

## **Bible Salvation or Religion**

I would like to ask you a question that can determine your eternal destiny. If you were to die, do you have that blessed assurance that you would go to heaven? Your answer to this question will reveal if you have Bible salvation or just religion. If you are among the majority, you would probably answer this question with a “Yes!”. If I were to then ask you how you knew you were going to heaven and you replied with, “I am a particular religious denomination. I am a member of a certain church; or I am doing the best I can”, then it is definite you do not have Bible salvation. You are merely relying on yourself and your own good works. You are planning on going to heaven without the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what the Word of God has to say about those who are trying to enter heaven without Christ: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”* (John 10:1)

Today’s society teaches that love and good works allows a person to gain entrance into heaven. Many people believe religion and salvation are the same and are taught that baptism, good works, sacraments, confirmation, church membership, and similar traditions are the qualifications for heaven. Thus, most people are relying on some form of religion to get them to heaven. The sad news is that religion saves no one and actually leads one straight to hell.

In Romans 10:3 we have the Biblical definition of religion and the devastating result. *“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”* We see that religion has nothing to do with God or salvation. It is nothing more than a system of self reform (do’s and don’ts), based on doing the best you can and promoting the false gospel of good works. The Bible has a strong warning for those that promote any false gospel. *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel*

*unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8-9)*

Reform, brought on by religion, is not regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration simply means to be born again; to be reborn; to have a new birth; to be born of God; to be transformed. The moment one is born again, regeneration takes place. The act of regeneration is a miracle of God. One now becomes a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). Titus 3:5 tells us that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”* . Thus, regeneration is not by our own merits or acts of reform.

Organized religion teaches man to go about establishing his own righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness of God. The Word of God has a lot to say about our righteousness.

*“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (Isaiah 64:6 )*

The reason why one goes to hell is not the fact that he is a sinner or has done some terrible thing. *“For all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God.”* One goes to hell because he believes not on the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“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 3:18)*

*“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar;*

*because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:10 –13)*

The following three individuals in God’s Word were trying to get to heaven by doing the best they could: Cain, Rabbi Nicodemus, and Cornelius. Although all three were very sincere, they were relying on their religion and good works to get them into heaven.

*“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” (Genesis 4:3-7)*

Cain, the first born of Adam and the first person born with a sin nature (because of Adam’s sin, man now has a sin nature), is the first example of a religious but lost man. Scripture tells us that Cain *“was a tiller of the ground.”* (Genesis 4:2). Today, we would refer to him as a farmer. In order to be successful at farming, one has to be dedicated and willing to work long, hard hours. Thus, we learn from the beginning that Cain had a strong work ethic and was not afraid of hard labor.

Cain’s younger brother Abel, also born with a sin nature, *“was a keeper of sheep,”* (Genesis 4:2). Today, we would refer to him as a shepherd. In order to be a successful shepherd, one had to be constantly watching the sheep to prevent harm from

befalling on them. The shepherd had to be willing to put his life in harm's way in order to protect the sheep. Thus, we learn from the beginning that Abel was a man of great courage and not afraid of the dangers of his job.

From the time they were old enough to understand, Adam and Eve taught their children that they must present offerings to the Lord. While both men did just this, Abel did it the Bible way and Cain did it religion's way.

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While both men are similar in the fact that they shared the same parents, same upbringing and same strong work ethics, their similarities end there. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel believed God's promise of a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). Even though he could boast in the fact that he was a courageous man, he knew that he was still in dire need of a Saviour. He knew he could not get to heaven of his own merit. Cain, however, refused to believe God. Cain's mind, blinded by the god of this world, was determined to come to God on his own terms, not on God's terms. He went about trying to establish his own righteousness, rather than submitting unto the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3 reveals to us the danger of *“being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness,”*.

By offering to God the fruit of a cursed earth, an offering of his own works, a bloodless sacrifice, Cain tried to pay for his

own sins by his own efforts, which is unacceptable to God.

Cain, in his blasphemous attempt to establish his own righteousness before a Holy God, was marring the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cain was well aware of God's promise of a Redeemer and that a blood sacrifice was required, for "*without shedding of blood is no remission*". The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were a picture that pointed to Christ, God's true Passover Lamb, who went to Calvary's Cross and paid that sin-debt that only Jesus could pay. The following verses clearly show us that only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is acceptable.

*"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God:"* (Romans 3:25). *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (1 John 4:10). *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"* (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Cain was so blinded by his religion that he refused to listen to God and totally ignored God's gracious warning in Genesis 4:5-7. Scripture tells us the following about Cain: *"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."* (1 John 3:12)

Thus, we see that good works and religion do not save! Religion is one method that Satan uses to blind the minds of them that believe not the glorious gospel of Christ. The Bible plainly states what the glorious gospel of Christ is in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: *"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if*

*ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”.*

Because religion teaches man to go about establishing his own righteousness, which the Bible states is as filthy rags, man does not see his need for a Saviour. Fooled by religion, man does not see himself as a lost sinner on his way to hell. The Bible clearly states “...*There is none righteous, no, not one:*” (Romans 3:10); and “...*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ;*” (Romans 3:23).

It is sad that, because of Cain’s self-righteousness, pride and arrogance, he refused to accept God’s plan of salvation. Cain is without excuse for he knew God’s plan of salvation. He knew that God had promised a Redeemer and God Himself was that Redeemer. “*And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.*” (Psalm 78:35 ). “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” (John 1:1). “*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*” (1 Timothy 3:16)

All Cain had to do was place his faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Cain has been in hell all these many years and will be spending all eternity in the Lake of Fire. He knows better now.

As we continue our study of the Word of God, we are introduced to Rabbi Nicodemus. In John chapter 3 we are told that he was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews and a master of Israel. The Pharisees were known for their religious zeal in keeping the law, and their strict orthodox view pertaining to the traditions of their forefathers. Nicodemus no doubt met the qualifications that were required for this prestigious position. However,

Nicodemus was just as lost as a poor drunkard.

After seeing and hearing the power and wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ as he performed miracles, Nicodemus realized that there was something missing in his life. He was moved and felt a thirst and a hunger in his soul that Judaism could not satisfy. In search of the answer, he came to Jesus by night.

It was obvious by Jesus' response to Rabbi Nicodemus that his religion, good living, status in the Jewish community, and even his knowledge of the Scriptures was no substitute for salvation. Jesus' response was "*..Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*" (John 3:3,7)

Nicodemus took the time to carefully listen to Jesus as He preached to him about the new birth. He allowed the Word of God to minister to his receptive heart and believed on the Son of God with his whole heart. Because Nicodemus was willing to look beyond the limits of his religious bias and let God's Word have free reign in his heart, he understood what it meant to be born again. Nicodemus believed John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

Lastly, the third person we mention is found in Acts 10, Cornelius the Roman centurion. Scripture tells us that he was "*A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*" (Acts 10:2). Cornelius also had a good report among the Jews and those who knew him. There is no doubt he was a very moral, religious man, trying to do the best he could. However, Cornelius was lost and in need of a Saviour. No matter how devout he was to his religion, without being born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. One might ask the question, "Do you mean to say that this religious man, devout in his religion, is lost and on his way to hell?" The Bible makes it

very clear in Romans 6:23. Cornelius' good works, kindness, status in the community, and religious zeal could not atone for his sins: *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Cornelius had to be born again the Bible way, according to the Word of God. The following verses indicate that no matter how hard he tried, he could not attain salvation through his own merit: *"And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."* (Acts 11:13-14)

Please take the time to read the full account in Acts 10 of this religious man who heard the Word of God and then believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and was saved.

My dear friend, religion cannot save you and your good works cannot atone for your sins. The clear difference between religion and Bible salvation is that religion has no Saviour. Only by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary's Cross can one be born again. If you have never trusted Christ as your own personal Savior, do not put it off any longer.

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"* (John 1:12)

*"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

*"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6)

*"...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7)