

Do “Good People” Go To Heaven?

by Bryan Gibson

The Bible tells us about a man named Cornelius who feared God, was devout and just, gave money to the poor, prayed to God always, and had a good reputation in his community (Acts 10:1-2, 22). Surely this man was on his way to heaven. Right? Wrong! Cornelius was a good man—a very good man—but he was not a Christian. Despite the good this man had done, he was not saved, and he knew it (Acts 11:13-14).

Thankfully, there is more to the story. The apostle Peter was sent to the home of Cornelius to tell him what he “must do” to be saved (Acts 10:6; 11:13-14). Cornelius was eager to hear these words; he even called together his friends and relatives so they too could hear (Acts 10:24). When Peter arrived, he preached Jesus to them, showing clearly that He was their Lord, their Judge, and their Savior (Acts 10:34-43). The intent was clear—to persuade these Gentiles to believe in and follow Jesus. What did Peter then tell them they had to do to be saved? “He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48)—the purpose of which is clearly stated in other passages: “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38); to “wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16); to be “saved” (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21); to enter “into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3); to “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). In other words, Cornelius and the others were not saved until they obeyed this commandment to be baptized. They did not put on Christ—become a Christian—until they were baptized into Christ.

What became of Cornelius after this? We really don’t know, but we do know what he was supposed to do. He was now a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, and needed to do what others were urged to do: “walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6); “abide in My word” (John 8:31); “keep My commandments” (John 15:10); “continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23); “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22; Colossians 1:23); “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4); “be faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10); “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4).

What about you? Are you hoping to go to heaven, simply because you are a “good person”? Cornelius was a “good person,” but he was still not right with the Lord. He had to be baptized into Christ, and then live faithfully for Christ. Will you do the same?