

By W. J. Allen 3/9/2004

PROBLEMS IN CHRISTIANITY??

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The following questions are often raised by people examining the claims of Christianity. This is an attempt to briefly, but honestly and fairly, deal with them. It is my hope they will prove helpful to some searching for the truth.

- **“Do good people really go to Hell? Surely not?”**
 - The first question must be, “What IS good? What are the acceptable standards?”
 - The second series of questions logically follow, “Who makes that judgment? Who is qualified to make that judgment? On what basis is the judgment made?”
 - The third question might be, “What IS Hell?”

In order to define who is good, one must have or set some standards. On what basis is someone to be determined as good, and another as not qualifying? Many would say that they know many good people who are not Christians or not even religious, and they may well look better than many Christians. The assumption is that surely they should be judged with compassion and favor by Christ.

Yet, the same Christ who invited all to come to Him for salvation and rest, said this in Matthew 7, beginning with verse 21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day [of final judgment], ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” Stern words, indeed!

But, by what standard do you determine who these “good people” are? Are they as good as you? Better than you? In what ways? How much do you really know about them? Can you look inside their heart, or are you judging based simply on what you see or imagine about them?

Do you realize that many of the most brutal Nazi leaders in World War II were great friends and family men, admired by those around them? For example, Goebbels was a devoted husband and father. Heydrich, the “butcher of Prague”, was a skilled musician and highly-regarded as a good husband and neighbor. Hitler himself was said to be much admired by those German women who had contact with him. Would their judgments of these as “good men” be accurate?

Or, on a simpler scale, how about your friends and neighbors? How much do you know about their hearts? Have you never been shocked when one you admired and held up as an example of goodness then did some dastardly deed? How many such deeds would it take to disqualify them as “good?”

For that matter, how good are you? Do you always do what you believe you should? Do you fail to do that which you ought to do? Has your ability to accurately evaluate or judge someone been perfect, or even rarely wrong?

You see, we establish standards that we think we can meet and evaluate others based on those standards. We see some good deeds, some kind actions, some soft words, and assume this is an accurate assessment of “good.” Indeed, these may be good, but how do they measure up on the scales of justice in one’s entire life, both that of thought and of deed? By most standards, the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were considered to be the “cream of the crop.” Yet, Jesus severely castigated them and said they were under God’s judgment. And, most of us, in reading the Scriptures, would agree with that assessment. They looked good on the outside, but inside their hearts were wrong; and, eventually, this came to the top.

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The real issue is, What are the standards? The answer of the God of the Bible is that you must be perfectly righteous. This is necessary for anyone seeking to go to Heaven, for Heaven is a place of perfection, and can only remain so if only perfect people are admitted.

Still, God's standards are not so tremendously high. In Micah 6:8, God declares to the Jewish people, "He has shown you, O man, what is good: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?"

Those would appear to be reasonable requirements. Yet, God makes clear on a number of occasions that, in His view, there is none righteous, no, not one! You see, I can do good things and do kind things, yet refuse or fail to walk in humble harmony with the God Who created me.

And, since God is the standard for good, and He is perfectly good, failure to walk in harmony with Him inevitably will lead me away from good. Even my good deeds will become tainted, as I expect and assume, (as did the Pharisees), that they will be recognized and applauded by others. Thus, my actions are self-motivated, in the final analysis, not others-motivated.

Of course, even the worst of us (and, by what standard do I say "worst"), sometimes will do good things. But, again, how many good deeds qualify you for perfection? How many kind acts are necessary to earn a place in Heaven? One? Twenty? Five Hundred? And, who is keeping score? How does one ascertain correctly that the good deed is done selflessly?

The simple fact is, that neither you nor I is qualified to render such a judgment. And, so, we settle for vague judgments, like, "Well, he really is a nice person." But, we really don't know, do we? Still, he may truly be a nice person, but is that the prerequisite for heaven? Moreover, if Heaven is perfect, surely we can agree that even you and I don't qualify. And, if Heaven is not perfect, what's the point? How much imperfection could Heaven endure before it would be just like life on earth?

The second part of the questioning revolves around the idea of who, really, IS qualified to judge, and on what basis do they judge?

If there is a Creator God, He is the logical choice to make the judgment, for we are creatures He has created, and there is no higher level of power than that. Further, if He is truly God, He will be all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present (Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent). Thus, nothing is withheld from Him, and nothing can escape His searching out. If that should not be true, then He is not really God and may be dismissed from consideration.

But, then, what other basis or source of judgment could anyone or anything have? Perhaps "Mother Nature?" Perhaps, evolutionary forces (whatever that might be)? Perhaps the "law of the jungle?" (for that is what Evolution professes to be the case). The simple fact is, that if there is not a God who can accurately evaluate good and evil, then there is NO basis for judgment, and good people fare no better than "bad" people. Thus, the only justice we can expect is the collective judgments of our society in this life, and we know that is not an always just deal.

If you say, "Well, I know a good person when I see one," we must ask again, "By what criteria?" "How can you be sure?" "And, by what right can YOU judge?"

So, we have a major problem: we cannot get into Heaven unless we are perfect; and none of us are perfect. Unless God will "grade on the curve", we are out of luck. But, then, Heaven would be full of lucky, but imperfect people.(a bit like a perhaps better version of life on earth.

No religion on the face of this earth has any answer to this dilemma, except to suggest that god or gods may graciously "grade on the curve", or play favorites with people who worship them.

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But the God of the Bible has a simple solution, found in Romans 4. He gave up His one and only Son, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Co-creator of man and the universes, to become a genuine man, in order that He might be a sufficient substitute for the sins of all the world. He took His beloved Son and poured out ALL the sins of ALL the world upon Him. He made His beautiful, sinless Son the bearer of all the incredibly ugly sins of all time. And, he transferred of the Son's righteousness to those who would accept the Son's sacrifice as complete and sufficient.

This simply means that all my sins were judged in Christ by God. Since Christ is God the Son, He, too, is infinite. Thus, there is no limit to the sins He could carry. He is omnipotent, so even this horrendous burden could not hold Him in the grave. The cost to God was immense – the unity of the Triune Godhead was broken at that point on the cross where Jesus said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? For, at that point, as all our sins were assigned to Him, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit had to turn away from Him, for they could not look on sin with equanimity.

But the second part of the equation is this: Since Christ is infinite, His righteousness is without limit, and therefore, may be applied to an infinite number of people. God is satisfied with Christ's atonement for sin, and is willing and eager to apply His Son's righteousness to anyone who will accept it.

And so, the question for admission to Heaven is simply this: Will you accept, without reservation, the application of the finished work of Christ to your account? To do so, you must surrender any claim to your own righteousness, for as God has said, "All our RIGHTEOUSNESSES are like filthy rags" (Isa 64:6).

But God will not force Himself on anyone. If you insist on presenting your "good works" to God for qualification for admittance to Heaven, He must turn you away. And sadly, for the cost of accepting the finished work of Christ as admission is simply a surrender of your pride and self-centeredness.

When a person does turn to Christ, truly, he finds a tremendous burden lifted. He is truly forgiven, once for all time. Some say, he will then turn right back into his prior lifestyle of sin, but that is not the experience of those who have found themselves freed from the slavery that is sin. True, they will continue to commit sins, but will bitterly regret then and will flee to Christ for ongoing cleansing. Sin may periodically tempt them, but can never again enslave them.

There is much more, but a careful reading of Romans 1-6 will shed much more light on the subject, along with John 1-6. We will now move on to the third part of the question. Is there REALLY a hell?

The answer is simply, Yes. For it is the banishment forever from the presence of a good, just, holy, and gracious God, and finding oneself under the continuing ministrations of Satan himself, without any relief from the God one has spurned. Can anything be worse than that? In that sense, we are experiencing a bit of Hell here in this life, as we live apart from God. But, the final Hell is even worse – it is utterly devoid of God and therefore of good, and is devoid of people who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Putting your entire future (and, present) on the line by trusting in the Person and finished Work of Jesus, the Christ, is the only way to go to heaven, and is something that anyone like you can immediately and easily do. You simply give up your own sense of judgment, your self-satisfaction, your pride, and come to Christ – without any strings, without any baggage of "good works", without any sense of deserving it. And, He promises that all such will never be turned away. That is truly good work (John 6:29).