

More Than Just Being Good

Joe Slater

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius . . . a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2, NKJV).

If you aren't being good, repent — quickly! And bring forth the fruit of repentance by mending your ways. God wants you to be good. Of that there is no doubt.

But is “being good” all God requires? If ever there was a “good” man, Cornelius certainly was. As to “goodness,” few, if any, of us could hold a candle to him. He was “devout” (i.e. religious) man And he directed his devotion toward the right object: he “feared God” (i.e. he held God in reverence). Not only that, but he led his household in that same worshipful devotion. Then our text tells us he “gave alms generously to the people.” While Cornelius was a Gentile, his charity was directed toward Jews (“the people” is used in contrast to the Gentiles). Finally, Cornelius “prayed to God always.”

What a good man! God Himself took note of him: “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). So Cornelius must have been saved, right? No, that would be wrong! God's holy angel told him to “send men to Joppa , and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:13-14). Good as he was, Cornelius was lost! Unlike so many today, however, Cornelius wasn't trusting in his own goodness. When Peter taught him the gospel, he believed and obeyed (Acts 10:44-48).

Jesus taught that many sincere, “good,” religious people will be lost on Judgment Day. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then will declare to them, ‘I never knew you: depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Yes, doing His will includes being “good”; but goodness won't cleanse you from sin. Only Jesus' blood can do that when you, like Cornelius, believe and obey the gospel, and then “walk in the light” with Jesus (1 John 1:7).

Firm In The Storm

“For we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end” (Hebrews 3:14).

Red Rocks is a beautiful natural open-air amphitheater near Morrison, Colorado, just a short drive from Denver. Huge peaks of red and mostly barren rocks surround the stadium and soar high above it. Hundreds of famous bands and singers have performed there.

Every performance finds nearly ten thousand people screaming and clapping their approval of the artists. However, one performance is far above the rest. High above the amphitheater, clinging precariously to the side of a rocky peak, a small tree hangs on. It has withstood howling winds, blizzards, and torrents of rain. Its roots must go deep into the rock to give it such tenacity. Yet few notice it or think anything about it.

Followers of Christ usually get no attention when they remain true to God in our culture. No one sees the struggles inside us as we overcome Satan and his darts. Not many understand the despair and disappointment we feel when our efforts to lead others to Christ seem to fail. Nobody knows our discouragement and heartache when our loved ones turn away from God.

Jesus knows and understands. Sometimes we forget that we don't have a high priest who “cannot be touched with the feeling or our infirmities,” but one that has been in all points tempted like we are (Hebrews 4:15). The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which you showed toward his name in that you ministered unto the saints, and still do minister" (6:10).

Christian, hang in there, just like that little tree. Keep on believing and trusting God's promises, just like Jesus did, even when it meant His cruel death for you. God remembers and will reward you.

--Donna Wittlif (Denver, CO)

When The Lights Go Down

Recently, my family returned from our first ever trip to Nevada. There was no shortage of things to see or do. Of the many things we experienced, the most spectacular was the night time view of the Las Vegas strip. The colorful lights, the lucid scenery, and the brilliant flashing signs brought joy and excitement. I've never seen anything else that compares.

The remarkable manmade scenery only extends for only a short distance. Just blocks away, almost within sight of the lights, one finds the true appearance of the land. The surrounding area is a desert, barren and mostly devoid of color and life. The lights create a false image of reality. Remove the manmade and the desert will eventually reclaim that which is rightfully hers.

In a similar way, sin presents itself with a facade that often appears bright, colorful, or even exciting. It turns white to black and black to white. Yet, when one strips away the "bells and whistles," its true appearance is shocking and ugly. In order to avoid being deceived, one must be cautious. James writes, *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him"* (James 1:12).

--Kenny Westmorland (Celina, TN)

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FIVE LINKS OF FELLOWSHIP

Gathered together (Acts 20:8)

Knit together (Colossians 2:2)

Perfectly joined together (1 Corinthians 1:10)]

Striving together (Philippians 1:27)

Caught up together (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

--via Campbellsville, KY