

# Grading Your Own Paper

## Are you good enough?

How many people quickly answer the question in the affirmative! “Yes, I am good enough to go to heaven.” If they thought otherwise, surely they would be busy trying to improve their life in order to avoid eternal punishment and enjoy eternal bliss. But there is more to this most important matter than first meets the eye.

## What is the standard?

How good do you have to be, after all? If it were left up to us to decide the question, we would be like children in school grading their own papers. We always give ourselves a wide margin for error, and credit ourselves much more than we deserve. When we grade our own papers, everyone passes!

A well-known preacher in Kentucky was walking one morning, as was his custom, to his church study. Deep in thought, his eyes were buried in his Bible. A neighbor lady observing him cried out, "Pastor, you have forgotten your trousers!" He thought he had left home well-dressed. In the same way, our own assessment of ourselves may be woefully flawed.

Perhaps it would be safer to let others be the judge. In that case, most people could confidently say, “Yes, I am going to heaven because others think I am good enough to make it. I try not to hurt anyone. My mother and my friends think highly of me.” So you can present some witnesses who verify that you are, to some degree, better than Osama Bin Laden. Or maybe you trust the estimation of your church or priest. This again resembles the schoolchildren, except this time they have exchanged papers for grading. And when friends exchange papers, everyone passes!

“But,” you say, “nobody’s perfect. If perfection is the standard, then no one can go to heaven. I figure my chances are as good as anyone’s.” But imperfection is a poor comfort! Heaven’s entrance requirements are not less stringent simply because of man’s sin. True, nobody is perfect—but that is the problem, not the solution.

“But God ought to be happy with me. I am sure that my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds!” However, the Word of God never sets up the balance scale as the standard. I find it shocking how many unbiblical theories like this one gain currency in the minds of people. How can a holy God be happy with even one sin?

“But preacher, you speak as if I were some sort of criminal. I am insulted! Who do you think I am?” Friend, the fact is, God is insulted by your sin. Your pride stinks in His nostrils. Imagining that you are good enough to satisfy God is the very depth of badness.

## God’s standard

On the day of judgment, neither you nor others will be the judge. God will be the judge. He has the right to determine the standard. And He has declared what His right and just standard is: PERFECTION. That’s right. Nothing short of perfection satisfies a perfect God. He does not grade on the curve! He does not lower the standard so that more may receive a passing grade. Rather, He assures us that every soul that sins will die (Ezk. 18:20). If you break only one of the Ten Commandments, you are guilty of breaking them all (Jas. 2: 10).

God’s standard is not an unrealistic ideal; it will be maintained. It is not an empty bluff; it will be enforced. He has declared that under no circumstance will any sinner enter into heaven. For example, no liar

will enter (Rev. 21:27; 22:15). Have you ever lied? Have you ever wanted to lie? Have you ever approved of someone else's lie?

### **A true story**

There was once a very religious man who was confident that if anyone would make it to heaven, he would. In his autobiography, he describes himself as *blameless*. All his friends held him in highest esteem. He was so careful! He was as faultless as a man could be—squeaky clean.

But one day God's standard began to smite his conscience as never before. He came to realize that he was not so good after all. He learned that though he had never committed adultery, his secret lustful thoughts were tantamount to adultery. In God's sight, his desire to sin was itself a sin. When he saw this truth, he was so shocked, it was as though he died. All he had lived for was destroyed. He was utterly exposed, helpless and defenseless. He came to consider himself as the worst sinner who ever lived. The man's name was Saul, later called Paul. (See Php. 3:6; Rom. 7:7-9; Mat. 5:28; 1Tim. 1:15.)

Paul saw that, to satisfy God, he had to be perfect. But he could not come close. Could anyone else accomplish it for him? No, all his fellowmen were sinners also. Paul was hopeless. Where could he turn?

### **Christ our righteousness**

God revealed a perfection to Paul. It was a perfection or righteousness accomplished by God's eternal Son who was manifest in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. This God-man lived a perfect life on this sin-cursed earth. He never broke any commandments. He fulfilled every precept of God's law. He met the standard of perfection. He boldly challenged His worst enemies to find one fault in Him, but they could not. Not even the Devil could accuse Him of any wrong. God's standard is so high, that no one other than Jesus Christ could ever achieve it. Concerning Him, God the Father said, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. (He never said that about even an angel!) And concerning the Father, Jesus could honestly say, *I do always those things that please him*. (See Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 7:26; Jn. 8:46; 14:30; Mat. 3:17; 17:5; Jn. 8:29.)

This perfect Person laid down His life. He was crucified on a cross—not because of any sin in Him, but because of our sin. He took our punishment. He suffered the penalty demanded by God from those who break His standard. God the Father was pleased by the sacrifice of the Son, and He raised Him from the dead and set Him on the throne of heaven to be the judge of all men. (See Isa. 53:4-6; 1Cor. 15:3-4; Ac. 17:31.)

### **What must I do to be saved?**

The perfection that God requires is the perfection that God has provided. This perfection is credited to the account of those who depend entirely upon Him. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved* (Ac. 16:31). Whoever believes on Him will not perish but will have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16). As long as you depend on yourself—your good deeds...your good intentions...the good opinion of others about you—you are under God's severe condemnation. But if you humbly take Christ as your perfection, you are acceptable to God. Is Christ your perfection? Is He your only plea? Can you sing the following happy words?

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

When from the dust of death I rise,  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
E'en then this shall be all my plea,  
"Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me."

Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
While through thy blood absolved I am,  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Jesus, be endless praise to thee,  
Whose boundless mercy hath for me—  
For me a full atonement made,  
An everlasting ransom paid.

O let the dead now hear thy voice;  
Now bid thy banished ones rejoice;  
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,  
Jesus, thy blood and righteousness.

(Count Zinzendorf, 1739)

### **A point of confusion**

"Are you telling me that I may live in any kind of sin that pleases me, and still go to heaven, since my personal deeds have nothing to do with my salvation?" No. Those whom God saves are not only credited with perfection in their account before God, they are also given a new heart that turns away from sin and craves after personal holiness, just as certainly as their old heart craved after sin. From the time of first trusting Christ to the time of death, every true Christian is engaged in a process of increasing in godliness and practical obedience. This process will be completed in heaven, where the people of God will be personally sinless.

Therefore, it is true to say, "Good people go to heaven," if we understand that only those who already possess the perfection of Christ positionally in God's sight, are becoming truly good in their practice in this life. Their personal goodness is the effect and evidence of a right standing with God. Yet, it is a myth to say, "Good people go to heaven," if we mean that their goodness is the cause or grounds of it. This myth is assumed by very many people today. Let none be confused about this vital distinction!

### **Conclusion**

The principle of imputed righteousness is the only true gospel of salvation. All false gospels and all false hopes converge on one common ground: they point us to self, rather than to Christ.

Here is the ultimate issue: Whose is the righteousness? By whom is it wrought—by you or by Christ? Let Scripture answer. *Their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD* (Isa. 54:17). *The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness* (Jer. 51:10). One of the names of God is *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS* (Jer. 23:6). God's amazing grace drew the whole plan whereby this alien righteousness is given to those who have none. In ourselves, none of us is good enough for God. Only those in Christ are good enough.

My friend, you cannot afford to be wrong on this crucial and urgent matter. Make Christ's perfection

your plea. Look away from yourself and look to Him. Only His righteousness suffices in God's grading department. If you grade your own paper, don't be surprised if you fail the final exam!