keeping with the justice and holiness and righteousness of God, I believe that all good people go to heaven. The problem is, who is good? What does it mean to be good? Are you good? Am I good? Are my mother and father good? What about my neighbors—are they good?

In **Matthew 19**, a young man came running up to Jesus and asked Him this question:

Matthew 19:16 "And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

Now, we don't know a great deal about this man, and we can only really speculate as to his motive in asking Jesus this question, but it seems to me that he was honestly impressed with Jesus and was sincerely asking Him about how to go to heaven. I want you to notice that this young man used the word "good" like we often use the word to refer to people. He calls Jesus "good master," meaning *good teacher*. What does he mean by it? Perhaps it was merely a way for him to show respect to Jesus, but I think he was most likely acknowledging the Lord's moral character, and that he was impressed with Jesus on some count.

Not only does he call the Lord *good*, but he then goes on to ask what *good thing* he needs to do to have eternal life. I really believe that this man thought Jesus was a good man, like we think of goodness, like

we look at some seemingly virtuous or impressive person, and believing that Jesus understood the will of God, he wanted to know what good deed he could do that would make God accept him and allow him to go to heaven. I think this young man thought as multitudes of people around us think today: *Jesus is good, in the sense that He is morally superior. He was a good man, a good teacher. So, if I just try to be good, then I'll get to go to heaven. Surely there is some good thing I can do, some good quality that I can possess, maybe if I give enough to charity and am good and kind enough to people who are less fortunate than I am, as long as I am well-intentioned...Surely, if I do some good thing, I can go to heaven.*

But, how did Jesus answer him?

Matthew 19:17 “And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

You see, Jesus wants this young man to understand the meaning of the word “good.” He tells him that only God is good, and He wants this man to know that if he really means what he says, he is acknowledging a great truth about Jesus Christ: that is, not that He is merely an impressive man or that He just possesses some upright and moral qualities, but that by acknowledging that He is good, this man is saying that He is God, because only God is good. If Jesus is truly good, then He is deity because God alone is good.

We’ve given the word “good” a relative meaning. We say that if a person has some commendable moral quality or is kind and caring and giving that he/she is a good person. After all, who would put Mother Teresa in the same category as Jezebel? Who would put someone who went about caring for the poor or the sick in the same category as Charles Manson, regardless of their religion or personal morality? We wouldn’t equate such a person with a wicked person like that! So, we begin to reason that because this person is better than this really wicked person over here, how could that person possibly be lost? That’s how we come to reason that surely all “good people” are going to heaven.

Don’t misunderstand. I’m not trying to say that your neighbor, who minds his own business, pays his taxes, gives to charity and doesn’t harm anybody is the same as Charles Manson or Timothy McVeigh. But, that’s how WE define “good.” Jesus says that it means something else. God looks at goodness in a totally different way, and as God defines “good people,” it is absolutely true that all good people go to heaven. The problem is, where do you find a good person?

There really is no such thing as a good person.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.”

You see, only God is good, and all of us have fallen very short of the mark when measured by God’s goodness and holiness. I cringe to think that there are people—and there are—who claim to believe in God, and even claim to be Christians, who would dare say, *“I like God, I love God. But I don’t need His forgiveness because I’m a good person.”* No one, no matter how rich, powerful, successful, well-intentioned, benevolent, kind, caring or honest—no one has lived up to the standard of God.

In **Romans 1**, the apostle Paul painted a dark and ugly picture of the pagan Gentile world, and he showed that they were sinners, separated from God. But, lest the religious Jews stuck out their chests, Paul shows that they were no better off in the second chapter. Then, in chapter three, he draws a powerful and convicting conclusion when he says this of God’s own people by way of the flesh:

Romans 3:9-10 “What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:”

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

Every single person who is able to choose between right and wrong has made wrong choices in his/her life, because the Bible says unequivocally and without question, that we are ALL sinners. We have ALL fallen short of the glory of God. It doesn't matter how nice you are. It doesn't matter how respectable you think your life may be. It doesn't matter how much you give to charity or how much you engage in religious activity or how honest you are.

I John 1:8,10 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

Yes, all good people go to heaven, but there is no such thing as a good person. So, where does that leave us? I'll tell you where it leaves us: in desperate need of Jesus.

Isaiah 59:1-2 “Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Our sins make us worthy of eternal death. That means that every single one of us deserves to be cast into hell because we have sinned against the Lord. Surely you won't say, *“I've never sinned.”* But maybe you think, *My sins aren't that bad or terrible compared to someone else's sins.* Well, are you sure about that? *Well, I've never murdered anyone.* According to **I John 3:15**, if you've ever hated your brother, you're a murderer. *Well, I don't cheat on my spouse.* Good for you. But Jesus said in **Matthew 5:28** that if you've ever looked at another person with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart. You say, *I don't steal.* Do you every covet? Have you ever told a lie? Ever? Have you ever misled or deceived someone? Have you ever been drunk or attending a drinking party? Have you ever used God's name in vain, or uttered a profanity? Have you always done right by others, in every circumstance, with every person you've ever met? Have you every failed to do something that the Bible says we are to do?

Those are all things clearly spelled out in God's word as sins. They are defined by God's word as sin.

James 2:10 “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

What are we to conclude from that? That we're all sinners. We've all been sinners. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. We're all in need of redemption and Jesus. Listen: all of your good deeds won't change that. Your good intentions don't change that. There is only one way to be accepted by God, and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. ALL OF US are defiled and stained by our sins on our own. But, Jesus died on Calvary to atone for our sins. He shed His blood so that our sins could be forgiven, and we could be justified and washed white. We can only be declared righteous in the eyes of God through the forgiveness of our sins, obtained by obedient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are no exceptions to that. All good people go to heaven, but the only way God will ever look at me and declare me to be

“good” is through and by the redemption that is offered through Jesus Christ and what He did upon Calvary.

Ananias told Saul the following:

Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Cornelius, of **Acts 10**, had to do just that, just like Saul of Tarsus. By the way, Saul was a religious man who never violated his conscience. But he did some terrible things, and he was a sinner in the sight of God. Ananias told him he needed to be baptized to wash away his sins, and call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Then we come to the case of Cornelius, in the very next chapter, and he had to do the same thing. However, we’re told that Cornelius was a devout man.

Acts 10:2 “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”

Cornelius feared God, he gave alms to the poor, and he prayed always. Most people would call Cornelius a “good” man. I mean, who would say that a man who goes to worship regularly, digs deep in his pockets for the poor and downtrodden, he lives a very humble life, fearing God and trying to obey the Lord, he’s always praying. Most would call him a “good” man. But, what did God say about him? What does the Holy Spirit in His word say about him? That Cornelius was lost, because he was outside of Christ. He had to send for Peter to come and preach the gospel to him and tell him about Jesus. Peter finally said this:

Acts 10:47 “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

He had to believe and obey Christ in order to be saved. There was no exception to that, and there still is no exception to that. Good people go to heaven, but Cornelius—as good as we might like to think he was—was not a good man, because he was outside of Jesus and therefore, in his sins. Saul of Tarsus was not a good man because he was in his sins. You’re not a good person, I’m not a good person, apart from Jesus Christ because we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

So, I ask today: are you in Christ Jesus? Because only those who are in Christ are going to heaven. I know that is awfully narrow. I know that excludes a lot of people who we think are good people. But, Jesus said this:

John 14:6 “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

And you only get into Christ through the obedience of faith in the gospel. Very sadly, Paul declared that this is what will happen when Jesus returns:

II Thessalonians 1:7-9 “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;”

What is Paul saying? He is saying that those who have never obeyed the gospel, and thus remain in their sins, are not fit for the presence of the Lord. They can't live for eternity in the presence of a holy, perfect, righteous and just God. So, he says that *in flaming fire*, the Lord is going to come and destroy them, and they will be banished from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

One of the most difficult, seeming dichotomies that we have to grapple with is that of the justice of God and the love of God; the holiness of God as opposed to the grace of God. If we're not very careful as we look to the scriptures for a picture of what God is like, we will embrace some scriptures and forget all about others, and we will come away with a distorted view of God. Is God love? Absolutely. Is God just? You'd better believe it. But, when we only take one attribute of God and try to make that represent all of God, what we do is take half of the truth and trying to make it all of the truth, and it becomes an untruth.

The fact of the matter is that God IS love. He is love in that He wants the sinner to be saved. He is love in that He provided an atonement for our sins. He is love in that He sent Jesus in His grace and mercy, to die upon the cross so that we could go free from sin. But, God IS also just, in the sense that sin will either be punished through the vicarious sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, OR the sinner will pay for his own sin in death. If we're not careful, we will allow our emotions and or human reasoning to create a God who doesn't exist.

Yes, God is holy, He is righteous, and only those made fit for His association will be allowed into heaven, His perfect dwelling. Let me remind you of what Paul said.

Colossians 3:24 "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."

If you've never been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, we'd be so glad to help you do that today, so that you can begin serving the Lord and preparing to live eternally in the presence of a holy God. But you must have your sins washed away. You must be in Christ. You must be in His body. The Bible tells us that He is the savior of the body (**Ephesians 5:23**). You must serve Him all of your life, if you would ever expect to spend eternity with Him in the great by and by.

All good people go to heaven, but every person is in need of Jesus in order to be good.