

Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (12)
Why We Cannot Have Eternal Life simply by Doing Good Deeds?
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

In the past messages we have looked at various aspects of the foretaste of eternal life in the present age:

- The link between eternal life in the present age and eternal life in the kingdom of God in the future.
- Eternal life is to know the only true God Yahweh and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Eternal life in the present age is a life of freedom, a life of righteousness, a life of peace, a life of joy, and rivers of living water flowing from the innermost being.

Today we are going to study another aspect of the Kingdom of God and eternal life. First let me tell you the true story of a middle aged woman; we will just call her Auntie C. She did not believe in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but followed Chinese traditions in worshipping different deities and family ancestors. Auntie was a very moral person, she took very good care of her husband and her children, she had three girls and one boy; all the family members loved one another deeply.

Her eldest daughter went to university and became a Christian through the help of her friends. After graduation she became a high school teacher. She was hoping that her parents and younger siblings would also come to know Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ. She prayed for them and would often explain to them the salvation plan of Yahweh God, but they didn't believe.

One day Auntie C didn't feel well, so she went to see a doctor. The doctor discovered that Auntie had cancer. The whole family was alarmed and worried; they brought Auntie to see different doctors and specialists. But her cancer was getting worse and worse, and the doctors said her cancer had developed to the final stage, and there was no more hope. The whole family, except the eldest daughter, all sought help from the deities and their deceased ancestors.

But the eldest daughter quietly prayed to Yahweh God, asking God to help her mother come to know Him and the Lord Jesus Christ. She encouraged her mother to commit her whole life to Yahweh God and so be granted eternal life in the kingdom of God. Auntie C didn't say a word, but started to wonder whether Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ are real or not.

One night she had a dream, and in her dream she saw a man dressed in white. She didn't see his face but she could sense the love and kindness in this man. She knew right away that he was the Lord Jesus Christ, and she sensed that the Lord Jesus loved her deeply. It seemed as if she had turned back to become a little girl. Then she broke down and cried. The Lord Jesus took her hand and said to her, "Daughter, don't cry, you shall pack your belongings, for I am going to bring you back home!"

Then Auntie C woke up and she cried loudly, not because she was sad or afraid of death; she cried because she was so happy that she had seen the Lord Jesus in the dream. She understood the meaning of the Lord's statement: he was telling her to repent of her sins and commit her life totally to Yahweh God in baptism, and then the Lord would bring her back home in the kingdom of God.

She immediately repented of her sins, and later got baptized. She had no more doubts. She also told her husband and her children to commit their lives to Yahweh God and get baptized. Shortly after her baptism she died peacefully. She had no fear or sadness, for she knew that she was going back home in heaven. She told her family to also "pack their belongings", and that she would go first. She will be waiting for them in the kingdom of God. Sometime later her whole family including her husband and her children all one by one repented and committed their lives to Yahweh God in baptism.

This is a true story. Auntie C's eldest daughter was in my Bible study group, that's why I know the whole story so well. After you hear this story, you may wonder why such a moral person like Auntie C still need to repent and get baptized, and only then can she have eternal life in the kingdom of God? What sins had she committed?

Indeed a lot of people say that they didn't commit crimes, they didn't kill anyone, they didn't steal, they didn't rob, they didn't commit adultery. In fact they have lived a very moral life, therefore they don't need to repent, they don't need to commit their lives to Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ, they only need to continue to live a moral life! In fact I was one of those who thought in this way.

Today we are going to look into this question. I will not quote the passage Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (NASB) Because many years ago when someone preached the gospel to me, she quoted this passage to me. I didn't understand it but I didn't want

to argue with her, so I just kept quiet. That's why today I don't want to simply quote that passage, but I will use simple language to explain to you why we cannot be saved and have eternal life simply by doing good deeds.

1. All the people on earth have committed sin

First of all, even if you haven't committed serious crimes such as robbery or killing people, but since childhood we all have committed sins such as lying – who has never lied before? Since 4 or 5 years old children know how to lie and start lying. By the time we grow up we all have lied many times!

How many times have you deliberately said very sharp and hurtful words to hurt people? We envy those who are better than us, but we look down on those who are worse than us; and we use our tongues to hurt them, we talk down people we don't like, we slander people we don't agree with etc. Not to mention we might even have some ugly and depraved thoughts in our hearts.

Maybe you think that these are just very minor things, "I didn't really kill people or commit crimes, so it doesn't matter that much!" Brothers and sisters and friends, Yahweh God is holy and righteous, and according to His word these things are very serious!

^{ESV} **Galatians 5:19 – 21** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19 – 21 ESV)

This passage clearly points out that people who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Maybe you did not commit all of these sins, but who has never committed some of these sins? Have you never been angry with someone? Have you never been jealous of someone? The Bible says that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!

Actually we all have committed 2 very serious sins:

- The first is that we only live for ourselves; all the things we do are for our own benefit or the benefit of someone we love;
- The second is that we don't want to submit to the will of God, we only want to live according to our own will.

Many sins and crimes originate from these two sins, therefore we all have to repent. True repentance in the Bible is more than just repenting of the sins we have committed. True repentance is:

- To change the selfish attitude into a self-giving and self sacrificial attitude;
- To change the rebellious attitude against Yahweh God into total submission and obedience to His authority.

That's the first point, that all the people on earth have committed sins.

2. The good deeds we have done are not sufficient to pay off our debts

Secondly, the Bible compares sin to debt. Every time we commit a sin, we add one more debt to our pile of debts. All the sins we have committed in our lives have been piled up very high; this pile of debts is too big, we have no means to pay back. Even if we do some good deeds occasionally, they are not sufficient to pay off this debt.

^{NAU} **Matthew 18:23 – 27** For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell *to the ground* and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷ "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. (Mat 18:23-27 NAU)

Here in this passage the Lord Jesus compares sins to a debt that the slave owed to the king. He owed the king ten thousand (10,000) talents. In the time of the Lord Jesus, a laborer's wage for one day of work was one denarius. According to a Greek English dictionary, one talent is equivalent to 6,000 denarii, so 10,000 talents = 60,000,000 denarii. That means the slave has to work 60,000,000 (60 million) days to pay off the debt! 60 million days is equal to 164 thousand years! That means that the slave would never be able to pay off the debt, the debt is too big. There is only one way out for him, and that is that the king forgives his debt.

The Lord Jesus uses this parable to tell us of the seriousness of our sins: our so-called good deeds are never sufficient to pay off the debt, which means that our sins will never be cleansed. Similar to the slave in this parable, there is only one way out for us, that is for Yahweh God to

forgive our sins. Actually Yahweh God has provided a way out for us: His Son the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, his precious blood cleansing us of all our sins.

So the second reason why we cannot have eternal life simply by doing good deeds is that the good deeds we do are not sufficient to pay off our sins unless Yahweh God forgives our sins.

3. Our so-called good deeds are limited to those we love

The third point is that when we still have sins in our lives, even if we try to do some good deeds, our so-called good deeds are limited to those we love.

^{NIV} **Luke 10:25 – 28** On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”²⁷ He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-28 NIV)

This passage is very deep. Here I will just explain the meaning of this passage in the simplest way. If you want a full exposition of this passage, you can go to the CDC church website to read the book “Totally Committed” written by Pastor Eric Chang.

Here the Lord Jesus says that if we want to have eternal life we have to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and we have to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We think that doing good deeds are things like giving some money to the poor, encouraging the suffering, and helping those in need etc. That is the thinking of most people in the world. The Bible also teaches us to do good deeds, but the standard of the Bible is entirely different from our human standard. According to the Bible, doing good deeds is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Everyone in the world loves himself, we all love ourselves wholeheartedly. The Bible says that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

We can love our neighbor a little bit, but we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves. We can love our own children wholeheartedly, we are also willing to take care of our neighbors’ children, but we are not willing to love the neighbors’ children as ourselves. Many parents are willing to die for their own children, but who is willing to die for the children of other people? If our neighbor is someone we dislike, how can we love our neighbor as ourselves?

The people in the world can never love their neighbors as themselves, but according to the Lord Jesus one of the two requirements for eternal life is to love your neighbor as yourself. If we cannot obey this commandment, we would not have eternal life. That is the third reason why we cannot have eternal life simply by doing good deeds.

Christians are supposed to be able to do all things by the grace of Yahweh God

Some people may ask: “Does it mean that Christians are able to love their neighbors as themselves?” Yes, a true Christian is able to love his neighbor as himself!

While we are still living in sin, we are controlled by the power of sin, and we are always concerned for our own benefit first. Then definitely we cannot love our neighbors as ourselves. But after our sins have been forgiven and cleansed, we will be given the power to overcome the power of sin, and we will be able to do things that the people in the world cannot do.

^{NAU} **Philippians 4:13** I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phi 4:13 NAU)

Before I knew Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ, when I saw people whose faces were not likable, or whose behavior I didn't like, then I couldn't love them. Even though I tried to do some good deeds, I only cared for those I liked, especially I cared for my own benefit first. That means I would only do good deeds if it didn't affect my own benefit or my own interests. At that time I thought I was a very good person. Only after Yahweh God opened my eyes, then I was able to see my sins. I asked God to forgive my sins and help me to love others as myself. Our Father in heaven has changed me, now I can love my neighbor as myself, and I can even do good to those who hate me and oppose me. I pray for them. Maybe my enemies still hate me, that part I can't do anything about, but I don't hate them anymore, I can love them, I am no longer controlled by the power of sin.

A true Christian can overcome sin and can love the neighbor as himself.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything. Today we looked at a very important question: Why is it that we cannot have eternal life simply by doing good deeds? Why do many moral people still need to repent of their sins, and commit their lives to Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism? We saw that it is because:

Why We Cannot Have Eternal Life simply by Doing Good Deeds?

1. All the people on earth have committed sin;
2. The good deeds we have done are not sufficient to pay off our debts;
3. Our so-called good deeds are limited to those we love.

But for those who follow the way of Yahweh God, there is the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life in the present age and in the future age in the kingdom of God.