

# GOOD PEOPLE

EVERY now and again as we endeavour to preach the gospel we have to deal with the question of the "Thief on the Cross" — there are always those who want to be saved like the thief. Likewise we are sometimes perplexed by those who point out to us the occasionally really good person, much like God asked Satan to consider His good servant Job. The public at large find it reasonable to believe that patently evil persons need Christ but find it much more difficult to accept that the genuinely good people need to be saved. I am sure that by the very law of averages there must be a small percentage (a very small percentage) of the world's population inherently good, if not inherently good then good by any standard — nature's own gentle-people. We all know, and or have known, a few who could come into this category. Their exemplary life and generosity of spirit may well eclipse some of the finest of church members. The comparison might even be embarrassing. Such good people are to be found in the world and in the denominational bodies as well. What does the New Testament say on the matter?

Jesus encountered some such individuals. In Matt. 8 Jesus marvelled at the Roman Centurion (not Cornelius) and said that He had not seen such faith, not even amongst the Jews (chosen people of God). In fact when Jesus marvelled at His own people it was at their unbelief (Mark 6:6). In Mark 10:17 Jesus encountered a really good man who had zealously kept God's laws from his youth upwards and for this, we are told, Jesus looked at him and loved him. This young man had come running to Jesus and kneeled before Him and had asked Him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life." A good question from a very good man. The first thing Jesus did, we may notice, before He dealt with the question was to deal with the matter of 'good people'. Jesus said unto him, "Why callest me good? there is none good but one, that is God." Thus in our discussion of 'good people' we have discovered at once a very important lesson from the lips of our Lord Himself, that there is no such thing. God alone is good. (When we remember that Jesus refused to be called 'good' we must be surprised that men allow others to address them as 'Reverend'.) Good as the young man was Jesus said that he lacked one thing — and that one thing certainly put to the test the enduring goodness of the young man. Good men and women will always lack one thing, or another. Certainly all good men lack one thing if they have not obeyed the gospel — this is illustrated very clearly for us in the case of Cornelius.

Of all the good people we know could any compare with Cornelius? He was not a Jew (that is, from amongst the chosen of God) nor was he from some religious establishment. He was what was usually regarded as a 'heathen man' from Italy and his occupation was of all things — a soldier. One wonders how he could have retained personal integrity in the army. He was more than a soldier — he was an officer in charge of probably a hundred men. Here was a man who was pious, devout, who feared and respected God, who was moral, kind, honest, upright, benevolent, generous, a man of prayer and a man of good works. His good works, we are told, came up before God as a memorial — imagine that. Most ordinary folks would say that such a man had no need of repentance or reformation — that in fact Cornelius was better than most followers of Christ. Yet God sent an angel to him to tell him to send for a preacher of the gospel. It is perhaps ironical that the preacher (apostle Peter) had to be given a vision from God to persuade him to go and preach to Cornelius. And so, good and all as Cornelius was, he had not heard or obeyed the gospel of Christ — he had not entered the Kingdom of God in the way prescribed by Christ. This incident teaches us several very vital lessons not least of which is the fact that it is not enough to be a good man, or an exceedingly good man — one must come to the feet of Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord — one must hear the gospel and obey the gospel — one must be born again of water and the Spirit. Surely the case of Cornelius is the quite definitive one, when dealing with the matter of 'good people.'

If a 'good character' or a 'charitable lifestyle' was a passport to heaven then perhaps the following assumptions might be correct:-

- 1 **It was unnecessary for Christ to have come into the world.** But Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:17)
- 2 **We could be saved apart from Christ.** But without Christ we can do nothing Jesus said, "I am the vine ye are the branches, he that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)
- 3 **We could be saved apart from His name.** "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)
- 4 **We could be saved apart from the blood of Christ.** But we have redemption through Christ's blood. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7)
- 5 **We could be saved apart from Christ's death.** But Christ died precisely for our sins.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." (1st Cor. 15:3)

- 6 **We could be justified without the resurrection of Jesus.** But Christ was raised for our justification. "... who was delivered for our offences and was raised for our justification." (Rom. 4:25)
- 7 **We could please God without faith.** "But without faith it is impossible to please Him. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (Heb 11:6)
- 8 **We could be saved yet ignore God's word.** "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)
- 9 **We could enter eternal life without any rebirth.** "Jesus answered, Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God."
- 10 **We could be saved without remission of sins.** "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

These are but a few random implications of the theory that the extremely good people in this world place themselves outwith and above the New Testament scriptures. Many more will occur to readers. Christ nor the apostles, although they encountered as many good people as we do, drew no distinction between the sons of men but enclosed them altogether in the statement that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and that there are none righteous no, not one. The gospel is God's power unto the salvation of everyone, with no exclusions mentioned, and Peter said, (as quoted above) "Repent and be baptised every one of you, (or all of you)". There is none good but one, that is God.

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