

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation [manner of life] in Christ"

1 Peter 3:15 -16.

A lady I had just met, having learned of my church membership, asked a challenging question. That old question came up AGAIN! **"Do you believe that a person must be in the church of Christ to go to heaven?"** I tried to answer the question with wisdom, but I found myself stammering trying to find words which would help and not harm.

Why should not I (and others) give a simple "yes" or "no" answer? If we say "yes" we automatically peg ourselves as being *harsh, judgmental and narrow!* If we say "no" we leave the impression that *religious differences make no difference to us or to God!* Neither answer conveys the true picture nor accomplishes the will of God to lead the questioner closer to Jesus.

The difficulty is compounded when a Christian really accepts the Biblical teaching that all believers in Christ should be "one", and that there is one body, the church over which Christ is head. (See John 17:20-21, Col. 1:18, Eph. 4:4; 5:23.) If he says "yes", he feels that he will drive a wedge of animosity into the heart of the inquirer; if he says "no", he feels that he has betrayed the word of God.

One of the first things we have to admit is that we have no control over who says they are "members of the church of Christ." There are some shoddy examples of so-called "New Testament Christians." If all of us were living exemplary lives and always showing love, honesty, and purity of life to our fellow men, it would not be so hard for folks to see the difference between the religion of Christ and the religions of men.

But we are not perfect. The church will always have her Diotrophes and Demas, her Ananias and Sapphira, and even the moral failures of the Corinthian brethren. Those human weaknesses do not prove that Christ does not have a church, but they make it much more *difficult* to find, especially for those who are happy and *satisfied* in a religion that gives them support for the beliefs they want to hold.

It is interesting and impressive that despite the unpopularity of the position that Christ only established one church, people continue to accept that idea in one form or another! Most of those who contend that "one church is as good as another" only hold membership in one "brand". There are some who will back off from their contention when it is mentioned that there is a "Church of Satan", and some will exclude certain cultic religions when naming churches they believe to be acceptable to God. However, there is an ardent desire to include as many religions as possible as a part of the one church.

A PLEA TO THOSE WHO ARE OF OTHER RELIGIONS!

The reluctance of those in the churches of Christ to agree that salvation is possible through "many religions" is not due to a hateful attitude, nor to a desire to condemn others to hell, nor a desire to feel "holier than thou". Whether you agree with us or not, please do not judge our motives. Your questions should be, do these people respect God and truth? Should they try to please me or God? The inspired word of God records the conflict between those who wanted to follow "another gospel", and the apostle Paul who warned that those who sought to please men would not be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:6-11).

Without doubt, most of the members of the various religions of the world are sincere. There are devout Muslims, Hindus, and Jews who do not accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. They are good moral people by the world's standards. However, either Jesus is a liar, or he is the only way to the Father in Heaven (John 14:6).

If people can be saved without accepting Jesus, then salvation is possible by "good works", but Ephesians 2:8,9 teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not simply the result of being "good". Since all have sinned (Rom.3:23), and through sin death came into the world (Rom. 5:12), we need to be freed from sin and death. That happens when we obey Christ (Rom.6:16-18) and are buried with him by baptism into his death, and

are raised to a new life (Rom. 6:3-11). When we are baptized into Christ, we are also baptized into his body (I Cor. 12:12-13).

For this reason, we conclude that **every person** who believes in Christ, repents of sin, confesses Christ as the Son of God, and is baptized for the remission of sins, is saved from all sins of the past. **That person** is added to the church we read about in Acts 2:47. **That person** is just a Christian, and a member of the Lord's body (or church). **If that individual continues** to live and worship as taught in the New Testament, when judgment day comes there will be nothing to fear. However, **if that individual refuses** to follow Christ's plan for Christian life and worship, the rebellion and/or neglect will condemn the soul.
(See II Pet.2:20-22 and I Cor. 9:25-27.)

Every Christian could probably do better in his service to God. Every congregation could probably find areas to improve. But is there any chance that churches of Christ today might be identified with churches of the New Testament? Are you willing to study further to find out? Even if you find from further study that a particular congregation of the church of Christ is not what it ought to be -- even if you find none of them to be up to Christ's standard for a faithful church -- even then, the truth will remain. **Christ died on the cross to purchase His church** (Acts 20:28). **His church is built on the fact that Jesus is the Son of God** (Mt.16:16-18), and **salvation is found**

only in the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). These are truths directly from God's Word, and no effort of man or unfaithfulness of His people will change this. Whatever you have heard about us, either from others or from our own lips, please do yourself the favor of studying the Bible with an unprejudiced-mind. As you come to greater understanding, obey what you understand. If you continue in this way, you will find the truth that gives freedom from sin, and the hope of eternal life. If you share what you learn with others, perhaps they too can share your hope. If the teachings of this pamphlet are not right, please contact me and show me by scripture so I can correct my own thinking. If these things make sense to you and seem to be what God's Word teaches, please accept them. God loves us, and if we love Him, we will obey Him
(II John 6; I John 5:3).

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HOW SHALL I ANSWER?

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A study of the question of
"Who will be saved?"

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What does the Bible say?

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By
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