

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

AUGUST 14 - 18, 2023



MONDAY

Read [Romans 3:21-26](#); [Romans 1:21-25, 28-32](#); [1 John 5:11-13](#)

How can God send good people (those “kind, moral and generous; faithful Jews, Muslims, Buddhists …”) to hell, where they’ll face eternal damnation and torment?

This week we examine some leading issues which unsettle believers. Today’s featured question tops the list for many Christians and unbelievers alike.

First, some believers might challenge the question’s first foundation: other than Christ, there have never been any “good people.” Jesus Himself debunked the “good people” notion when He was called “*Good Teacher*.” “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone*” (Mark 10:17-18). The question itself assumes a human standard for “goodness,” a God-diminishing orientation. Such a “horizontal” (people-facing) vs. “vertical” (God-facing) perspective is perilous and foundational to discontent, envy, gossip, etc. The Bible emphatically declares, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

Others might challenge the question’s second foundation: God doesn’t “send people to hell”—unbelievers choose it. Technically, this is untrue—it discounts God’s holiness and sovereignty as Creator. A more biblical perspective: those rejecting God choose to reject heaven. G.K. Chesterton said, “Hell is God’s great compliment to the reality of human freedom

and the dignity of human choice.” Unbelief is more a matter of loving sin and refusing to be accountable before a holy, righteous God than “choosing hell.” Jesus willingly took our deserved judgment; denying Him as Savior, however, makes Him one’s Judge.

Finally, today’s question presumes that hell is an endless, post-grave damnation and suffering for unbelieving humans. This traditional church view *may* be true—it is one interpretation, presuming the soul’s innately eternal nature, a view that is not explicit biblically. The theory of the human soul’s eternity originated with Socrates, sponsored into Christianity by Augustine and others with Greek philosophy heritage (Britannica). The Bible indicates, however, that eternal life is gifted in Christ: “[One] who believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36).

How can we best address such challenging, complex questions today? As “Bereans,” commended for “[receiving teaching openly], examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:10-11). Prayerfully ask for God’s help with these difficult issues.

QUESTIONS

Why does today’s devo maintain that there are no “good” people? Does God “send unbelievers to hell”? Do you believe that the human soul, apart from Christ, is immortal?

PRAYERS

For Three Angels Haiti

Pray for baby Betsaida, one of the Angel House orphans with serious medical needs. Betsaida’s condition will require surgery in a US care facility and a lengthy recovery. Some related funds have been raised, but more will be needed for the surgery, travel, housing, and post-op recovery.

TUESDAY

Read **Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 4:7-8**

Can a believer “lose his/her salvation”?

This question’s implications are theological, yet practical for believers aware of our continuing inclination toward sin and worried accordingly about eternal security. Denominations embracing Covenant theology, typically self-identifying as Reformed, generally fall into the “Calvinist” (after 16th century reformer and theologian, John Calvin) side of this issue within Christendom. Glenkirk and ECO churches are Reformed, the “C” in ECO standing for “Covenant.” Calvinism focuses upon God’s sovereignty and holiness, de-emphasizing humankind’s free will. For Calvinists, the answer to today’s question is “No—anyone truly following Christ cannot lose their salvation. Once saved, always saved (a.k.a., the perseverance of the saints).”

Though not literally opposite of Calvinism here, the most common classification for those holding a different view on today’s question are “Arminians” (after 16th/17th century Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius). Arminianism emphasizes human responsibility and free will, thus maintaining that believers can deliberately reject the Holy Spirit’s influence in their lives and thereby “lose their salvation.”

No credible theologian on either side emphasizes that one’s salvation can be “stolen” against the believer’s will (John 10:28). The crux of the issue between Arminians and Calvinists is this: Can a true believer

willingly cast away their salvation? For Calvinists the question is nonsensical—they maintain that no legitimate Christian would ever consider such a thing. Arminians disagree, often pointing to many historical examples which Calvinists dismiss saying, “Obviously, these people were never truly saved in the first place.”

Both sides can build strong, biblical cases for their views while challenging the other’s. Note the first two readings today, both per Paul’s Philippians epistle. The first Scripture reading is a popular Calvinist proof text reinforcing “perseverance of the saints”—“*[God] ... will bring [His good work in you] to completion*” (Philippians 1:6). The second—a leading Arminian proof text—suggests a believer’s active role in “*[working] out your own salvation*” (Philippians 2:12).

The clearest answer to today’s challenging question comes from Jesus Himself: “*Abide in Me*” (John 15:4). If one faithfully walks with Christ—seeking God’s will and ways, repenting and asking for God’s forgiveness upon sinning, loving God and others in Jesus’ name—today’s question becomes irrelevant.

QUESTIONS

Do you believe that there are circumstances in which a true Christ follower can “lose his/her salvation”? Why or why not? How does Jesus’ “*Abide in Me*” (John 15:4) teaching relate to today’s difficult question?

PRAYERS

For Three Angels Haiti

Pray for Steeve, another Angel House orphan whose paperwork has been stalled, leaving him unadopted as a 6-year-old boy (children are harder to place as they get older). Pray that God would raise up Steeve’s “forever family” and clear all administrative hurdles in his adoption process.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Job 2:11-13; 11:1-7; 16:1-3**

How can I sincerely comfort someone who's lost a loved one, particularly if the one who died seemingly didn't follow Christ?

Historically, when another Christian shared the loss of a loved one or friend, I would sometimes ask, "Was he or she a believer?" I don't ask that anymore—not only because the honest response often might be "Apparently not," but also because the question is not comforting. I do far better here when acting biblically, when I "*weep with those who weep*" (Romans 12:15).

Regarding today's question, remember that God alone determines and knows who is saved. Jesus' admonishment, "*Judge not, lest you be judged*" (Matthew 7:1), applies particularly regarding another's salvation. We cannot know if someone—even one whose life appeared dedicated to great wickedness—surrendered to Christ prior to his or her death. Remember that "*God is unwilling that any should perish*" (2 Peter 3:9) and that Jesus Himself assured the repentant thief on the cross—on what amounted to this great sinner's "death bed"—"*Today you will be with Me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43).

The book of Job gives excellent guidance here, particularly in what not to do with another who has experienced great hardship or loss. As addressed above, speculating upon the eternal security of one who

has passed is unhelpful—and “above our pay grade”—regardless of whether they appeared to be saved or not. Several things not to say: “You need to move on”; “Everything happens for a reason”; “God has a plan—they’re in a better place now”; or even “I know how you feel.”

The cruelest thing you could say, much like Job’s “*miserable comforters*” (Job 16:2), is that anyone involved “got what he or she deserved.”

Moreover, people don’t need to be told how to grieve—the observation that “You don’t look like you’re grieving” is unnecessary and sounds critical.

Job’s friends did well when initially “*they sat with him ... seven days ... and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great*” (Job 2:13). A sincere “I am sorry for your loss” and/or “I am here for you” are both comforting and helpful.

QUESTIONS

Why is it wrong to judge another’s salvation? What did Job’s friends do wrong, and do right, in drawing alongside their devastated friend? What are some effective ways to comfort a friend who has experienced loss?

PRAYERS

For Three Angels Haiti

Like many charitable organizations, Three Angels has struggled during the COVID season and its aftermath. Ask God to stir donors and sponsors for one of our 300 Angel Academy students and 14 Angel House orphans. God remains faithful; He is good, all the time!

THURSDAY

Read **Galatians 3:27-28; Romans 16:1-12; Exodus 21:16**

What do I say to others who claim that the Bible is sexist, that Scripture condones slavery?

Bible critics regularly criticize Scripture’s “compliance with practices subjugating women and condoning slavery,” both areas rightly offensive today. These issues deserve continuing attention: “There are today over 27 million people [globally] ... subject to slavery: forced labor, sex trade, ... etc.” (GotQuestions.org) and sexism continues, prominent in many countries while still evidenced in American life.

Remember that the Bible is descriptive—sharing historic details, evidences of humankind’s fallenness, etc. However, not everything in the Bible is prescriptive—commanded, recommended. For example, Samson’s story is rife with womanizing and deceit, behaviors biblically condemned.

Ancient cultures, whether Israel’s or in the Roman Empire, were hyper-patriarchal. Paul wrote guidelines that sound shockingly tone-deaf today: “*The husband is the head of the wife*” (Ephesians 5:23); “*It is shameful for a woman to speak in church*” (1 Corinthians 14:35); “*I do not permit a woman ... to exercise authority over a man*” (1 Timothy 2:12), etc. This same apostle, however, also enabled and honored early Church female leaders—Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis (Romans 16:1-12)—and penned Galatians 3:28.

Slavery, unfortunately, was an “economic given” in ancient cultures. Slaves accounted for 10-20% of the Roman Empire. Slavery circumstances included: guaranteed lifetime employment, debt repayment, an alternative to execution by a conqueror, and the heinous form we generally think of—abduction and forced labor. Regarding this final version, note these biblical warnings: “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone ... in possession of him, shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:16), and “the unholy and profane ... [include] enslavers” (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

Realizing that it is for “freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1), Glenkirk condemns slavery in any form, regardless of when or where. We support mission partners fighting slavery, including ZOE International. We affirm men and women as equals in all walks of life, including ministry—because of Scripture, not despite it. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

QUESTIONS

What forms of slavery prevailed during biblical times? Was the Apostle Paul sexist? How does our freedom in Christ inform our views regarding equality, human dignity and opportunity?

PRAYERS

For Three Angels Haiti

Three Angels Haiti finished the school year strongly with students growing intellectually and spiritually and graduation completed amidst the continuing social strife plaguing Haiti! The ministry has commenced with the buildout for the new eighth grade curriculum that will begin with the new school year in the fall. Pray for God’s related favor and blessing.

FRIDAY

Read [2 Corinthians 5:16-19](#); [Ephesians 4:20-24](#); [Hebrews 2:17-18](#)

Can one who commits suicide or struggles with alcoholism and/or drugs be a Christian?

We are called as witnesses, not self-righteous judges—we cannot judge others’ salvation despite their circumstances and history. Today we consider conditions that some deem incompatible with salvation. It is important to remember that being tempted is not a sin. *“In every respect [Jesus was] tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

We all struggle with pasts—even current, fleeting thoughts and temptations—outside of God’s design. Regarding suicide, though Satan cannot steal a believer’s salvation, he can plague Christians who battle darkness. In momentary weakness, even a committed Christian can “listen to the wrong voice,” that of “*a murderer from the beginning. ... [and] a liar*” (John 8:44).

Even the strongest Christian families are not exempt from suicide tragedy. Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church and wrote the Christian best-seller, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Regardless, Warren’s 27-year-old son—a lifelong, depression-plagued Christian—committed suicide in 2013. “Suicide is a sin. It is not the ‘greatest’ sin—it is no worse than other evils ... and it does not determine a person’s eternal destiny.” (GotQuestions.org)

A believer fighting alcohol or drug addictions may likewise grapple with this continually. “A sober alcoholic [or recovering drug addict] can struggle with the ongoing desire to [abuse], even years after [‘recovery’]. Those desires ... are part of being a fallen creature ... in a fallen world.” (GotQuestions.org)

Sin happens, or not, depending on what one does in response to associated temptations. “Without Christ, we are lost ... We can choose new life in Jesus or the old life of sin. But we cannot have both (Matthew 6:24).” (GotQuestions.org)

We are all “recovering humans,” facing associated frailties and temptations. Every believer hobbles into heaven, getting there by grace. What differentiates a Christian’s life from others’ is the struggle against sin—Christians repent, always eventually returning to God and resuming the fight. Our identity is in Christ, not in dark battles, addictions, or any inclinations toward sin. “We have all been called to holiness. ... The ultimate goal ... is becoming more like Christ in the individual way God has for each person.” (GotQuestions.org)

QUESTIONS

Is suicide a “mortal sin” unforgivable by God? How can a recovering alcoholic or drug addict demonstrate saving faith? What does the following statement mean to you: “What differentiates a Christian’s life from others’ is the struggle against sin.”

PRAYERS

For Three Angels Haiti

Pray that God would settle social unrest in Haiti, raising up godly leaders who will lead the people ably. Ask God to make the way for travel to resume to Haiti—for board members longing to return, short-term mission teams, etc. Ask God to bless this desperately needy country.

Sources

- G.K. Chesterton's quote can be found at <https://bibleportal.com/bible-quote/hell-hell-is-god-s-great-compliment-to-the-reality-of-human-freedom-and-the-dignity-of-human-choice>.
- The Britannica reference is per the following link: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/soul-religion-and-philosophy>.
- GotQuestions.org's quotes are from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-slavery.html>, <https://www.gotquestions.org/suicide-Bible-Christian.html>, <https://www.gotquestions.org/is-being-gay-a-sin.html>, and <https://www.gotquestions.org/Side-A-B-X-Y.html>.



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