

SE102807

MYTH BUSTERS

4. *I'm a Good Person*

Andy Stanley tells the story of a church kids teacher who was trying to explain heaven to his class. So he asked the class a series of questions to see what they already thought about the subject:

- if I had a garage sale and sold all my stuff and gave the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?
 - o NO they all cried!
- If I cleaned the toilets in the church and mowed the lawn and gave all my money to the poor, would that get me into heaven?
 - o NO! they said again
- If I loved my wife and gave candy to every kid I saw and was kind to animals, would that get into heaven?
 - o NO they shouted.
- Well, then how can I get into heaven? Kid in the back row pipes up and says:
 - o You GOTTA BE DEAD FIRST!

Right! First prerequisite for heaven... you have to be dead! Anybody who knows for sure how to get to heaven has to have died first to have field tested their theory. But there's a small problem with that, since there's a dearth of dead people walking around willing to talk about heaven.

So we all agree, you need to die, but after that, it's all speculation. And I would say, not just speculation, but ASSUMPTION. Here's where our myth takes shape. It's built on a very popular ASSUMPTION on heaven which simply put is this:

Good People go to heaven.

That's it. It's so popular you can find this theory on heaven around the world. Almost all of the major world religions are some version of this theory. Everyone you meet on the street holds to it. The problem is, it's a myth. I mean, it doesn't make a lick of sense when you think about it, which most people don't.

Why don't they? I don't know... too busy living to think about dying, I guess. But when a mom or dad or wife or husband dies, then we're faced with it, I see it at every funeral I officiate... people think about their morality and it gets very uncomfortable. And then someone starts to talk about all the good deeds this person did what a good person they were and everyone relaxes and says:

Of course, good people go to heaven.

The MYTH goes like this:

- There is a Good God who lives in a Good place reserved for Good people.
- This God goes by many names, he's behind all the major world religions.
- And of course that means that all major religions and all minor religions provide a path to this good place.
- The path is not in the religion, it's that the GOOD people in the religion, the good Muslims, the good Buddhists, the good Catholics, the good Jews, the GOOD

Christians go to heaven.

Now let's be honest, almost everyone believes this. You ask the average person about heaven, if they think about it at all, it's just passed off with a simple, "well, I'm a good person and so I'm figure I'm OK."

They're always quick to add, "well, of course, I'm not PERFECT"... as if they needed to say that. Like, "oh, well, you're not? I would have never guessed. Ok, let me scratch that assumption off my list then! Thank you for clarifying!"

That's their nod at being humble, which again, is them being "good".

Now of course it's an attractive way to think, isn't it. Some of you are Christians – you believe in the whole Jesus thing – but you still think this way. Good people go to heaven. Why? Because we're the "good" people. How many people have you met who have ever said,

- "heaven is for good people and I'm not one of them." NO!
- We're good people! How many bad people in this room?

It's an appealing myth for three reasons:

- A) Because it's fair. Good is rewarded, Bad is Punished. That seems fair.
- B) Because it motivates us to BE good. If the good people go to heaven, then I should be good.
- C) Because it's consistent with God's Goodness. If God is Good, then only good people can be with him.

So it's got some common sense going on, but there's some fatal flaws in this idea which is what makes it's a MYTH according to the Bible.

1. IT'S NOT CONSISTENT

Since nobody is perfect, who gets to answer the question, how good is good enough? A Barna Research Group Poll asked, if the following phrase was in the Bible, or not: "**God helps those who help themselves**". According to the Barna poll, 80% of Americans believe that phrase is in the Bible. Surprise! It's not.

But see, that's the myth. God helps the good people, the ones who pull themselves up. But let's just ask some simple questions:

- How much do you have to help yourself, before God helps you?
- A day? A week? All the days in a two year period?

And how much does God help?

- In equal proportion to your effort?
- Or do you have to help yourself 15% of the time, or 50%?
- When does God stop helping? After ten major failures? After two?
- When does God throw in the towel on us?
- When does God give up helping?

Is your head spinning yet? We can't answer those questions can we? It's too subjective. But still, despite that, we think God's just going to let us into heaven based on our subjective

ideas of how much good is good enough. Isn't it true that some people do some things that they thought were good, that others thought were very bad?

Let's compare shall we?

- Does God like thieves better than murderers?
- Does he like abortion doctors better than racists?
- Does he like Nazis better than Communists?
- Does he like the Americans better than Canadians?*
- Does God like gossipy women better than lying men?
- Does God like pornographers better than self righteous pastors?
- Does God like abusive drunks better than materialistic business owners?
- Does God like lusty frat boys better than militaristic madmen?
- Does God like people who commit tax fraud and evasion better than child molesters?
- Does God like lawyers better than politicians? - there's a tough call.

Head spinning now? See, since we all readily admit we're NOT PERFECT, then a Good God must grade on a curve somehow. But what curve? What mysterious scale are we talking about?

- There were some well meaning southerners, respectable people who beat and raped their slaves. Where do they fall on the curve?
- There were some sincere Nazis, that they were doing good. Saddam Hussein died thinking himself a hero – we have his thots on video tape.

Who's to say your definition of good enough is the same as his. If God grades on a curve, friends, whose curve? Yours? You expect God to bend to your ideas of right and wrong? Make a new heaven for every person? It's a interesting idea, but did you just make that up? How is that just wishful thinking. I'm going to bank my eternity on somebody's hearts and unicorns? I don't think so.

But lets say for the sake of argument, that the good enough is simply just living up my own conscience. Whatever my conscience tells me is right or wrong. That's all. Just my own internal compass is all I have to follow, the only test I have to pass. Even if that was the bar, friends, how many of us cross it? Which of us lives up to our own standards?

Now, at this point I'm not trying to tell you that Christianity is right, I just want you to think critically about this. "Good Enough" is just too nebulous. Who decided? You say, well God knows. I'm sure he does, but how do you know you're one of them?

2. IT'S NOT BIBLICAL

Now at this point, some of you say, well, I've got the GOOD book. And I do the good things in the good book. Well, if any of you say that, I want to just say three words:

DON'T GO THERE.

Because according the Bible, God doesn't grade on a curve at all. He has one standard and *only one* and that standard is 100%. Doing all the right things, at all the right times, for all the right reasons. Perfection. God says, no less than 17 places in the Bible:

"be HOLY, because I am HOLY"

I met this one atheist friend and he said to me, if I die and I was wrong about the God thing, I know God will say to me, "Friend, you kook, you had it so wrong, but you were a good person, get on into heaven." See, he said, I live by sermon on the mount.

Is that really? Have you READ the sermon on the mount? Because if you're banking on that to get you into heaven... well it's trouble. You see, in the most famous sermon in history Jesus said, Matthew 5:48

be Perfect therefore, as my Father in Heaven is Perfect.

And in case there was some doubt as to what he meant by that, he explains in detail in other parts of the sermon:

- you've heard that staying morally pure means having sex with only the spouse you made promises to. But adultery from God's point of view occurs even when you gaze at another person as a object of lust.
- and murder? According to Jesus, "do not murder" includes keeping from uncontrolled outbursts of anger. Like - for example - when you see the guy driving like an idiot on the freeway. Let me just quote him: "**Anyone who says, 'you fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell**".
- yeah, gentle Jesus meek and mild said that.

Some might say,

"if what Jesus is telling me is true, then NOBODY'S going to heaven based on being good enough."

Bingo. That's right. Nobody's good enough. The Bible says, in Romans 3:23, "everybody has *sinned* and fallen short of God's glorious standard."

If you are trusting in all the Bible's wonderful, high, lofty moral code to be your ticket to heaven, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but God didn't give you the moral code to get to heaven. Here's why he gave it:

Ro 3:20 no one will be declared righteous [good enough] in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. NIV

Friend, in a very real sense, the thing the Bible's moral code does for you, is not to MAKE YOU BETTER but to make you worse. That is, the Good Book, actually INCREASES our understanding/awareness of our own BADNESS! I'm not arguing that's good or bad at this point, friend, I'm just saying, that if you're trusting in the Bible's moral code to be your ticket to be good enough, you're simply on the wrong track:

DON'T GO THERE.

It's like sticking your hand on a hot stove to make it feel better after you already burned it. The Bible just INCREASES the sense that we have that we can never be good enough on our own.

3. IT'S OPPOSED TO GRACE

So some of you are saying, already Einstein, if the good people don't go to heaven who does? Well, you want something more than my speculation on this topic. The teaching of Jesus (who is the only man who was dead for 3 days and came back to tell us about heaven)

is this:

“But now,” the Bible says, “a righteousness (that is, a perfect level of goodness) is available apart from the law (that is, apart from my moral or religious efforts to be good enough). This goodness, this moral perfection from God comes through trusting Jesus Christ and is available to ANYONE who believes.” (Romans 3:21-22)

So, let me say it clear: according to Jesus, it's not the GOOD people who go to heaven, it's the FORGIVEN people. So if we can assume that forgiven people are people who have a lot of bad to be forgiven in their lives, then we might say, it's only the BAD people who go to heaven. That is, those willing to admit their badness, confess, repent and trust God. It's a gift of grace to the people who ask for it.

I had a skeptic friend talk to me a while back about how unfair the Christian system was. It was the famous HITLER OBJECTION. So any fool can repent and ask Jesus into their heart and that's it? How unfair. Unfair. It's a joke, he said.

- I said, well, what's more unfair?
 - o A system where God says, I want you all to be good enough. And no one knows the rules, no one knows the finish line, where if you're set up with a bad set of parents, or born in Nazi Germany, you're automatically disqualified, or if you're born in a good situation you're automatically in?
 - o OR,
 - a system where everyone is invited,
 - a system where it's totally equal because everyone gets in the same way – through grace and not earning, and
 - a system where anyone not matter their badness or past or upbringing can meet the standard,
 - What's more FAIR?

What's more fair? Through Christ, God has made relationship with him as EASY as possible.

On the day Jesus was crucified the Bible says that the criminal next to Jesus called out to him and said Lk 23:41-43 "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And what does Jesus say? Does he say, well, have you been good enough? Did you have a good heart underneath all that murder and lying and stealing? No... he says:

"I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise ."

A commitment to be a good person doesn't mean much from a cross does it? I'm going to be a better man, Jesus. For the next 5 minutes of my life, I'm going to be a better husband and father. No, friends, it's just a trusting faith in Jesus Christ and God makes you righteous. Not one good work is required. Not one. It's GOD'S WORK from start to finish.

- Everyone is invited, No one is excluded based on ethnicity, or past or gender, or moral pedigree
- Everyone gets in the same way, through a gift, not by works so no one can boast,
- Everyone can meet the standard. Everyone gets righteousness as a gift. Everyone BECOMES good enough – goodness is IMPUTED into them!

Are you getting this? **NO PRECONDITIONS.** I don't know what your past is, but God wants to liberate you from the curse of the curve, of not measuring up, he wants to relieve you of the curse of your relentless self-efforts to meet the expectations of God. No good works required, not one. Not one precondition save for the faith and trust in God's forgiving love. And that faith is **ALSO** a gift God will give you. It's **GRACE** – unearned, favor from God.

THE BITTER IRONY

So now you know the myth and how crazy it is to think **GOOD** enough is **GOOD ENOUGH.** And now you know the **GOOD NEWS** (Gospel) that God has made a way to heaven through Jesus Christ by which

- Everyone is invited
- Everyone gets in the same way
- Everyone can meet the standard.

Now, you want to know the irony? The bitter irony is, many people despise this **GOSPEL.** Grace is scandalous friends. It shocks us. It mocks our ideas of what's fair. Jesus says, if it was all fair, we'd **ALL** be condemned. You know why this is so shocking and scandalous? Because of pride.

- You mean, I'm no better in God's sight than my miscreant neighbor?
- You mean, Ted Bundy just lives like a hellion and repents in prison and he's in?
- You mean all my good deeds they mean **NOTHING** to God?

It's not that they mean nothing to God, but friends, it's like a boy asking his dad for 10 bucks, buy him a present and giving it back to God. The Father surely appreciates the gift, but no one thinks he's 10 bucks to the good in the exchange! Every good thing you do is first from God, the giver of all good gifts.

Friends it's scandalous I know. People stumble over it and many "good" people will never be forgiven because of their pride. In fact, that's what our word scandal means, it comes from the **GREEK:** "stumbling block." You know what **GRACE** means? It means that on the day of Judgment, there will be surprises. Jesus said, in Matthew 21:31
"the prostitutes and the tax collectors are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you good folk - because they understood the way to life and you didn't!"

You get it? The good people weren't getting in and Jesus said the **BAD** people were! Why? Why were the broken and messed up getting it and the moral people, the upstanding people **NOT** get it? I'll tell you why:

Because they were under **NO ILLUSION** that they could ever be good enough.

So because they had long ago given up on being good enough, they can come humble to God, desperate, lowly, contrite, and just believing, with a reckless hope that maybe, just maybe God will be merciful to them! Guess what? That's all God wants! And so he forgives them and Jesus says, these are now candidates for heaven! These are the people who go to heaven, my forgiven ones, who come to me child like and not proud.

The bitter irony is that many, many will not come this way. When the good people saw that this is the way Jesus set the terms for heaven, they were indignant. These people don't

DESERVE heaven. But I want you to catch what he says to them:
I did not come for the well, but for the sick.

I asked a friend of mine who hated the whole atonement idea, the idea that we're bad and we need to be fixed... I said, are you spiritually sick? He didn't know what to say. I said, well, if you aren't, then Jesus didn't come for you. You are not a part of the audience he came to save. If you're not sick, then when it comes to heaven, you're on your own.

You want to justify yourself with Good Works, fine, he says, here's the BOOK, do EVERYTHING it. Be perfect. Unless your righteous surpasses that of the mother Teresa's of the world, you have no hope for heaven.

CONCLUSION

That's Christianity friends. I admit it, it's scandalous: Salvation: there is no curve and no condemnation! But this is the cost – full trust. NO TRUST in yourself, FULL TRUST in God's Grace for you through Christ.

But for all who will humble themselves at the **level** ground in front of Christ's cross, the GOSPEL is incredibly good news, it is life and health, and peace and joy, and freedom and a transformed life and it is - I'm afraid this is very unpopular to say in our culture - it is the only way to heaven. Only by grace.