

## Can people who die having never heard of Jesus, the cross, the Bible, or Christianity go to heaven?

Sid Galloway BS, M.Div. Just an OLD sheepdog of the Good Shepherd

This is a common, thoughtful, and very important question. It's also one that many *ANTI*-Christian people have used to *distort* the character of Christ and the message of the gospel, the "good news", about Him. Sadly, many pastors and theologians repeat "traditional" answers they've heard from other men, but have not carefully examined what God says in His Word.

Some people answer this question by saying that anyone who dies having never heard of Jesus or the Bible or the cross has no hope of salvation and going to heaven. That is *NOT* a biblical answer. Others say that if a person never hears of Jesus, the cross, etc., but tries hard to be a "good" person (a "good" Buddhist or "good" Hindu, etc.), then that person will go to heaven. This also is *NOT* a correct answer according to God's Word in Scripture.

OK, but what about people who've tried to be "good", but finally *realize* that humans *cannot* make themselves "good enough" and so cries out in *faith* to the Creator for forgiveness and salvation (*transformation*)? Now this is God's Way to Him!

### God's Grace thru Faith, not human works

This interpretation is supported by some of the most respected, conservative biblical scholars. **Dr. J.I. Packer** is one example and is considered a top theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. At 91, though "retired", he continues teaching occasional courses at Regent College in Canada.

- "We may safely say
- (i) if any good pagan reached the point of **throwing himself** on his **Maker's mercy** for **pardon**, it was **grace** that brought him there;
  - (ii) God will **surely save** anyone he brings thus far (cf. Acts 10:34f; Rom. 10:12f);
  - (iii) anyone thus saved would **learn in the next world** that he was **saved through Christ**. ...."

**J. I. Packer, God's Words (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), p. 210.**

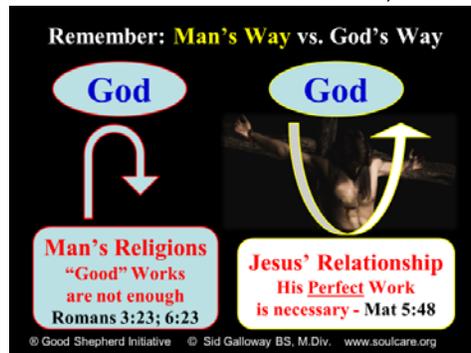
**Acts 10:34-35** "Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that **God is not one** to show **partiality**, but in **every nation** the man who **fears Him** and **does what is right** is **welcome** to Him.'"

What does Peter, the apostle of Jesus, by "does what is **RIGHT**"? Please listen to what Jesus said:

**Luke 18:9-14** And He also told this parable to some people **who trusted in themselves that they were righteous**, and viewed others with **contempt**: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a **Pharisee**

and the other a **tax collector**. The **Pharisee** stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that **I am not like other people**: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **I fast** twice a week; **I pay tithes** of all that I get.' **But the tax collector**, standing some distance away, was even **unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven**, but was **beating his breast**, saying, 'God, be **merciful to me, the sinner!**' [Jesus said] I tell you, **this man went to his house justified** rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he **who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

In the historical record of Scripture, often when someone asked Jesus a question, He initially answered with *another* question to help the person *think* more deeply. So, let's do that first, and then let God's Word answer.



### Did Abraham, Moses, and King David go to Heaven?

They lived before Jesus was born. They also never heard the name "Jesus", did not know about the "cross", didn't have the complete "Bible", and did not fully understand that God would become a man to accomplish the work necessary for their salvation. Yet, these men are presented in Scripture as being men who

were "saved" and went to "heaven". **How?**

**Genesis 15:6** "Then he [Abraham] **believed** [trusted] in the Lord; and He [God] **accounted** it to him as **righteousness.**"

When Abraham died and entered God's presence, he found out that what God fully did for his salvation was done through the incarnation work of Jesus, as Messiah.

**John 8:56-58** "[Jesus said] Your father **Abraham** rejoiced to see My day, and **he saw it and was glad.**" So, the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and **have You seen Abraham?**" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **before Abraham** existed **I AM.**"

### God's WAY has always been: GRACE thru FAITH not WORKS

Abraham was declared to be saved because he put his *faith* (trust) for salvation NOT in his own human good works, but in God's ability (*grace*) to do the *perfect* work he needed. David in the same way depended by faith on God's grace, not his own human good works, which cannot be good enough.

**Romans 4:2-8** "For if **Abraham** was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham **believed** God, and it was **credited** to him as **righteousness.**" Now to the one who **works**, his wage is **not credited** as a favor, but as **what is due**. But to the **one who does not work**, but

believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works

‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. ‘Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.’”

**Galatians 3:6-9** Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.”

God’s “way” of salvation (forgiveness and metamorphosis into His character) has always been by His grace (an unearned, undeserved gift) through faith, NOT by human good deeds or religious efforts to make ourselves good enough. Every man-made “religion”, is the opposite of God’s way. All of man’s religions teach some method of human efforts to make ourselves good enough – for our good works to out weigh our “bad” works. God’s true gospel, good news, stands alone.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.



Jesus made it clear in His profoundly simple sermon on the mount that the requirement for entering heaven is perfection, not just being good enough.

**Matthew 5:48** “Therefore you must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Jesus first explained that the old “religious” traditions of the rabbis fell short of the full character of God. Those “religious” leaders taught that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but Jesus said you must love your enemies and do good to them. His point and purpose were to show the listeners and the religious leaders that no human can be good enough. Because to enter heaven, God’s realm (His Kingdom), a person must be as pure as God is and love as perfectly as He does without failure. That’s both bad news and good news. It’s good news because whoever is allowed into His new heavens and new earth will be sinless, perfect in goodness like God. and won’t be able to ruin it the way we’ve messed up this world. But it’s bad news because none of us can make ourselves perfectly good. Our selfishness infects virtually every motive and action to some degree.

### So, Who Can Be Saved (Transformed into His Goodness?)

Only by God doing the perfect work for us that we cannot do for ourselves. God promised and prophesied 100’s of times over 100’s of years before Jesus was born that He would take on human form to do **THREE** necessary things for us (Philip 2).

**1. LIFE** - He promised to live a pure, perfect life of love, without any sin (selfishness). (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; Heb. 4:15)

**2. DEATH** - He promised to pay the consequences (in our place) for our personal, selfish sin. That consequence (penalty) is separation from God the Father who is the only source of life. Such separation results in death. (Rom 5; 6:23)

**3. RESURRECTION** - He also promised to rise again as proof of who He is and to offer as a gift (grace) His resurrection life of love. (Mat 16:21) His 3-dimensional perfect work for us is not a thing, it’s Himself, packaged in the very person of Jesus Christ (Messiah). It’s freely available to anyone who receives Him for who He has revealed Himself to be, the Creator, the Lord, the only source of pure and perfect, self-sacrificing love.

### God Reveals to Everyone His Reality, & Our Need - for Him.

**Romans 1:20** “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

**Romans 2:14-16** “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, ... show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

**Romans 3:21-30** “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

.... Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. ....”

God’s WAY (to pure Love) is only by:

His Grace (gift)

thru our Faith (humble trust)

**NOT** our Works

(prideful efforts to be good enough)