

Does God Send Good People to Hell?

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This may be hard to take in, but we must recognize that there are no good people. Jesus states in Mark 10:18, “No one is good except God alone.” Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable.” And the Lord looked down to the earth in Genesis 6:5 and saw that “human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time.” Therefore, the first step in responding to this question is to recognize that we are broken, sinful beings and that only God is good.

We only need to look at the last century to see many examples of human evil. Twenty to twenty-six million died in camps in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. Three hundred thousand were tortured, raped, or killed in Nanking, China. Another 20–43 million starved to death, and 46,000 scholars were buried alive during the regime of Mao Zedong in China. The Turks from 1915 to 1923 killed 1.2 million Armenians. Six million Jews were killed in concentration camps and another 6 million of Slavic decent under Adolf Hitler. And in the United States there have been more than 57 million babies killed since 1973. This list could keep going because these aren't rare occurrences. Humans did all this.

These atrocities were not committed by just a few individuals. As Dr. Clay Jones, professor at Biola University, says, “It is the average member of the population that commits genocide.” The police battalions responsible for capturing, transporting, and executing Jews in Nazi Germany were composed of ordinary men. These men had ordinary jobs and families before joining the Nazi police battalions. You have to ask yourself this question: “If my life had turned out differently, could I have been a guard at Auschwitz?” The answer is “Yes” because they were ordinary humans just like you and I who committed these acts.

Now you may be thinking, “I am not the same as Hitler, Mao, or Stalin. I do good things.” Well there is a difference between a good person and a person who does good things. We have created the idea in our culture that if you do good then you are good, and if you do bad then you are bad. However, this is not the view that Jesus held. Jesus was clear in stating that only God is good. Therefore, doing a good act doesn't make you a good person. It only makes you a doer of good.

A better question is, “Do bad people go to hell?” That answer seems obvious. The more important question to ask is, “How could anyone possibly enter heaven?” We are broken and don't deserve to be with God forever. Hell is the place of eternal punishment for those who have sinned against God, and we all deserve to go there. But this is where we recognize the tremendous grace and compassion of God when he sent Jesus to die for us. Romans 5:8 says, “God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Recognizing our brokenness makes Paul's words sink in that much more deeply. It is a miracle God pursues us, heals us, forgives us, reconciles us, and brings us into right relationship with him.