

THE TWO WAYS TO HEAVEN

If we were to look at the major religions of the world, we would see that there is only one way that they present for man to get to heaven. That way is by doing "good works". They do not agree on the works that are required, but they all offer some formula of a combination of rituals and rules that have to be followed. Those who follow the prescribed formula are guaranteed entrance into a better life in a better place. Only Christianity differs from this format. But even in Christianity there is a tendency for man to want to **do** something to **earn** his place in Heaven. It is mans nature to want to earn his way into Heaven because this gives him bragging rights. If you were to take a survey of a group of people and ask them why they think that they will go to heaven, you would probably get some of the following answers. " I try to live by the golden rule." "I have been as good as the next guy." "I have never committed any of the really big sins, I have never killed anyone." "I have belonged to the church ever since I was confirmed and my parents belonged to that church too." "I try to play by the rules, I don't always succeed but then who does?" I could go on and on but you get the idea. All of them would site either something that they did or something that they have refrained from doing. But is it possible for us to get to Heaven by our good works? Let us examine the Bible and see what it has to say about the subject.

We read: ***"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself', you are doing well. But, if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."*** (James 2:8-10). There are some who think that if they do more good things than bad, then God will let them into Heaven on that basis, but does that make any sense? Suppose you received a ticket for driving 45 m.p.h. in a 30 m.p.h. zone. As you stand before that judge, he asks you how you plead and you say, "innocent". Then you proceed to tell him about all of the laws that you did not break and of all of the times that you obeyed the speed limit. Will he let you off? No! He is not interested in how may times you obeyed the law, that is what is

expected of you. What is of interest to him is the fact that you broke that law at that time. That makes you a criminal. In Romans 3:23 we read, ***"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"***. That word "all" doesn't leave much room for anyone to claim that they deserve to be counted as righteous. We read, ***"There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, With their tongue they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips"; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known." There is no fear of God before their eyes.***" (Romans 3:10-18). The chances for self justification are beginning to look bleak. Even in the old testament we read, ***"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God', they are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; There is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."*** (Psalms 53:1-3). "So", you may ask, "if man is so bad, then who can go to Heaven?" God Himself made a way for us. It is not our nature to follow it because He requires that we recognize and accept the fact that we are sinners and can't save ourselves. The bible says, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23). So you see, as sinners, we deserve to die. But Jesus died in our place. He could do this because He had no sin and therefore was not under the penalty of sin. What we have to do is accept Him as Lord and our Savior. We read, ***"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for a good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His***

Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Romans 5:6-10). The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus wrote, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."*** (Ephesians 2:8+9). Jesus said, ***"For God so loved that world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16). How much God must love us to go to this extent to redeem us so that we can be with Him forever in Heaven. Our fitness for Heaven is not determined by what we do, but by what we become. In the gospel of John, in the first chapter, starting with verse ten, John writes of Jesus; ***"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*** In The Book of The Revelation we find a vivid description of the selection process for Heaven. In the twentieth chapter, starting with verse eleven, we read: ***"And I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and Heaven fled away,, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*** If there was ever a definitive description of the selection process for Heaven, this is it. There is no use arguing with me about it. I didn't write it, God did. So what is in these books? I think that it is plain from the context that they are books that contain all of our deeds. If we are relying on our deeds to get to Heaven, we will be found wanting because we will then be judged by those deeds. If we

are brought into court charged with a crime, we can either plead guilty or not guilty, and our defense is based on that plea. If we plead "not guilty" we must be able to defend ourselves against the charges. If we plead "guilty" we can then throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. But if we plead "not guilty" we cannot, then, throw ourselves on the mercy of the court because we have called for justice and not mercy. If we are not guilty, we don't need mercy, we need justice; but if we are guilty, we do not want justice, we want mercy. Before the trial can start, there is a preliminary hearing at which time a plea must be entered, and a future court date is set. This gives both sides an opportunity to prepare their cases based on the plea. We enter our plea on earth before we die. If we think that we are good enough to go to Heaven on our own merits, we can enter a plea of not guilty. If, on the other hand, we see ourselves as sinners and unworthy of Heaven, we can come to Jesus, confess our crimes against Him and His laws and plead for mercy. If we do that, He has promised to pardon us, and our names are entered in a book along with others who have received pardons from Him. This book is called, "The Book Of Life". What we see in this passage is a court scene. There is a great stack of books that contain all of the deeds of all people. There is another book that is called the Book of Life, containing the names of all of the people who have pleaded guilty, asked for mercy based on the merits of Christ, and received pardon for their sins. Notice that all who were judged by the things that were in the books were cast into the lake of fire. None of them made it on the basis of their works. Only those who had their names written in the book of life were spared. If you have a pardon from someone who is empowered with the authority to pardon, there is no case against you and there is no reason to examine the records against you because there is no case. Later, in Revelation 21:27, where the writer is talking about the new Jerusalem; we read, ***"and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."*** Jesus is called "The Lamb of God". It is only by Him that we can have our names written in His book of life. He alone has the power to pardon from sin. He alone paid the penalty for our sins. We must rely only on Him and the blood that He shed for our sins to cleanse us from our sins. Jesus said to His disciples, ***"Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all***

the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in Heaven." (Luke 10:19+20). Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? Jesus said, *"Truly, truly I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep, to him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of the strangers." This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. Jesus therefore said to them again, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."* (John 10:1-11). The people who heard Jesus, understood what He was saying. When the shepherd would make a small temporary sheep fold out of sticks, just large enough for the sheep to all lie down in. The shepherd would then lie down to sleep across the entrance, or door to the fold so no sheep could leave and no intruder could enter without his knowing it. In this way, the shepherd would actually become the door to the sheep fold.

Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him, and he with Me."* The way to Heaven is not through our own works but through Jesus and his provision for us. It is not based on what we do but on what we become. The children of God.

Paul Ziegler