

# Where do “good works” fit in?

## Does God honour the good works of non-Christians, too?

There's a lot of arguing on the Internet about whether or not God gives salvation to good people, like Stephen Lewis, who aren't Christians. Here's a man who's done all kinds of good work trying to combat AIDS in Africa but he's also publicly stated he's not a religious man.

Does God overlook his unbelief and save him anyway?

There are Christians who would answer, “Certainly not, because that would mean a person could save himself by his own works, so what would be the point of Christ having to die?” In their minds, no amount of good works can save a person, Stephen Lewis included.

Other Christians, however, quote **Romans 2** and the verse about God giving eternal life to “[every man that works good \(verse 10\)](#).” In their minds, therefore, good works can save a person; it's the works one does, not whether a person is a Christian or not, that counts in the end (**verse 6**). And why would God ignore all the wonderful work Stephen Lewis has done simply because he isn't, quote, “religious?” Isn't life more about doing good rather than all that religious ritual stuff that doesn't do anything good for the planet anyway?

So, does God honour Stephen Lewis for his good works?

Well, he certainly noticed the good works of a man called Cornelius in the book of Acts. Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a seasoned soldier who'd probably whacked a few heads off in his time. In his private life, though, he was a good man. He was devoted to God and he gave money to Jewish charities, a highly risky business for a man in his position. But he cared, and for his good heart and good deeds he “[ascended as a memorial before God \(Acts 10:4\)](#).” Cornelius was a monument in Heaven; quite the accolades for a man who wasn't a Christian!

God clearly honours non-Christians too, then. He honours anyone with a good heart, though, including those who follow their conscience (**Romans 2:14-16**).

The only stipulation God adds to that is - don't use those good works to insist you qualify for eternity, that's all. God clearly honours good deeds, but not if they're being used as a lever to get salvation. That's a whole different story. Some people, though, especially religious people, think good works give them a right to eternal life. They expect a royal welcome into eternity for having done “[many wonderful works in his name \(Matthew 7:22\)](#).” Jesus isn't impressed, however.

Doing good works to honour God is one thing; doing good works to stake one's claim on a place in Paradise is quite another.

The first group of Christians mentioned above, then, have a point. Good works don't save a person. God accepts only one person's good works for our salvation, and that's Jesus Christ's. But the second group of Christians also have a point when they say God honours anyone who "works good." Christian or not, God holds them in great esteem. Their good deeds don't save them, but if Cornelius is anyone to go by, God has them as monuments in Heaven.

And that's exactly the point Paul is making in Romans 2. God gets a huge kick out of good deeds done by people with a good heart. He delights in a cheerful giver. He loves rewarding us for our good works. I like a God like that; he's so easy to please! He's even moved to making monuments of people who love to serve and help!

I hope one day that Stephen Lewis gets to see God in that light too, and he realizes the soft spot God has for people like him who try so hard to help the downtrodden and helpless, because that's exactly whom Jesus was concerned for when he was here.

Stephen Lewis's good deeds won't earn him salvation, but he doesn't have to worry about that anyway because all the good works necessary for earning his salvation have been done by Jesus Christ already. I imagine when he understands this, Stephen will have no trouble accepting it because, like Christ, he too has cheerfully given his life as a gift to others.

I imagine it will be huge relief when he finds out he doesn't have to be religious to please God, either. Stephen's already pleased God, and one day he'll find just how pleased God is when God gives him eternal life for the good works Jesus did for him.