

Good Enough for Heaven?



Can one live a “good enough” life to earn a place in heaven, to balance misbehavior with good conduct? Is there a formula for how many pounds of “good” are needed to outweigh a pound of “bad?” Let’s examine the Bible as the resource for the answers to these questions.

From the earliest biblical records, we learn of dreadful consequences from disobedience to God. Adam and Eve, who at first lived in a perfect world, sinned against God and then were forced to work hard in a degraded world, destined to die. Their descendants, all but Noah and his family, were drowned in a catastrophic, worldwide deluge. Sorrows continued throughout the Old Testament, following periods of defiance.

Until the great prophet Isaiah begins his writings in the eighth century B.C., there is not much recorded about salvation. Until then, the Lord is referred to as “rock and salvation,” but in the defeat-our-mortal-enemies sense, such as: *I will hide in God, Who is my rock and my refuge. He is my shield and my salvation, my refuge and high tower. Thank you, O my Savior, for saving me from all my enemies.* (2 Samuel 22:3 LVB.)

Isaiah advanced his strong prophetic messages of the coming messiah. This is when the meaning of “salvation” took on a wondrous new dimension: *But Israel shall be saved by Jehovah with eternal salvation; they shall never be disappointed in their God through all eternity. For Jehovah created the heavens and earth and put everything in place, and he made the world to be lived in, not to be an empty chaos. I am Jehovah, he says, and there is no other!* (Isaiah 45:17-18 LVB.)

So how does this “eternal salvation” thing work and how does one earn it? The Jews were taught that the only means of remission for their sins was the sacrifice and shedding of blood of a clean animal. What are the relationships of good, evil, punishment, and reward to salvation? *Plant the good seeds of righteousness and you will reap a crop of my love; plow the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and shower salvation upon you.* (Hosea 10:12 LVB.) That verse, by a contemporary of Isaiah, suggests that we do good things, but that our salvation is from the Lord, not from doing good things. How, then, can we be good enough for heaven?

We must ask the Savior that Isaiah, Hosea, and others prophesied. He, Jesus, followed a string of 17 prophets, fulfilling every messianic prophecy. One night, a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus. He said, “We all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miracles prove this.” *Jesus replied, “With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God.” “Born again!” exclaimed Nicodemus. “What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “What I am telling you so earnestly is this: Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Men can only reproduce human life, but the Holy Spirit gives*

new life from heaven; so don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again!" (John 3:3-7 LVB.)

Jesus' emphatic reply is that physical acts can't buy a spiritual life. Eternal life in heaven can only be acquired by a spiritual rebirth. Only Jesus can save us. We can never be good enough. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23.) Our good deeds, "works," can't do it. *We are saved by God's grace: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- not because of works, lest any man should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9 RSV.)

Here is another account from Jesus with a promise of Good News: *"Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly. And you know where I am going and how to get there."* "No, we don't," Thomas said. "We haven't any idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus told him, *"I am the Way--yes, and the Truth and the Life. No one can get to the Father except by means of me."* (John 14:1-6.)

If you want to be "good enough for heaven," you can't. But you can go there someday. If you would like eternal life, pray, "Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner. I believe in your Son Jesus Christ, our Savior. I ask Jesus here and now to come into my heart and life and to be my savior. Please help me to turn from sin. I give my life to you. Thank you, Lord, for saving me. In Jesus name I pray. Amen."



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