

WON'T LIVING A *GOOD MORAL LIFE* GET ME TO HEAVEN?

“If going to church will make you a Christian, then going to a garage will make you a car.”¹

--Billy Sunday

The eighteenth question reflects a very prevalent attitude of our age. "Isn't living a good moral life all I need to do to get to heaven?" Or as a student put it, "If God grades on the curve, I'll make it." His words are an apt summary of the confusion today about religion in general.

DOING OUR BEST

Most people will accept this philosophy that **all we need to do is *our best***, and then everything will be all right, or at least we'll be able to squeak by. Some people picture God with a large scale in His hand. On the one side He places all of their evil, on the other side all of their good. If their good outweighs their evil, they make it in. Some people say, "If I do the best I can I'll go to heaven?" Have any of us done the best we can? Others say, "As long as I love God I'll be all right." But remember what Jesus demanded. He said:

“The most important one [commandment] is this: Love the Lord your God with **all** your **heart** and with **all** your **soul** and with **all** your **mind** and with **all** your **strength**. The second is this: Love your neighbor **as** yourself.”

(Mark 12:30; Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27)

But has anyone **fully kept** this first and greatest commandment? Has anyone kept the second commandment by having always loved his neighbor as much as himself? The Bible is very clear that salvation just doesn't work that way. In fact, in this wishful dream—of thinking we always do our best—we see **an incredible optimism about man's righteousness and an appalling ignorance of God's infinite holiness**. God doesn't grade on the curve. He has an absolute standard: Jesus Christ.

HUMAN NATURE

Light, when it is turned on, destroys darkness. Likewise, the character of God so blazes in its purity that it consumes all evil. As we are, we could not abide in His presence, but would be consumed because of the corruption in our lives. The Bible is clear:

“The **heart** is **deceitful** above all things and **beyond cure**. Who can understand it?”

(Jeremiah 17:9)

Because of the deceitfulness of the heart we ourselves cannot understand it. No wonder we claim to be better than we are. By doing so we are kept from realizing our depravity and our great need for God and His forgiveness.

The Bible teaches emphatically that no one can keep God's law by trying:

“Therefore **no one** will be declared **righteous** in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20).

The law brings “consciousness of sin,” not salvation.

All our good works—our morality, our religion—fall short of God's holy standards. As the Bible says,

“There is **no one righteous, not even one** . . . for **all have sinned** and **fall short** of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10,23).

God calls our good works “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Why? Because His holiness so far surpasses our righteousness. We can stack our good deeds up to the sky, but they will never reach heaven. The apostle Paul wrote,

“. . . know that a man is **not justified by observing the law, but by faith** in Jesus Christ. So, we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be **justified by faith** in Christ and not by observing the law, because **by observing the law no one will be justified**” (Galatians 2:16).

Paul points out that “if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ **died for nothing!**” (Galatians 2:21). If our good works could save, or even help to save us, then Christ died for nothing, and His sacrifice was useless and unnecessary! If we could save ourselves on the basis of our own goodness we wouldn't need a Savior. We would in fact be our **own savior**.

THE ONLY BASIS

The perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is the *only basis* on which we can come into fellowship with the living God.

Suppose the entire human race lined up on the West Coast with one objective, to get to Hawaii. We'll equate their goal with God's standard of righteousness. The gun is fired and all the swimmers jump in. As we look down over the ocean we see the most moral of all. He's been a wonderful professor and a good man, always doing his best and following high moral standards; yet he would be the first to admit his imperfection and sinfulness. But he's out there in the water seventy-five miles from shore. Next we pick out the average college student who cheats on exams once in a while and goes on a binge now and then, and gets into a few scrapes. But he's not really too bad. He's gotten about ten miles out. A derelict from Skid Row is practically drowning one hundred yards offshore. Scattered about in the water between the two extremes of the spectrum we see the rest of the human race. As we look from the bum on Skid Row to the college student to the tremendously moral man who has gone seventy-five miles, we see the difference. It's an enormous difference. But what's the difference in terms of Hawaii? Everyone will drown.

A set of swimming instructions won't help at this point. We need somebody who will take us to Hawaii. This is where Jesus Christ comes in. If you can make it to Hawaii by yourself, if you can live a life that is absolutely perfect in thought, word, and deed, you can make it to heaven on your own steam. But no man ever has succeeded or ever will succeed.

All the other religions of the world are essentially sets of swimming instructions, suggested codes of ethics for a wonderful pattern of life. But **man's basic problem** is not knowing how he ought to live; it is **lacking the power** to live as he ought. The good news of Christianity is that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who invaded human history, does for us what we could not do for ourselves. Through Him we may be reconciled to God, given His righteousness, and enabled to have fellowship with Him

NOTE

1

“Brainy Quotes: Billy Sunday Quotes” (1/10/2009), Page 1 of 3 cited in http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/b/billy_sunday.html

