

Am I Good Enough For Heaven?

Four Studies On Assurance

Dan McKinlay

Foreword

As a young man training for ministry, I remember a class at Cornhill Scotland where a retired minister was sharing his insights on pastoral visitation of aged and sick people. One harrowing story he told—which has always stuck with me—was about one of his most loyal parishioners. She had been at the church for 42 years, 27 of which under his ministry which was faithful and grounded in the Bible. And yet, as he visited her in a hospice and asked her the question, 'Are you ready to be with Jesus in heaven?' Her answer was one that brought deep sorrow to his heart: 'I hope I am good enough'. Why was it such a difficult thing for that minister to hear? Well, it was because that beloved lady, who had spent her time in church, given her time and money to its mission and who had been an integral part of the life of the ministry, was at a loss when it came to understanding the core message of Christianity.

I have written this study series, my final as your assistant minister, because I want each person who reads this to know the answer to the question: 'Am I good enough for heaven?'. To put it succinctly, the answer is, 'Of course not!' Maybe that's a new way of thinking for you. It certainly was not how I was raised to think about heaven—I thought I'd get there based on my record of good behaviour and commitment to church. But our gaining of heaven is all about Jesus' finished work, not our service or our religious vigour. It's about what God has *done* in sending his Son, rather than what we *do*. God has chosen us from before the foundation of the world to be his children, and nothing can change that remarkable and comforting truth.

As you embark on these four studies, it is my prayer that you would know that the love of God is immeasurably bigger than any love we could have for him. And in seeing that, I pray you would have the wonderful hope that you will see Jesus for yourself in his eternal kingdom, and be assured that he himself will take you there when our days on earth are done.

With much love in our Saviour,

Dan McKinlay

South Head Anglican, 2021

Study 1: The Question of Being 'Good'

Introduction

If you go to a jewellery store, you will find that the diamond ring or earrings are almost always sat on top of a black velvet cloth. The dark backdrop allows you to see the magnificence of the stone and the way it reflects and refracts light through it. The same can be true for coming to understand God's wonderful grace. If we are to fully grasp God's love and mercy, we need to see the black backdrop. That backdrop is what we'll cover in this study. It is the 'not-so-good' news about humanity, our sinfulness and our desperate condition of being cut off from God, our Creator.

Introduction Question: Are humans, morally speaking, fundamentally good or fundamentally bad?

Prayer

Dear God, our heavenly Father. Help us today to see the truth about ourselves in your word. May we not shy away from the truth that we are lost without faith in Christ, but instead rejoice that you would be gracious and loving by sending your Son Jesus to die for our sin. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Study



Read Genesis 2:1-9

What stood out to you in this passage?



Read Genesis 3

What stood out to you in this passage?

1. How does God relate to humanity in Genesis 2?
2. How does humanity relate to God in Genesis 3?
3. How do we see some of the characteristics of human behaviour that we read in Genesis 3 occur today?



Read Romans: 3:10-12

1. What do you think about these words?

It's not easy for us to come to terms with the truth that we are not fundamentally good. But if we go back to Genesis 2 and 3, it helps us make sense of why Paul says what he does in this passage.

As Genesis 2 tells us, God is the loving ruler of the world because he made the world. And unlike human rulers, God always does what is best for his subjects. God created people who were something like himself, and put them in charge of the world—to rule it, to care for it, to be responsible for it, and to enjoy all its beauty and goodness. He appointed humanity to supervise and look after the world, but always under his own authority, honouring him and obeying his directions.

Yet the sad truth is that, from the very beginning, men and women everywhere have rejected God by doing things their own way. We see it Genesis 3, and we all are guilty of the same thinking as Adam and Eve. We don't like someone telling us what to do or how to live—least of all God—and so we rebel against him in lots of different ways. We ignore him and just get on with our own lives or we disobey his instructions for living in his world.

How ever we do it, we are all rebels, because we don't live God's way. We prefer to follow our own desires, and to run things our own way, without God. This rebellious, self-sufficient attitude is what the Bible calls 'sin'. And this is what the passage above in Romans 3 is getting at.

Being a sinner is not about being the worst example of humanity as much as it is about the fact that everything we saw, think do, to some degree, is impacted by our own sinfulness—our desire to be at the centre of our world. We are not all as bad as we could be, but we are all affected by sin. We all fall short of God's perfect plan for humanity.

This is the black backdrop that we all need to hear and understand. We need to keep being reminded of it, because our culture often tells us a very different truth. But as you know, this bleak picture of humanity is not the end of the story. Keep going with the next study to get to the very good news of Christianity.



Watch this video either by clicking the picture (if using the ebook version) or scanning the code.



If you're using a paper version of this study, you can scan this QR code to get to the video



Implications

1. What themes in today's study surprised you?
2. What is something new that you have learned?
3. Do you think you need further thought or information? What needs clarifying?

Study 2: The Finished Work of Christ

Introduction

Our previous study finished with a clear picture of sinful humanity and the reality of God's judgment. But this is a valuable picture that we must always hold in close view, because it allows us to see why the good news of Jesus truly is good. Last week was the 'black cloth', and this week we get to see the diamond. In this study, we will reflect on the significance of Jesus' work on the cross as the New Testament authors think about it, especially as it relates to the confidence that we can have before God.

Introduction Question: Does a Christian need to do anything to prove that they are truly a Christian?

Prayer

Dear God, our heavenly Father. Help us today to see the amazing work of Christ in your word. May we rejoice in your love and grace in sending your Son Jesus to die for our sin. May we only rely on Christ and not our own good works or religious disposition for salvation from judgment. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Study

Today's introduction question was maybe somewhat tricky, but we are not the first group of Christians to wrestle with it.



Read Ephesians 2:1-10

What stood out to you in this passage?

1. What are things in this passage that God has done for us?
2. Why would God do these things? (Look especially at verses 8-9.)
3. What do you understand God's 'grace' to be?

Unlike every other person who has ever lived, Jesus did not rebel against God. His life always honoured God and he did not deserve to die. Although he had the power to heal the sick and to perform miracles, he willingly was executed. Why? What is the point of Jesus death?



Read 1 Peter 3:18

1. What is the purpose of Jesus' death, according to this verse?
2. What is the implication of Jesus' suffering 'once' for sins?

Jesus' death

Because of his great love and generosity, God did not leave us to suffer the consequences of our foolish rebellion. He sent his own divine son into our world to become a man, in order to save us.

Unlike us, Jesus didn't rebel against God. He always lived under God's rule. He always did what God said, and so did not deserve death or punishment. Yet Jesus did die. Although he had the power of God to heal the sick, walk on water and even raise the dead, Jesus allowed himself to be executed on a cross. Why?

The Bible rings with the incredible news that Jesus died as a substitute for rebels like us. The debt that we owed God, Jesus paid by dying in our place. He took the full force of God's justice on himself, so that forgiveness and pardon might be available to us.

All this is quite undeserved by us. It is a generous gift, from start to finish.

Jesus' resurrection and return

God accepted Jesus' death as payment in full for our sins, and raised him from the dead. The risen Jesus is now what humanity was always meant to be: God's ruler of the world.

As God's ruler, Jesus has also been appointed God's judge of the world. The Bible promises that one day, he will return to call all of us to account for our actions.

In the meantime, Jesus offers us new life, both now and eternally.

Now, our sins can be forgiven through Jesus' death, and we can make a fresh start with God, no longer as rebels but as friends. In this new life, God himself comes to live within us by his Spirit. We can experience the joy of a new relationship with God.

What's more, when we are pardoned through Jesus' death, we can be quite sure that when Jesus does return to judge, we will be acceptable to him. The risen Jesus will give us eternal life, not because we have earned it, but because he has died in our place.

Note: Much of the above text is taken from the Two Ways to Live gospel outline, which is a great tool for reading and sharing the core message of Christianity. You can access it at twowaystolive.com



Watch this video either by clicking the picture (ebook version) or scanning the code.

This short video is taken from a longer sermon by Billy Graham. He discusses the importance of the cross as the way that God has chosen to bring about forgiveness of sin.



If you're using a paper version of this study, you can scan this QR code to get to the video



Implications

1. What are some of the things that you find hard to believe about Jesus' work on the cross?
2. How would you respond if someone asked you the question, 'How can I get to heaven?'

Study 3: Living in Hope

Introduction

There are few topics in the history of Christianity that have been more fraught than the question of the role of good works and virtuous living in the life of someone who trusts in Jesus. The Bible has much to say on this particular topic, too. Some people think that faith in Jesus is simply assent to belief in facts about his life. They might have true *belief* in the facts, but having true *faith* in Christ is about more than assent—it's about wholehearted trust. True faith will always produce a changed life; a way of thinking, speaking and acting that is informed by that faith.

Introduction Question: Do you think a person can believe in Jesus without that faith changing his or her life?

Study

In Romans 4, the apostle Paul paints a picture of what genuine faith looks like. He uses the Old Testament example of Abraham to make his point.



*Read Romans 4:13-25**

Was anything in this passage confusing or difficult to understand?

Note: Righteousness = Being counted as free from guilt or sin.

1. What has God promised to do for Abraham? (See also Genesis 15:1-6)
2. What reasons did Abraham have to doubt God's promises?
3. What did God do in response to Abraham's faith? What does that have to do with us?

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul spends the early chapters speaking of the free salvation offered by Jesus' death. Chapter 6 is framed around a question that people who are naturally inclined towards sin would then ask as a response to hearing about this free gift of grace.



Read Romans 6:1-14

What stood out to you from this passage?

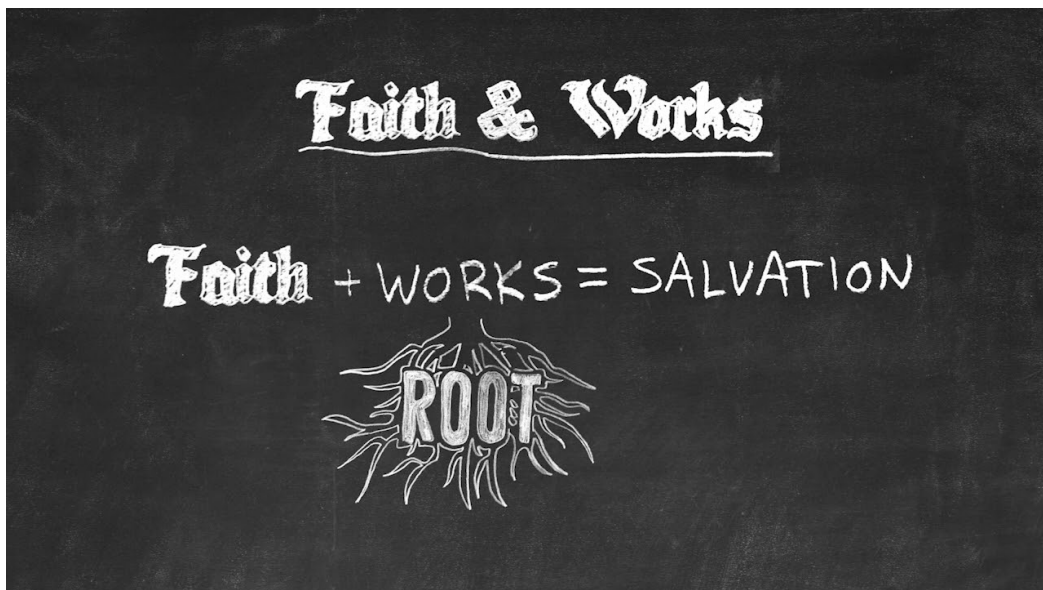
1. What are all the things that have already happened to we who believe in Christ?
2. List the things we are commanded to do in this passage.

3. Is it possible for us to have true faith in Jesus but live without regard for that truth?

Those who trust in Jesus experience what it means to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We are renewed from the inside out and every part of our life is transformed. Godly living and modelling Christ is hard work, but it is not impossible for us to exercise self control, practise forgiveness, live generously etc. With God's help, we can and will grow in these things and much more, if indeed the Spirit of God is at work within us. The one minute video below serves as a really helpful way to remember the relationship between our faith and our actions.



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Implications

1. Think about some of your personal struggles with sin (you don't have to share them now). How does Romans 6 help you think about overcoming them?
2. How has your way of thinking being challenged or refreshed in this study?
3. Is it possible to be 'good enough' for heaven?

Study 4: Assurance and the Family of God

Introduction

For many, religion, spirituality or faith is a profoundly personal thing. It's not something that is spoken about often at dinner parties or in casual conversation. Yet, the Christian faith has always been a corporate as well as individual endeavour. Christians are individual members of a corporate body, the one body of the Lord Jesus himself. But how does this play into our assurance of salvation? Is assurance only an individual thing? In this study we will see that our shared life as the people of God is a source of real comfort and joy and that true faith is far from individualistic.

Introduction Question: Is there anything in your life that you are unmotivated to do? Where might you find the motivation?

Study

The New Testament assumes that believers in Jesus will not be remote from one another. Rather, their corporate life is a given: Christians regularly meet together in order to keep spurring one another on.



Read Ephesians 4:1-16

What stood out to you in this passage?

1. What qualities are we to exhibit in our Christian lives?
2. What particular gifts does God give his people? Where would we see those gifts today?
3. What is the goal of our corporate life? (See especially vv. 13-16)



Read Hebrews 10:19-25

Is there anything in this passage that seems complicated or needs explaining?

1. According to the passage, what does a Christian have? Why does that matter?
2. How can we hold fast to the confession of our hope?
3. How does assurance of salvation link to our corporate gathering?

In both of these passages we see the implications of an individual's genuine faith in Jesus play out in a corporate expression of that faith. They are not saying that going to church makes you a Christian—of course not! But they *are* saying that it's a precarious place for a Christian not to gather regularly with other believers. In fact, assurance of faith and corporate gathering are closely linked.



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Implications

1. How do you feel when you, or others you know, miss church? Why do you feel that way?
2. Why is it a good thing for us to go to church and gather with other believers?
3. 'I'm going to heaven because I go to church'. What is wrong with this phrase? How might you re-word it?
4. How would you respond to someone who says, 'I hope I'm good enough for heaven'?