

Articles and Sermons :: You Can't Work To Heaven by B.E. Yoo

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by B.E. Yoo

People generally think that if they are good during their lives, they will go to a good place when they die. Those who believe in Jesus also think that if they continue in their faith, they will go to heaven. When they die, a pastor will conduct a funeral service and pray for them, and a cross will be erected at the head of their graves. It is possible, however, that the spirit of such a person will not be able to go to heaven.

Even if a person is enrolled as a member of a church, even if he serves faithfully in his church and donates a lot of money to it, it is still possible that his spirit will go to hell after he dies. Even if he has evangelized with great enthusiasm in order to guide the spirits of others to heaven, he will not be able to go himself if he is not born again. An individual may have worked diligently as an elder, a deacon, or even a pastor, but those duties will not send his spirit to heaven. Of course, it goes without saying that the spirits of people who do not believe in Jesus will not be able to go to heaven; but it is really appalling to think that the spirits of all the people who have been misinformed in their belief will also end up in hell.

This point is made very clear through the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler, or leader, of the Jews. One evening Nicodemus came to look for Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."

To this Jesus answered, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Not knowing what it meant to be born again, Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus answered, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (See John 3:2-5).

Even today, about two thousand years after Jesus spoke these words, there are many people who ignore the fact that they need to be born again in order to get to heaven, and try to get there on the basis of their own efforts instead. There are some diligent people who continually make an effort to get to heaven even while one of the hymns they sing so joyfully contains the line, "Working will not save me."¹

I once heard the following story about D.L. Moody.² One day, as Moody was traveling by train, he happened to be riding in the same car as a gangster. When the gangster became aware that he was traveling with this famous revivalist preacher, he approached him and asked, "Mr. Moody, how many months would it take for a gangster like myself to go to heaven?"

Moody replied, "Five minutes would do."

The gangster was astonished to hear that within just five minutes he could have the faith needed to go to heaven.

This incident developed into an opportunity for him to hear the gospel and later he was born again.