

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

If you're a Christian and live a life of sin, do you still go to heaven? Do you have to "do" something or simply "believe" something in order to go to heaven? Is there a difference between entering God's Kingdom and inheriting it? Does "faith" mean more than believe? Is it possible to lose your salvation? Why does God seem to question or threaten our eternal salvation?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 5

5:1-7, in light of the fact that we are now brand new people—who we used to be is not who we are anymore: we're no longer Satan's child but God's, 2:2; 5:1. We've been permanently united with Jesus Christ, 2:5-6, which means that His inheritance becomes our inheritance, 1:11, 18, His Spirit becomes our Spirit, 1:13-14; 2:18, 22; 3:16, His power becomes our power, 1:19; 3:16, 20, His capacity to love and forgive becomes ours, 3:16-19, His Father becomes our Father, 1:2; 4:6; 5:1, His Father's help becomes our help, 2:18; 3:12, and the Father takes up residence in us as He does in His Son, 2:22; 4:6. Finally, Jesus becomes our guide and tutor who shows us how to live the brand new life He's given us, 4:20-21—in light of all this, God calls us to imitate Him and His Son. We are to live the way they do; we are to love and speak the way they do, 5:1-2. Therefore, our speech and behavior must not be wicked in any way. One reason God gives for this is that bad behavior is not fitting for individuals who are God's children, who are saints that have been set apart from the world's darkness and are now called to be holy and sacred, 4:1-3, 17-19; 5:1-4. The other reason God gives is that those who live in sin have no inheritance in God's Kingdom. Instead God's wrath rains down on them as it does on the sons of disobedience, 5:5-6 (2:2).

Since God says that those who live in sin will have no inheritance in His Kingdom but instead get His wrath, some think that God is saying that those who live like this are not really saved and they will ultimately end up in hell. Is this true? Is this what God means in Ephesians 5:5-6 and other passages like it?

Can habitual sinners go to heaven? ABSOLUTELY!! There are several things in Ephesians (and the whole Bible for that matter) which unequivocally argue against the notion that sin, whether one-time or habitual, either sends you to hell or is proof that you're not really saved. There are several issues involved here: The Problem of Sin and Good Works. Do you get to heaven by faith or works? Entering God's Kingdom vs. Inheriting It. Does faith mean more than believe? Does a sinful life prove that you're not saved and on your way to hell? Is it possible to lose your eternal salvation? Why does God seem to question or threaten our eternal salvation? Here's what Ephesians has to say about these issues:

The Problem of Sin and Good Works, is it true that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell? NO. First, in Ephesians 2 God indicts the entire human race. Both Jews and Gentiles (all of humanity) are dead in sin and walking after Satan, 2:1-3. This means that there's no such thing as a "good person." All are dead in sin, 2:1, 5. Therefore, "good behavior" won't get you to heaven because no one is good enough to qualify; we're all sinners. Second, sin is no longer man's problem. Why? Because the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross, He paid for EVERYONE'S sins, for ALL sin for ALL time, 1:7. Therefore, man's problem is no longer sin, it's death! 2:1, 5, and the only way out of this condition is eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, 2:1-9. The truth is that there is no sin, BIG or small, that can either keep you out of heaven or send you to hell because Jesus paid for it ALL.

Do you get to heaven by faith or works? God is crystal clear about this: eternal salvation can NEVER be earned through good works; it is a gift from God which can only be received through faith alone, 2:8-9. You can't even try to work for it because it is a **gift** from God which you can only **receive**. Gifts are not earned, they are simply received. If you have to work for it, it's not a gift. Being good doesn't get you to heaven because heaven is not for sale; it's a gift.

Entering God's Kingdom vs. Inheriting It, entrance into the Kingdom is by faith alone; it can never be earned by good works. That is, the moment you simply believe in Jesus Christ you are made alive together-with, raised up together-with, and seated together-with Him. This means that you are forever and permanently united to Christ, 2:5-6, which means that wherever Jesus is or will be, you are and will be also, including in His Kingdom (see Colossians 3:1-4). So entrance into God's Kingdom is not based on your performance; it is assured to you by simple faith apart from any good works, 2:8-9. However, inheritance in God's Kingdom is not assured to us; this *is* performance based. Your good works or lack thereof will determine your inheritance in God's Kingdom. Christians were made to participate in Christ's inheritance, His rulership over the world, 1:11, 18. This is why He urges us over and over to walk in the good works that He's prepared for us, 2:10, to walk worthy of this calling, 4:1, instead of living in sin with Satan the way we used to, 4:17-19. We're to live like God the Father and God the Son, 5:1-2. If we refuse and instead live in sin, we will get God's wrath **now** and lose our future inheritance in the Kingdom, 5:3-6.

Does faith mean more than believe? Some say that if you "really" believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then your life will show it. Why? Because "faith" in the original Greek means more than "believe," it means not only accepting a set of facts as true but applying them, doing them, living them out. So if you "really" believed in Jesus as your Savior, then your life will show it, i.e., you will live a godly life instead of a sinful life. Therefore, if you live in sin, it proves that you're not really saved, that you never "really" believed in Jesus. Is this true? NO. "Faith" in the original Greek means the same thing it does in English: "believe." Does Ephesians bear this out? Not only does God make it crystal clear that "believe" simply means accepting something as true—no more, no less—He says that faith at the moment of salvation has nothing to do with good works, with doing something, with living out what you just believed, 2:8-9—notice, it says "**have been** saved." Your salvation happens in a millisecond and once it's done, it's a completed act (past tense). Therefore, your good works before, during or after play NO role. Should we live out what we believe? Absolutely! But there's no guarantee that we will. People believe many things that they never do: they believe they should eat fewer sweets, exercise more, be better than they are, etc. But the fact that they believe all these things doesn't guarantee they'll do them. Should God's children live godly lives precisely because they are God's children? Yes, a thousand times, YES! That's what the New Testament epistles are about. It's God telling us to live what we have now believed. He keeps urging us over and over to live like the beloved children of God that we are! 5:1-2.

Does a sinful life prove that you're not really saved and on your way to hell? NO. First, sin cannot send you to hell because Jesus Christ paid for ALL sin, 1:7. Second, as mentioned above, just because you are God's child and have His Spirit beating inside you, and everything else available to you as His child, none of that guarantees that you will live a godly life. This is why God spends so much time urging us not to live in sin, because there's a good possibility that we, as God's children, will, 4:1-6:20. If individuals who believe in Jesus Christ automatically live godly lives, why urge them over and over to live godly lives, why warn them over and over that they'll lose inheritance if they live in sin? Because "children" disobey their parents and need to be instructed and encouraged not to, which is why God urges us to imitate Him and His Son, 5:1-2; He knows what "children" are like. Third, your eternal salvation happens in a millisecond, so the instant you believe in Jesus Christ it's a completed act, 2:8, and NOTHING can undo this, not any sin, not anything because you are permanently united to Christ, 2:5-6.

Is it possible to lose your eternal salvation? NO. Why not? For two reasons, first, everything that people point to as proof that someone is not saved or that they've lost their salvation has to do with sin, i.e., they point to the person's sinful behavior and say, "See, they're not really saved; look how they're living." But the sin problem has been taken care of once and for all by Christ on the Cross, 1:7. Sin is no longer the issue. Second, eternal salvation is a permanent state, a state that cannot be undone, once saved, always saved. Ephesians 1-2 is crystal clear on this. Notice what this says: He chose you, 1:4. He's adopted you as His child, 1:5 (and God's adoption doesn't happen through an agency but through birth). All your sins have been forgiven, 1:7. You have a right to Christ's inheritance, 1:11. God's Holy Spirit has been given you, 1:13-14. God's power works on your behalf, 1:19. You used to be dead in sin following after Satan, 2:1-3. But God loved you greatly, 2:4, and the millisecond you believed in Christ, He made you alive, raised you up, and seated you together-with Jesus Christ, 2:4-9. You used to be separated from God, 2:11-13, but you are now reconciled with Him and have complete access to Him, 2:14-18. You're a member of God's family and the temple where He now dwells through His Spirit which is in you, 2:19-22.

Why does God seem to question or threaten our eternal salvation? There is NO passage in Scripture, NONE, where God threatens or questions our salvation. There are several passages that **sound** like He's questioning our eternal salvation, but He's not. For two simple reasons: when we look at the context of those passages, we see that this is not what God is talking about. Secondly, each one of those passages is addressed to His children, which means that everything He says is said to members of His family not people on probation or a trial-period pending admission into God's family. They ARE part of His family and this is precisely why He says those things to them. That is, they're God's children which is why He calls them to godly behavior, as He does with the Ephesians: God clearly spells out that they are His children, 1:1, 2; 2:19; 3:14; 4:6; 5:1, and then proceeds to urge and warn them not to live like the sinful creatures that they used to be, 4:1-6:20.

What is God saying to you when He says that your salvation is secure, that you will always be His child? It means that no matter how wicked you were or are, He will always be your Father and you will always be His child. It also means that no matter how bad life gets, Pandemic or no Pandemic, He will always be there to guide and protect you.

III. Conclusion

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.