

"But They Are Good People"

John Buttrey II

It is hard for many people, believers and unbelievers alike, to reconcile how a loving God could condemn any "good" person to eternal punishment. Like the apostle Paul, who desired the salvation of all Israel (cf. Rom. 10:1), our desire is for the salvation of everyone. God also desires the same (1 Tim. 2:4). However, to save all apart from their obedience to the Gospel, would make God unholy. How can a Holy God fellowship sin?

Despite what we would like God to do, Scripture is clear that not all will be saved on the Day of Judgment. It is hard to misunderstand the words of Jesus, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matt. 7:21).

There are "good" people mentioned in those verses. Good people who believed in God. Good people who strove to serve Him. Good people who attended worship services.

However, despite the fact that we might consider them "good," they are pictured as being lost. In fact, Jesus says to them, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23).

How is it that a loving God could condemn "good" people? Perhaps we should ask, what is it that makes a person "good"? Is a person "good" because they do not lie, steal or cheat? Is a "good" person someone who never uses bad language? Is a person declared "good" because they work hard? Is kindness to strangers something that makes one "good"? Certainly all of these characteristics and others of a similar nature, would, in our minds at least, qualify someone as being "good." However, such human standards of judgment do not match those of God.

The Bible records the account of a rich young man who approached Jesus and called Him good (Mark 10:17). Jesus responded, "Why do call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). In the same way, the apostle Paul declared, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). In another verse, Paul states, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In essence, both Paul and Jesus tell us, that, spiritually speaking, there are NO good people.

It is important for us to understand that just being a good person, from a human perspective, is not enough to merit one being saved by God. The apostle Paul said of himself, prior to becoming a Christian, “I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day” (Acts 23:1b). In other words, prior to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, Paul felt he was a good person. Yet, despite Paul’s opinion of himself, he later realized he was not good enough to be saved. A disciple named Ananias, told this “good” person, “Now, why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). Despite his “good” qualities, Paul still had sin in his life. The only way that sin could be taken away was through faithful obedience to the Gospel.

If being a “good” person alone were enough to save someone, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to die on a cross for the sins of the world (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8). If being a “good” person were enough, there would have been no need for this instruction of Jesus to His apostles,

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16).

The qualifications (in the above referenced Scripture) for one being saved are clearly spelled out. It requires belief and baptism. From other passages we also learn of the need for confession (Rom. 10:10), repentance (Acts 2:38), and living a faithful life (1 John 1:7-9).

Lest anyone think God is being unfair or harsh in demanding belief, repentance, confession, and baptism, please consider these Scriptures:

[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4)
[Emphasis in brackets mine].

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

In addition to being full of love, God is patient. He is allowing “good” people an opportunity to repent. His desire is that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. However, given the blessing of free will, it is up to man to choose to follow Jesus Christ. We sometimes

think of heaven as a place for good people. The truth is, heaven is for people who have obediently come to Jesus and are saved by His life.