

A Defensible Hope: Ten Questions Curious Unbelievers Will Eventually Ask

#7: Don't All Good People Go to Heaven?

Sunday Evening Bible Study, November 4, 2018

We believe that salvation is the gift of God's grace, freely bestowed upon all who put their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary, apart from human meritorious works. All who so trust the Savior are forgiven of their sins and born into the family of God by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. (First Bible Church Constitution, Article III)

The Default Religion: Salvation By Works

1. This question brings us back to the three things that distinguish Christianity from every other religion in the world (The Three G's):
 - God:** Only Jesus claimed to be God. Neither Moses, Muhammed, or Buddha made this claim.
 - Grave:** Only Jesus was raised from the dead. No other religion claims this for its founder.
 - Grace:** Only Jesus offers salvation by grace alone. Every other religion teaches salvation by works.
2. The FBC doctrinal statement strongly affirms historic and apostolic Christianity: that according to Scripture alone, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. No one is saved on the basis of their good works or merit.
3. Yet every other religion in the world teaches that we are saved by our works: keeping moral rules and religious rituals. Most of the moral commandments boil down to some form of the Golden Rule: Treat people the way you want to be treated. Even in "Christian America," most professing Christians affirm a Cultural Christianity that is nominal (Christian in name only):

- 86% Of Americans professed to be Christians in 1990
- 76% Of Americans professed to be Christians in 2008
- 31% Of Americans agree that the smallest sin deserves damnation.
- 58% Of Americans said worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for church.
- 44% Of Americans believe the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn't apply today.
- 52% Of Americans believe abortion is a sin.
- 52% Of Americans agree that we can earn our way to heaven with good deeds.
- 59% Of Americans believe Jesus is returning to judge all people.

Among Americans "with evangelical beliefs:"

- 52% believe most people are basically good.
- 51% believe God accepts the worship of all religions.
- 78% believe Jesus was the first and greatest being created by God the Father.
- 25% believe the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply today.
- 41% believe we can earn our way to heaven with good deeds (or they are not sure).
- 96% believe Jesus is returning to judge all people.

(Source: Lifeway Research, 2018)

Seven Reasons to Believe We Are Saved By Grace and Not By Being Good

1. **The standard for what is good is absolute.** Who decides what is good and bad? Though the religions of the world share some ethical teaching in common, there is also great disparity. Jesus taught his followers to die for their faith, while Muhammed taught his followers to kill for it. People can shop around until they find the religion that suits them or just design their own. Jesus claimed to be God, then authenticated his claim by being raised from the grave, and he affirmed the moral law of God set forth in Scripture.

Matt. 5:17, 18: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

2. **Everyone agrees that no one is perfect.** Even Without the moral law affirmed by Jesus, then being good is reduced to moral relativism. What we really mean by good is *better*. Don't all the *better* people go to heaven? The people who are better than Hitler and Jeffrey Dahmer. To be sure, some people are better than others (Grand Canyon; chain link), but who decides the cut off? If we are graded on a curve, who decides which scores fail? You can always find someone worse than you are. In matters of life and death, only perfection will do (ships and planes).

James 2:10 *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*

3. **Sincerity is an unreliable test of veracity.** If good people are the people who try their best to be good, then no one will make it. Who always does their best? But even if they are totally sincere in their efforts, sincerity does not guarantee success. People are often sincerely wrong.

Phil. 3:6,7 *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

4. **If only good (better) people go to heaven, then heaven will soon have earth's problems.** Pride is a root sin and if we earn our way to heaven based on our performance, we will boast of our accomplishments for eternity, focus on ourselves rather than God.

Eph. 2:8,9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

5. **A performance-based relationship with God makes his love conditional.** Only Christianity teaches that God loves us unconditionally. That is, he loves us freely, without obligation. He does not love us because we are good, but because he is good. When we trust Christ and start to understand his love for us, we are motivated to obey him out of love, freely and become better people in order to please him, not to earn his love.

John 14:21 *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.*

6. **Genuine salvation by grace alone produces genuinely better people.** When faced with grace-based salvation, many see it as a license to be a bad person: Accept the free gift of salvation then live like the devil since its all grace. But when God saves us, he changes us so that we *want* to be good and do good works. More specifically, we want to be like Jesus.

World Religions:	Works → Justification (declared righteous/good)
Counterfeit Christianity #1:	Works → Justification
Counterfeit Christianity #2:	Faith + Works → Justification
Genuine Christianity:	Faith → Justification + Works

7. **If people go to heaven because they are good, then God cruelly sent his Son to die for nothing, Jesus is a liar, and Christianity is a hoax.** This is a point that needs to be raised with professing Christians who claim to be followers of Christ but also believe that other religions that teach works-salvation are valid ways to get to heaven. They can't have it both ways.

Gal. 2:21 *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*