

## How Good Must I Be To Be Saved Without Obeying The Gospel?

Franklin Church of Christ  
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### Introduction:

If someone asked us, "What must I do to be saved?" we know the answer. **Romans 10:9-10** says we must believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He was resurrected from the dead. **Acts 2:38** says we must repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins. **Colossians 1:23** says we must continue in the faith. In short, we must obey the gospel or we will be dealt retribution (**II Thessalonians 1:8**). Let's ask another question. "How good must I be to be saved without obeying the gospel?" Two different people must ask this important question. The first person I have encountered in numerous studies. They have been shown these verses and yet are absolutely sure that God could never condemn them to hell because of they have done so much good. The second person I have encountered in several churches. These Christians look at folks who have all of these verses in their Bibles and yet have not obeyed them. However, they are devoted and sincere in their religion. They are religiously moral. In short, they have done a lot of good things. So the Christian says he has a hard time saying God would condemn someone who was so good to hell. Both of these people need to answer our question. To do so, we must ask several ancillary questions.

### Discussion:

- I. How good have any of us really been?
  - A. Our main problem is we look at things through human eyes. When we look at good people and become convinced that because they are good, God must save them, we are not using God's eyes but our own. Never forget **Isaiah 55:8-9**. God does not think like us.
  - B. **Romans 3:9-18** provides a clear picture of how God sees all of us, even those who seem so good. None is righteous. No one understands. All have turned aside. **Romans 3:23** drives it home, "All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." The fact is we are dead in trespasses and sins (**Ephesians 2:1**).
- II. How many good works pay for our past sins?
  - A. Many have recognized how bad we have been. And we have decided to change. For a moment, let us consider how we might live in order to be saved without obeying the gospel. How many good works will it take to pay for our sins so that God will no longer view us as dead? Does one good work cancel out a sin? Or maybe two? Perhaps a thousand?
  - B. Jesus' parable in **Luke 17:7-10** answers this question. Good works do not pay for any of our sins. If I change my life and do nothing but good works from now on, never sinning again, the most I can say about myself is that I have finally started doing what I should have done my whole life. I am still an unworthy slave.
- III. At what point does God owe us salvation?
  - A. This question is answered simply, with one word. Never. There is no one alive to whom God owes salvation. That is why the Bible consistently speaks of salvation as mercy and grace.
  - B. **Ephesians 2:4-9** hammers down that salvation is not a matter of God's debt to any man, but a matter of God's grace. There is no one so good that they may boast of their goodness before God and expect salvation. According to **Romans 9:15**, God can have mercy on whomever He desires. Since that is the case, we must now determine upon whom God has said He would bestow mercy. This leads us to our next question.
- IV. Where is salvation to be found?
  - A. Peter and John answered this question in **Acts 4:10-12**. "... by the name of Jesus Christ ... there is salvation in no one else."
  - B. There is no salvation in my name. That is, I cannot come up with a list of good works to which I personally devote myself that will save me. There is no salvation in any other man's name. That is, devoting myself to the teaching of some preacher cannot save me. There is no salvation in the name of some denomination or church. That is, there is no denomination or church to whose

teaching I can devote myself and earn salvation. Salvation is only in Jesus. Clearly, the issue of salvation is not about goodness. Rather, it is about being in Christ.

- C. Who is in Christ? **Romans 6:3-4** says we are baptized into Christ. **Colossians 2:9-15** talks about the salvation in Christ, saying we receive it when we are “buried with Him in baptism” and “raised up with Him through faith”. **Galatians 3:26-27** says we enter Christ through baptism. Who is in Christ? Those who believe and obey the gospel.
  - D. This coincides with Jesus’ words in **Mark 16:16**. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Those who do not believe (obviously they do not obey [**Romans 10:14**]) will be condemned. To claim that some people are saved by being good enough questions Jesus’ honesty. Additionally, it questions whether or not God does what He says. We are forced to ask, “If God saves some of those whom He promised to condemn, how do we know He will not condemn some of those whom He promised to save?”
- V. Is obeying the gospel a good work that earns salvation?
- A. Baptism, obedience to the gospel, does not make God indebted to us. I am often amazed that anyone, at any time, as a part of any discussion would make the statement that getting baptized can in any way be a good work that might obligate God.
  - B. In fact, the way non-Christians and Christians state the issue demonstrates how ridiculous it is to claim such. Have you ever heard that someone was so good and devout and “I just can’t imagine that God would condemn them over such a small thing as baptism”? Baptism really is a small thing. If salvation were an issue of enough good works, then surely such a small thing as omitting baptism would be inconsequential.
  - C. But salvation is not about good works and baptism is not about earning salvation. Baptism is an appeal to God for mercy in the way He has commanded (**Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21**). It is nothing more than following the example of the prodigal son in **Luke 15:17-21**. Had the prodigal not humbly appealed to his father, his sonship would never have been reinstated. However, his appeal did not earn his reinstatement. His father’s mercy gave it to him.
  - D. There is not one individual who deserves salvation because of any work he has ever done. There are only some who have made an appeal to God for mercy and forgiveness in accord with His instruction. They have not become better or more worthy than others. They have simply entered Christ and been given grace.
- VI. If all this is true, can I simply continue sinning and expect salvation?
- A. I have to provide this simple disclaimer as we conclude our study to make sure there are no misunderstandings. Some, learning that salvation is by grace and not about good works, may be tempted to claim, “Well, I have been baptized. Therefore, I am in Christ and now I can sin with impunity and God will still save me.”
  - B. Paul anticipated this mindset and taught about in **Romans 6:1-2**. When we enter Christ, we have died to sin. We are not to continue living in it. Paul continued in **Romans 6:12-18**, describing the kind of life we are now to live in Christ. If we refuse to live that life, God will refuse to extend His mercy.
  - C. When you do live that life, you cannot say you have earned salvation. All you can say is, “I am an unworthy slave and have done only that which I ought to have done” (**Luke 17:10**). However, having grown in Christ, you can rest assured that you will be saved. Not because of your goodness but because of God’s promise. Remember, God cannot lie (**Hebrews 6:18**).

### Conclusion:

We began with a question. “How good must I be to be saved without obeying the gospel?” I hope you have seen the answer. You cannot be that good. Are you in Christ? Have you obeyed His gospel? There is salvation in no other. You cannot trust in your good works. You cannot trust in devotion to a preacher, teacher, church or denomination. You can only trust in God and His word. Will you trust God today and appeal to Him for mercy in the way He has prescribed? Do not submit to what I say. Submit to what God says (**Romans 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; 22:16 I Peter 3:21**).