

## Are there Humanitarians in Hell?

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From a human perspective, there are lots of good people doing great work out in the world who are not Christians. Some philanthropists devote many hours working in third-world nations to provide clean drinking water, and others give billions of dollars each year to fund medical research and promote education. Some do it in the name of “religion,” and some do not.



When you hear about these heroic efforts you may ask something like, “Could God *really* condemn people like that to hell?” These queries then revive the whispers of law-keeping flesh, which always supposes that eternal life can be earned and can lead to the conclusion, “God will surely *not* condemn those good people who have done such loving things!”

To be sure, any honest assessment of these acts of goodwill would not deny the benefit they provide, the lives they have helped save, or any number of other positive societal effects. But how should the Christian think about philanthropy and generosity apart from love for Jesus Christ?

First, we should affirm that all humans are uniquely created in the image of God as moral beings with a conscience. The conscience is closely linked to the “heart” or “soul” and refers to the non-physical part of every person where moral reasoning takes place. Every human, Christian or not, knows God and the difference between right and wrong—even those with no knowledge of the Bible.

*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them . . . For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Rom 1:19, 21*

The conscience, if it has not been continually hardened, moves people, sometimes with powerful emotion, to help those in need. This is a good thing and a common grace of God.

Second, we should heed Paul’s warning at the end of 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.” Can you believe that? This

verse makes no mention of heinous sin, provides no laundry list of vices, and still it leaves no wiggle room. Love for God is the prerequisite for eternal blessing.

This means that no matter what you have done or will do in this life—if you do not love God, you will be accursed. To be “accursed” is to be utterly condemned like the cities that Israel “devoted to destruction” (Judges 1:17) by killing all those who lived inside. For us this is not the threat of a physical army coming to take us out, but the certainty of final and eternal devastation.

The one without love for the Lord does not care that Jesus came down from heaven to do the Father’s will. He has no place in his heart for the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for sinners, and therefore has not repented of his sins and believed. The person with no love for the Savior, no matter how good his actions appear, is in rebellion against his Creator. But God can turn the worst rebel into a repent.

Everyone agrees that the evil totalitarian needs atonement and forgiveness, but the humanitarian is no different. The gospel equalizes all men, irrespective of their societal or moral contributions, as just recipients of condemnation apart from the cross of Jesus Christ. When the outside of the cup looks clean and shiny, we cannot forget that Jesus’ main concern is with the inside. Jesus still speaks, “So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt 23:28). The truth can sting.

By God’s grace the gospel brings us back to reality, and reminds us to diligently seek to see the world the way God does. All humanity is lost in sin and in rebellion from birth. Some look like it on the outside, and others appear to have it all together. However, each one is without hope and cursed apart from the love of the Lord and his shed blood.

Your best effort, humanitarian or not, cannot save you from hell.

*And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Rom 4:5*