



TRUTH

"... thy word is truth" (John 17:17)

July 2010

WILL EVERY GOOD MORAL PERSON GO TO HEAVEN?

"She is such a good person." "He is always doing something to help other people." "I have never heard a bad word come out of his mouth, and I have never heard anyone say anything bad about him." "If my auntie does not make it to heaven, then I do not see how anyone possibly could. She was such a very kind person."

These and similar comments are often made about people that most folks would consider to be "good moral people." No one can please the God of heaven without living by His moral code of conduct. God instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12). Since the works of the flesh will prevent a person from inheriting the kingdom of God, it is obvious that God wants people to avoid such conduct (Galatians 5:19-21). It is also a fact that God wants us to treat others in a good way. The Bible says, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor*" (Romans 13:9,10). Does that mean, though, that every person who might be called "a good moral person" is headed to heaven? Many people apparently think so, but such a concept is not supported by the teaching of the Bible.

Sin is the greatest problem that mankind must face. Why is that so? Because sin separates those who commit it from the Lord God (Isaiah 59:2). Therefore, man's greatest need is to have his sins forgiven. The Bible teaches that "*all unrighteousness is sin*" (1 John 5:17) and "*all have sinned*" (Romans 3:23).

The Bible further declares, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). God grants eternal life through Jesus, not through man's good moral living. Man's morality could never wash away a single sin. Mankind must learn and accept this truth! Only the blood of the Lamb of God can cleanse one of his/her past sins (1 Peter 1:18,19).

In the Book of Acts, we read numerous examples of the conversion of lost people. In some cases, we read that lost people inquired

about what they must do in order to be saved. Never do we read that they were told, "Just be a good moral person." What we *do* read is that they were instructed to believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Jesus as God's Son, and be immersed for the remission of sins (Acts 2:37,38; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 22:10,16).

It is simply untrue to claim that the Bible teaches that being a good moral person "is good enough to get you into heaven." Friends, while God wants His children to be "*zealous for good works*" (Titus 2:14), those good works have no power to remove a person's transgressions. At the same time, abstaining from unlawful deeds, while such abstinence is required by the Almighty, could never cause one to be delivered out of the power of darkness into the Christ and His kingdom (Colossians 1:13,14).

Jesus is "*the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him*" (Hebrews 5:9). To whom does the Christ offer salvation? Not to all "good moral people," but rather only to those "who obey him." While the world would surely be a lot better off if there were more good moral people in it, it is also true that those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus, regardless of their good morality, "*shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*" (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9).

Why do you suppose so many people accept the idea that all moral people will be granted entrance into heaven? Some probably buy into this false notion simply because they have heard others say it, and they just repeat it. Perhaps others accept it because they consider it to be more convenient or less demanding than what the Bible teaches.

Regardless of what people might believe, including sincere religious folks, the bottom line is this: according to the Bible, no, not all good moral people will go to heaven.

-- Roger D. Campbell

COULD OUR CONGREGATION USE AN EZRA?

Ezra was both a priest of God and a scribe (Ezra 7:11). He is described as “*a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses*” (Ezra 7:6). In about B.C. 458/457, Ezra led a group of some 1500 Jews from the region of Babylon, where the Jewish people had been in exile, back to their homeland of Judah.

Ezra was a genuine leader. God saw that, Ezra’s fellow Jews saw that, and so did King Artaxerxes, the king of the Medo-Persian Empire. There is one particular Bible verse that gives us a clear insight into the type of person that Ezra was. That verse is Ezra 7:10, where it is written, “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*” There are four points that “jump out” at us in this text.

(1) Ezra had prepared his heart. What kind of person would Ezra be? That all depended on his heart/mind. The Master said, “*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil . . .*” (Luke 6:45). It all goes back to the heart. We see that same truth presented in a unique way in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. It is the one with an honest and good heart that continues to bear fruit to the glory of the Lord (Luke 8:15).

It was Ezra’s responsibility to prepare his own heart. There may have been others who taught Ezra, encouraged him, and set a good example for him. All of those are extremely helpful to any person that has a desire to serve and please Jehovah. But, even when one receives such a positive influence, in the end it is each person that must prepare his/her own heart to do what is right. God’s clear instruction reads, “*Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life*” (Proverbs 4:23).

(2) Ezra had prepared his heart to SEEK the law of the LORD. Here the word “seek” does not mean that he was trying to *locate* God’s law, but rather that he was wanting to *learn* His law. We all could use a healthy dose of that kind of desire! We recall the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily in order to determine if what they heard from Paul and others was correct (Acts 17:11). Blessed is the person who delights in God’s law and meditates in His law day and night. The Bible says so (Psalm 1:1,2). Regardless of what other tasks we might have on our schedule for this year, let every one of us make a renewed commitment to be like Ezra and diligently seek God’s law. Doing so pays tremendous dividends!

(3) Ezra had prepared his heart to DO the law of God. Ezra realized that God gave the Israelites the Law of Moses, not just so they could say that they had it, and not simply so they could seek and learn it. No, God gave it to them so that they would *obey* it. That is exactly what Ezra had made up his mind to do – *do* whatever the God of heaven commanded. God had earlier told Joshua, “*Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you: do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go*” (Joshua 1:7).

What is it that Christians are told about doing what God’s word says? “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (James 1:22). The universal principle for servants is simple: “. . . *I say . . . to my servant, Do this, and he does it*” (Luke 7:8). As the Lord’s servants, we want to obey Him, right?

(4) Ezra had prepared his heart to TEACH in Israel statutes and judgments. Our picture of Ezra is not complete without this fourth piece of information. We must not miss it! Ezra prepared his heart, he wanted to seek God’s law, wanted to obey God’s law, *and* he wanted to *teach* His law. As children of God, we must not be satisfied just *knowing* His word. Nor should we be satisfied with the fact that we *live* according to its instructions. We must go beyond knowledge and living holy lives to teaching God’s word to others. One sign of spiritual maturity is being able to handle “the meat” (Hebrews 5:12-14). Another factor in spiritual maturity is our ability to impart what we know to others. That same context in Hebrews 5 bears this out. Each Christian has a different level of teaching ability. My task is to use whatever level of knowledge and teaching capability that I have to teach others. Lost people must be taught! Our children must be taught! Saints of God must be taught! God’s church needs teachers in order to carry out its work.

Again, what was it that Ezra did? He “*prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach. . .*” So, it is now conclusion time. Could this congregation use an Ezra? What local church would not be better off with such a man in its midst?! In fact, this congregation, as well as all others, could use a bunch of Ezras! May God help us to appreciate the type of person that Ezra was and strive to imitate his attitude and commitment to serving God faithfully.

-- Roger D. Campbell

DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT (2)

If we lived in a fairy-tale world, then every aspect of life would go according to our desires and make us happy in each instance. In the real world, however, that is not how it happens, is it? Sometimes we are disappointed with the way certain activities go on in society. On occasion we are disappointed in the words and actions of certain individuals. And, yes, sometimes we disappoint ourselves. When we have to deal with disappointment in our lives, what can we do? Let us continue our study together.

(8) I should ask myself, "Is my disappointment only self-centered?" Am I thinking only about myself, about *my* pain, *my* sorrow, and *my* frustration? The Bible says, "*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Philippians 2:4). Such a mindset is required in those that want to be like Jesus.

(9) When we encounter something in life that disappoints us, we may need to get busy and set new goals or readjust our goals. What about the talented young woman who is one of the top piano players in her area of the country, but now her hands will not function properly due to a rare muscle disease? It is certain that she will be disappointed because her days of playing the piano well are now in the past. What can she do? She can set new goals. She can use other abilities that God has given her. A brother in the Lord may be disappointed that he is seldom asked to lead singing, but he can redirect his energy and use his talents in other areas. If we are unable to achieve a goal that we have set for ourselves, we need to accept the reality of such, reconsider what we are trying to do or accomplish, and move on with a positive attitude.

(10) When we face disappointment, it helps to get busy and go to work serving others. When we focus on other people and their needs, two things happen. Number one, by paying attention to the needs of others, we will dwell less on our own problems or frustrations. Number two, we learn the joy of service. It is a win-win situation. We help others and at the same time help ourselves emotionally. Remember what Jesus said about serving: "*If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all . . . For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom . . .*" (Mark 9:35; 10:45).

(11) On those occasions when other people disappoint us, let us keep in mind that all of us are human. That means that we all have our moments of weakness. The spirit might be willing, "*but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). Yes, there is a time to warn or even rebuke those who have failed spiritually. As we consider their flaws, however, let

us not forget to examine ourselves (Matthew 7:1-5).

(12) For many of us, our biggest disappointments in life come about when we disappoint ourselves. If what we have done (or failed to do) is sinful, then we need to repent of our wrongdoing. Simon was told to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:2,122). Once we have done that, we need to have complete confidence in the Lord's promise not to remember our sins any longer (Hebrews 8:12). After we have been reconciled to God, although we still might have a terrible feeling inside us due to our transgression, we need to put it behind us and move on with our lives. God cannot use us effectively until we stop looking back. Remember what happened to Lot's wife (Luke 17:32). Like Paul, we need to press ahead (Philippians 3:13,14).

(13) In some cases, when we have encountered something that disappoints us, we need to grow up, get over it, and be quiet about it! Those may sound like cold, harsh words, but there are instances when teenagers and adults act like little children. Some immature kids will kick and yell and hit others when they lose a game. If I did not win a game, if I did not get the top score on an exam, if I did not get to watch my favorite TV program, if I did not get to go to an event that I had my heart set on attending, for all of these things I must accept this reality: things did not turn out like I had hoped. I can make myself and others miserable by talking about them over and over, but there is another option available. What is that? I can grow up, get over it, be quiet about it, and move on. "*. . . in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature*" (1 Corinthians 14:20).

(14) When disappointment strikes our hearts, let us remember that we have so many blessings from God for which we ought to be grateful! Whether those blessings are material (Matthew 5:45) or spiritual (Ephesians 1:3), they are bountiful. Let us be thankful for them and focus on what we have, rather than cry about what we may be lacking.

(15) Here is one final exhortation. When we have to deal with disappointment, it is highly helpful to spend time with other faithful saints of God and enjoy their fellowship. It is a great joy to have fellowship with the Godhead and our fellow-saints (1 John 1:3). When the apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome, a Christian by the name of Onesiphorus came to visit him and refresh him (2 Timothy 1:16-18). Would we think that Paul was disappointed that he was forced to be a prisoner instead of traveling freely to spread the gospel? Of course. Yet, one factor that helped him to deal with his trials was to enjoy the fellowship of other children of God. Such fellowship really does help.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Colossians 1:12-14 – GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE

While the overall theme of the Book of Colossians is the Preeminence of the Christ, we want to focus our attention on three verses – the message that is recorded in Colossians 1:12-14. Just prior to those statements, Paul set forth his prayer for the Colossian saints (1:9-11). Now, in verses 12-14, he writes about giving thanks to God the Father. Why should He receive thanks? Hear Paul's words:

(12) Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (13) He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (14) in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

According to these verses, what has God the Father done for Christians? Consider these six truths.

God the Father has made us HIS CHILDREN (1:12). There is a sense in which all humans are the offspring of God (Acts 17:28,29). But the statement in Colossians 1:12 points to God as a spiritual Father to certain people. Those who have by faith been baptized into the Christ are counted as God's spiritual children (Galatians 3:26,27). In every culture, what is expected of children? Respect. *"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect"* (Hebrews 12:9). How much greater is our heavenly Father worthy of our respect! Again, what is expected out of children? Obedience (Ephesians 6:1,2). Should our Father not see such in us as we serve Him?

God the Father has also made us HEIRS. The text declares that He *"has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints"* (1:12). What do we call those that have an inheritance? "Heirs." In a family, the children have unique privileges and blessings. So it is in the family of God. Christians are *"joint heirs with Christ"* (Romans 8:17). God's children have an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for them (1 Peter 1:3,4).

Third, **God the Father has made us SAINTS** (1:12). This is the idea of being holy or sanctified, those who are set apart for God's purpose. How does God sanctify or make people holy? Through His word. Hear Jesus' prayer to the Father: *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth . . . that they also may be sanctified by the truth"* (John 17:17,19). If the Bible says that God sanctifies people (makes them holy), then does that mean that humans have nothing to do in order to be holy? No. The Bible teaches that we are *"sanctified by faith"* (Acts 26:18). Obedient faith is man's proper response to

God's grace. Continuing to demonstrate such a faith is what keeps one sanctified in the Son of God.

We also learn from Colossians 1:13 that **God the Father has DELIVERED us**. From what? From the power of darkness. There are only two possibilities for each accountable person: each person is either walking (living) in the light, or walking in darkness. Those who are outside of the Christ are lost in darkness. God calls such people into the light of His Son (1 Peter 2:9). How does God do such calling? He calls men through the message of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Those who respond to the call of the gospel by *obeying* Jesus are delivered from darkness. Those who *reject* the gospel remain in the lost state of darkness.

Fifth, **God the Father has CONVEYED/ TRANSLATED us** (1:13). Into what? *" . . . into the kingdom of the Son of His love."* When did that transition take place? When we obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which we learned in the gospel (Romans 6:17). When one obeys the gospel, he is baptized into the Christ and into His death (Romans 6:3,4). Put another way, according to Jesus, one that believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16). From Acts 2:47, we learn that God adds such saved people to His church.

That brings us back to the thought that the Father had conveyed the Colossians into Jesus' kingdom (1:13). If people in the first century were in the kingdom of our Lord, then what conclusion should we make about that kingdom? It already existed at that time. No one can be "in" a kingdom that does not exist! Those in our generation who tell us that they are waiting for Jesus to come again to establish His kingdom on earth have missed a major truth: His kingdom already exists! It has been in existence for about 2000 years. The kingdom of the Christ is His church, over which He rules as King or Head.

Finally, in Colossians 1:14 we learn that **God the Father has REDEEMED/FORGIVEN us**. How wonderful is that?! From what are we redeemed? Our sins. Where does this forgiveness take place? In the Christ (1:14). Since a person can only be redeemed by the blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18,19), and since redemption is found only in Him, then if a person wants to be forgiven, he must get into the Christ. Forgiveness is *available* to all, but *received* only by those that obey the gospel and by so doing are added to the Kingdom.

God is so great! He has made us His children, heirs, and saints, delivered us, conveyed us into the Kingdom, and forgiven us. Glory be to His name.

--Roger D. Campbell

TRUTH is published monthly by the Klang church of Christ in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God.