

Why Just Being a Good Person Won't Get Us into Heaven

We have often discussed this subject but because so many people believe otherwise, it always bears repeating: good works, by themselves, will not result in the forgiveness of your sins or secure for you eternal life in heaven. Nor will just being a “good person”. Salvation is given to us by God’s grace, through our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The path to salvation and eternal life is through Jesus Christ and Him alone. While good works and being a “good person” are important signs of your faith in Jesus, by themselves and without a genuine abiding, repentant, and enduring faith in Christ, they have little if any spiritual value. The Bible makes this extremely clear in numerous passages:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 3:8-9

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” Romans 11:6

“He saves us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’” John 11:25-26

“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” John 14:6

So, if the Bible is clear that good works alone will not get us into heaven, why all the confusion? We can think of four reasons:

1. Unfortunately, many religious institutions teach that good works are sufficient to earn salvation and that priests can forgive sins.
2. Many preachers – who preach to millions via megachurches, TV, and online – teach that good works, especially giving money to the church, will reward you with salvation.
3. Sadly, not enough Christians are well enough versed in the Bible to know what it actually says on this subject.
4. Somewhere along the line most of us have heard from either a parent or a teacher or from some other person we trust, “be good, and you’ll go to heaven”.

Nice, but no dice. Eternal life (salvation) is a free gift by God’s grace for our belief in His Son Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus and the Father are One, that Jesus died and His sinless blood sacrifice was sufficient to pay the penalty for humanity’s sins (including our own), and that He was resurrected on the third day to demonstrate the possibility of eternal life.

But some will then ask how one explains what the Apostle James, Jesus’ half-brother, tells us in James 2:17-18:

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’”

What James is really telling us here is that if our faith in Jesus is genuine (which is necessary for salvation), we will be compelled, by that faith, to do good works (I will show you my faith by my works). If we have no good works, then our faith in Jesus is not genuine (faith, if it has no works, is dead). Thus, good works is a manifestation of genuine faith, not a replacement for it. Good works are the *fruit*, not the *root*, of salvation.

So, if you believe that just being a good person will get you into heaven, we must tell you that you are sadly mistaken. Jesus confirms this in the following two Bible passages:

“‘Enter [into heaven] through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction [hell], and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to [eternal] life, and there are few who find it.’” Matthew 7:13-14

“‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets;’ and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’” Luke 13:24 -27

So if salvation is important to you, and the possibility of enjoying eternal life in God’s presence is something you seek, you need to ask yourself: Do I do good works because I’m supposed to; do I do good works just for the sake of being a good person, perhaps so I will be rewarded with gratitude and respect; or are my good works the direct result of my faith in Jesus Christ and seeking His righteousness?

A “yes” answer to any of these questions is life altering, but a “yes” answer to only one will result in eternal life with Jesus.