

## ***Wages or Gift?***

Tom likes to think of himself as a good person. He works hard, pays his taxes, and raises his family. People like him; he's a good neighbor. Oh, he has his moral lapses. Doesn't everybody? He lies on occasion—mostly little white lies. He swears like a sailor when he's stressed—like last weekend when he hit his thumb with a hammer. But usually he watches his language around his kids. He's honest, although he'd almost forgotten that time as a teenager when he shoplifted the cigarettes on a dare.

When Tom thinks about the bad things he's done, he immediately reminds himself of the good things he's done. He's just not that bad. He is certain that his good deeds outweigh the bad. He has gone out of his way to help people. He's even done some volunteer work and made charitable donations. Why last week he stopped and helped an elderly lady with a flat tire.

Tom isn't into organized religion, although he still believes in God. Admittedly he's never read the Bible—he really doesn't know anyone who has. But he's sure that some of the things in the Bible are true. Tom is just convinced that a good God couldn't send him to hell. After all, his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds.

Tom isn't alone. According to a Barna Research poll: “Half of all adults (50%) argue that anyone who ‘is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life will earn a place in Heaven.’”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, that Bible so many haven't read paints a different picture. Paul states, “The wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23a, *ESV*). One sin—any sin leads to death or separation from God. Why? Because God is completely holy and without sin. Any sin severs the relationship with God, and no amount of good deeds ever balances the scales.

But Paul's statement doesn't end there, “...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b, *ESV*) There is hope, but it is not found in just doing good deeds. It is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is our sacrifice. He's the one who pays the price for us. He experienced death, so that we might have life.

Half the people in this country misunderstand a basic point. Being a good person is not enough. We can't balance the scales. We will face God with either wages or His free gift. Which will it be for you?

—Russ Holden

<sup>1</sup> “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs From Diverse Points of View” (October 8, 2002) [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

