

LESSON 50 - THE VINE

Must You Do Good Deeds To Receive Eternal Life?

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Must you do good deeds to receive eternal life? Every religion except one teaches that what you *do* in life that determines what happens to you when you die. They may disagree about what is “good,” but they virtually all agree it’s what we *do* that determines the outcome. Christianity is different. Our outcomes are not based not on what *we do*—but on what *Christ did*. Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead, and all who put their trust in Him are forgiven and have received eternal life. If we receive this through our faith in Jesus alone—and not at all by our deeds—do deeds still matter? Are bad deeds still prohibited and punished for? Are good deeds required, expected, and rewarded for? This lesson covers: 1) The currently bad condition of the vineyard, 2) Jesus is the only and true Vine that leads to eternal life, 3) All branches connected to The Vine will bear good fruit.

1. The Currently Bad Condition Of The Vineyard. Matthew 3:10 says, *“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”* The bad trees referenced here represent people!!! Many religions teach that people are good if they *do* the right things. God’s Word teaches that humanity’s standard of goodness falls far short of God’s standard for what is good. People typically establish *their own* standards, considering those with similar values and viewpoints good, while those with whom they disagree bad. According to God we’re *all* bad and guilty. No one lives up to His standards. We’re currently under His wrath, we’re just receiving His mercy. Sure, some humans are worse and more guilty than others. Nonetheless, Romans 3:23 says, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* All people are born into sin with a sinful nature, are guilty of having sinned, and still desire to continue to sin. Romans 3:10-12 and 18 says, *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God... there is no one who does good, not even one... There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* Ephesians 2:1-3 says, *“You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”* This is the reality of our bad condition. All of humanity is like a bunch of dead-dying branches in a vineyard. Even if we *were* capable of doing purely motivated good deeds, no amount of future good deeds would erase our past sins, change our sinful nature, or remove our sinful desires.

2. Jesus Is The Only and True Vine That Leads To Eternal Life. In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Jesus also described Himself as a vine, with people as branches, and our good deeds like fruit. John 15:1-2 He said: *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”* We’re engrafted into Jesus, The Vine, by trusting

in Him. Faith in Him is the only way to cancel our past sin debt against God, get a new spirit nature, and new godly desires. In John 3 Jesus called this being “born again.” God puts us “in” Jesus spiritually. Simultaneously, He’s put “in” us spiritually, through the Holy Spirit of God who is sent to live inside of us forever. In John 15:4-5 Jesus says, *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* Apart from Jesus we can’t bear any good fruit at all and often even our outwardly good deeds are still bad. This is because our “good” deeds are often tainted by inwardly sinful motivations and a heart that’s still in rebellion to God, or it bolsters self-righteousness and it’s done for personal glory instead of God’s. And even if our deeds were good, they still wouldn’t have any eternal significance if we don’t belong to Jesus. The memory of them will perish along with us. In John 15:6 Jesus declares the outcome of those who put their trust in their own deeds apart from Him, *“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”* If we don’t belong to Him we won’t bear good fruit and we’ll be thrown into the eternal furnace (Hell). So no branch (person) can bear fruit (good deeds) by themselves; they must remain in The Vine (Jesus). Jesus said in Matthew 7:17-18, *“Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”* We need to first *become* a good tree to bear good fruit. This happens when we put our trust in the only True Vine and give our lives to Him, thus becoming a “good tree” - a fruit-bearing branch. Our deeds don’t determine our eternal fate—our right position in Jesus does.

3. All Branches Connected To The Vine Will Bear Good Fruit. Everyone who belongs to Jesus *will* bear good fruit, and God prunes all in Him so that they’re even more fruitful. John 14:2 Jesus said, *“He [God] cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.”* This does not mean you can be saved and be cut off because you didn’t do enough good. Salvation is a gift of God’s grace alone by our faith alone in Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* It means that we must be connected to Jesus through faith, and the evidence of genuine faith will be a life of repentance, godliness, and good deeds. God leads and transforms His children into being righteous (1 John 3:1-10). An unrepentant life of bad deeds is evidence of not yet being connected to The Vine. Do not believe you can both persist in sin and belong to Jesus. We must choose! Matthew 3:8 says, *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”* Matthew 7:19 warns, *“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”* Also our good deeds do not help contribute, at all, to our salvation. Good deeds are evidence of having Jesus in you, you being in Him, and you being His disciple. In John 15:5, 7, and 8, Jesus says, *“IF you remain in me and I in you, you WILL bear much fruit... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, SHOWING yourselves to be my disciples.”* As children of God it’s our obligation—and privilege—to do good works that glorify our Father in Heaven. All our good deeds in Christ glorify God and are part of our eternal testimony earning us treasures in Heaven. They’re part of the way that we glorified God with our lives.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, secure my position in Jesus, my Savior. I believe I can do no good apart from Him. Prune me, empower me, and bear much fruit through me, for Your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.