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# That They all May Be One

John 17:21



Chapter nine  
Are only members  
of the church of Christ

Clarence W. Fell

## Chapter Nine

# Are Only Members of the Church of Christ Going to Heaven?

A lot of people are curious about this question. Some people wonder about it silently and some people get rather aggressive about it. Members of the church sometimes dance around this question and try to avoid it. Other members devise clever answers in an attempt to dodge the discomfort sometimes associated with this question. Instead of using an evasive strategy in this chapter, we will meet this question head on. We will be kind and speak “*the truth in love*” (Eph. 4:15), but we will not sidestep the question.

## A Complex Question

People like to boil issues down to a simple “yes” or “no” answer, but life is not always that simple. A simple “yes” or “no” answer does not take into account the questioner’s frame of reference. To give an accurate answer, we must know what a person has in mind when he asks whether only members of the church of Christ are going to heaven. Depending on the questioner’s frame of reference the answer could be “no” and be a true Bible answer, or the answer could be “yes” and still be a true Bible answer. This question cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” until the questioner’s frame of reference is determined.

There are four frames of reference from which this question can be asked. This chapter provides a direct answer for each frame of reference. These answers may or may not be what people want to hear, but the answers are solid Bible-based answers.

## 1. Are Only Members of the Church of Christ Going to Heaven?

“Are only members of the church of Christ going to heaven?” a man asked a preacher.

“Yes,” the preacher answered.

“Then what about Abraham and Moses?” the man continued.

“They weren’t members of the church of Christ.”

In this case “yes” was the wrong answer. The questioner’s frame of reference must be known to properly answer. When the question is asked as illustrated above, we agree that Old Testament saints will be in heaven even though they were not members of the church of Christ (see Matt. 16:18 and Mark 9:4). In this sense one does not have to be a member of the church of Christ to go to heaven.

## 2. Are Only Members of the Church of Christ Going to Heaven?

The next frame of reference concerns those who die before reaching the age of accountability. We believe these will be in heaven even though they were not members of the church of Christ. This means that some who lived in the Christian dispensation, who were not members of the church of Christ, will be in heaven.

## 3. Are Only Members of the Church of Christ Going to Heaven?

Our next frame of reference concerns members of non-Christian religions. Will members of non-Christian religious groups go to heaven?

No, we do not believe they will. This answer is not pleasant, but it is the Bible answer. Consider the following verses.

*“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:15,16). Here we learn that Christians are saved and those outside of Christ are lost.

*“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). In this text we learn that Jesus is the only way to the Father. Those who reject Christ in favor of some other religious system have no access to the Father.

*“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God”* (Romans 10:1-3). Israel was lost even though they had the right God in view. They were lost because they rejected Christ. It was not enough that they had the right God in view, their only hope for salvation was in Christ. Jesus taught His disciples, *“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me”* (Luke 10:16). According to the Bible, rejecting Christ is the equivalent of rejecting God.

Finally, consider *“...When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* ( II Thessalonians 1:8). This text directly states that those who *“do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* will suffer the vengeance of Christ.

Based on the teaching of these verses, we do not believe members of non-Christian religions go to heaven. We do not believe that good Buddhists, or good Muslims, or good Hindus go to heaven.

Only those who follow Christ have the hope of eternal life. That is what the Bible teaches.

This answer is not pleasant and we do not find any joy in it. We stand with Peter when he wrote that God does not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). We view this loss of souls as a tragedy. This loss of souls is Satan's victory.

The fact that some people will reject this teaching does not change it. Rejecting this teaching only results in being excluded from the blessings that are found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Mere men do not have the ability to change God's word. When God said it that settled it, whether we believe it or not. What we think about God's way does not matter (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9). It is still His way. God is not tossed about by every wind of doctrine that men desire to follow. He does not change to accommodate man's ever changing desires. Our duty is to learn His word (II Tim. 2:15), fear Him, and keep His commands (Eccl. 13:12). Resistance is futile (Ps. 2:1-4; 59:6-8).

#### 4. Are Only Members of the Church of Christ Going to Heaven?

Our next frame of reference concerns denominations that operate under the name of Christ. Will all good members of all the various denominations go to heaven? No, we do not believe they will. This answer is not pleasant and we take no joy in it (II Peter 3:9), but it is a Bible based-answer. Consider the following verses.

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart*

*from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matthew 7:21-23). In this passage Jesus refers to people who worked under the name of Christ, they claimed

Jesus as their Lord, but they still were lost. There is more to following Christ than just being a member of a group that claims to follow Christ.

*“And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ... And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch”* (Matthew 15:9, 14). Again, we see that all religious activity is not pleasing to God. People who think that all religious activity is pleasing to God are sadly mistaken.

*“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Cor. 1:10). Denominational division is in opposition to what the Bible teaches. It is a direct violation of Scripture, yet men today give God credit and praise for creating denominations. Men actually claim that all denominations are just different roads leading to heaven. Unfortunately, that is not a Bible teaching. It’s another victory for Satan.

*“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul’s opposition to division is so clear that it needs no comment. Yet, there are preachers today who ignore Paul and tell their members to just follow whatever feels right in their hearts (Prov. 28:26). Paul states without any reservation that those who teach a perverted or twisted gospel are accursed. Peter agreed with Paul. Peter taught that many people twist the word of God unto their

own destruction (II Peter 3:16). In other words, there are people who hold up a Bible and claim to follow it, but they are actually headed toward destruction. All those who follow false teachers are headed for the same destruction (Matt. 15:14).

*“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son”* (II John 9). Modern denominations often teach

doctrines to suit themselves. They ignore the scriptures and substitute their own teachings. They have lifted themselves up in pride and lean upon their own understanding (Prov. 3:5). Paul warned us *“not to think beyond what is written”* (I Cor. 4:6) yet many denominations do so without hesitation or reservation. (See also Gal. 3:15 and Rev. 2:18,19)

The Bible teaches that professing the name of Jesus and claiming to follow Him does not prove that one is saved. Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 7:21). Will all good members of all denominations go to heaven? No, we do not believe they will. This answer is not pleasant and we take no joy in it, but to teach otherwise would place us in opposition to Christ.

## What About Your Church?

### Take the Test

All denominations claim to follow the same Lord and the same Bible, yet they teach conflicting doctrines. They can't all be right! Take the test and see how closely your church matches up to the Bible. Answer the following questions based on what your church teaches. Then see if there are any Bible verses that back up the things you have been taught (ask your preacher for help if necessary). Then, compare what you have been taught by your church to what the Bible actually

teaches.

1. Does your church teach that practicing homosexuals can be faithful Christians and go to heaven? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, "*Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error*" (Romans 1:27).

The Bible also teaches, "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 6:9).

2. Does your church teach that a woman can get an abortion any time she desires for any reason she desires?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, "*These six things the Lord hates, ...hands that shed innocent blood*" (Prov. 6:16,17).

3. Does your church teach that married couples can divorce for any reason they choose and remarry without restriction?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible says, "*Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate, ...whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries*



*her who is*

*divorced commits adultery" (Matt. 19:1 -10).*

4. Does your church have women preachers, or place women in positions of authority over men? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (I Tim. 2:12).*

The Bible teaches, *"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (II Thes. 2:15).*

5. Does your church practice sprinkling or pouring as baptism?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism" (Rom. 6:4).*

The Bible teaches, *"Buried with Him in baptism" (Col. 2:12).*

Why gamble with sprinkling when everyone agrees that immersion complies with the teaching of the Bible? Your eternity is too valuable to take such an unnecessary risk.

6. Does your church baptize infants? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).* Jesus and His disciples never baptized infants. Baptism verses apply only to those old

enough to hear the gospel, believe it, repent of past sins, and make the good confession. Jesus prayed for little children (Matt. 19:13-15), but He never baptized infants and children.

7. Does your church use titles such as Father, Pastor, or, Reverend? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi' for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant"* (Matt. 23:8-11).

8. Does your church teach that obedience to Christ is not necessary to be saved? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him"* (Heb. 5:9). First century Christians were taught that the faith was something to obey (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

9. Does your church teach that baptism follows salvation and that it is not necessary to becoming a Christian?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark. 16:16).

The Bible teaches, *"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins"* (Acts 22:16).

The Bible teaches, *"Baptism doth also now save thee"* (I Peter 3:21). Christians of the first century understood that baptism led to the

saving blood of Christ. In baptism His blood washes away our sins and we are united with Him (Rom. 6:3-5).

10. Does your church teach that once a person is saved, he is always saved and can never lose his hope of eternal life?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death"* (James 5:19,20. See also John 15:1-6).

11. Does your church teach that specific doctrines don't matter as long as a person is sincere? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Matt. 7:22,23). The Bible teaches, *"If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch"* (Matt. 15:15). Christians of the first century were not taught to just be sincere. They were not taught to practice just whatever felt right (Gal. 1:6-9; II Tim. 2:15; Prov. 28:26).

12. Does your church teach that God made denominations to satisfy the different personalities and desires of men?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"For God is not the author of confusion but of peace"* (I Cor. 14:33). Jesus prayed, *"I do not pray for these alone, but*

also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:20-23). Jesus prayed for unity, not for denominations (see also I Cor. 1:10-13).

13. Does your church borrow from the Old Testament system of worship? (candles, incense, instrumental music, or priestly garments)

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Give the verse\_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor"* (Gal. 3:23-25). The first century Christians were taught to follow Jesus' teachings and not to go back to the law of Moses (See also Matt. 28:18-20 and Gal. 5:1-4).

## God's Plan of Salvation

Hear the Gospel: Romans 10:14-17

Believe: John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6

Repent: Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30,31

Confess: Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32,33

Be united with Christ in baptism: Romans 6:3-5

In and of themselves none of the above steps save. It is the grace of God that appointed these as steps leading to the saving blood of Jesus. To get to the saving blood each step must be taken just as it is presented in the Bible. These steps only have value because God's grace has so granted. Without God's grace these steps would be worthless. Have you followed these steps to the saving blood of Jesus?

14. Does your church observe the Lord's Supper only once a year, twice a year, quarterly, or monthly? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread"* (Acts 20:7). The Bible reveals, and historians commonly agree, that first century Christians partook of the Lord's Supper every Sunday (See also II Thes. 2:15.)

15. Does your church sponsor social dinners, entertainment, and other types of recreational activities? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? ...But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home"* (I Cor. 11: 22, 34). When Paul untangled the mess the Corinthians had made of their worship service, he took social dinners out of the local congregations and placed them in the realm of the home. Many modern churches simply ignore this Bible teaching.

16. Does your church teach that God is still giving men divine revelations today? \_\_\_\_\_

Give the verses \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible actually teaches, *"Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3. See also II Tim. 3:17 and II Peter 1:3).

17. Does your church teach that it is okay to make any of the sixteen changes listed above in order to satisfy man's desires?

\_\_\_\_\_

Give the verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible teaches, *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven,*

*preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:8,9. See also Gal. 3:15, James 2:10, and Rev. 22:18,19).

Obviously, there is much more to be said on these subjects. The point to be understood at this time is that, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 7:21-23).

## What About Sincerity?

We know that there are many good and sincere people in the various denominations. We are not saying that denominational members are wicked and evil people. We believe that most of them have been misled by teachers and preachers who have been misled themselves. We believe this is a terrible tragedy. We can't ignore the Bible and preach that all sincere people are going to heaven. If we cave in to criticism and teach such a thing, that will not make it true. Real Christianity is not built on wishful thinking. It is built upon a solid book, chapter, and verse foundation. The Bible shows us that sincerity alone is not enough. While we must be sincere, we must also do the will of the Father in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

The church in Sardis had a good reputation among men. They were an active church that people respected and admired. Concerning this church John wrote, *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead"*" (Revelation 3:1). Their good reputation among men did not make them acceptable to God. They had left their first love and were under the threat of wrath.

James wrote, “*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does*” (James 1:25). Later he wrote, “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10). James taught Christians to follow the Bible. He sounds a lot like Jesus in Matthew 5:18,19 where Jesus talked about jots and tittles and the danger of breaking the smallest command. James did not teach the modern “just-be-sincere” doctrine.

Peter wrote, “*They stumble being disobedient to the word*” (1

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Peter 2:8). And, *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble”* (II Peter 1:10). Finally, *“...which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures”* (II Peter 3:16). Peter did not teach the “just-be-sincere” doctrine of modern denominations. He taught that the things we practice and believe in religion matter to God. We cannot wave the magic wand of sincerity and magically make everyone and every doctrine right in the eyes of God.

John wrote, *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”* (I John 2:3,4). Next, *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments”* (I John 5:2). Finally, *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the father and the son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”* (II John 9-11). John, just like all the other Bible writers, tells us that what we believe and practice in religion matters. We cannot sweep doctrinal differences under the rug and pretend they don't exist. Paul told us to *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (II Timothy 2:15). God made us responsible to study and rightly divide His Word. Modern man-made doctrines about sincerity do not relieve us of this responsibility.

The fundamental point to understand is the simple fact that we can't all be right. We know that there are good and sincere people in the modern denominations. We also know that the apostle Paul, when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, was also a devout and sincere man. But, he was lost. Goodness and sincerity do not automatically make a person a child of God.



## You Believe It Too!

Every denomination teaches that some people are saved and some people are lost. When the church of Christ points to a doctrinal line and says that everyone on this side is saved, and everyone on that side is lost, we are not doing something rare or unusual. We realize that many people don't like where we believe God drew the line. They would be happier with us if we would change our teachings to include them among the saved. We would gladly change our teachings if that would cause God to change where He has drawn the line. But, God doesn't redraw the line every time some religious group changes its teaching.

There are only two types of people who don't point to a line that divides the saved from the lost. The Atheist does not, because he does not believe that there is a heaven and a hell. Second, believers in Universalism do not, because they believe everyone will be saved. The rest of us believe a line exists somewhere. Whether it is clearly defined or somewhat hazy, we believe it exists somewhere. None of us mean to be hateful or rude when we identify this line; we are just trying to understand the teaching of God's Word.

## Why Doesn't Everyone Shout It?

Those of us who have long been familiar with this teaching sometimes wonder why everyone doesn't teach it with regard to their own church. It seems to us that some groups are saying, in effect, that their teachings don't matter. It looks like they are saying that any doctrine will do as long as one mixes a little sincerity with it.

We do not believe that any doctrine will do. We do not believe that all roads (denominations) lead to heaven. We believe that doctrine does matter. Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:4). Jesus also said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means*

*pass away*" (Matt. 24:35). And finally, Jesus said, "*Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:20). Every word of God is important. Every teaching of Christ is to be observed. And yet, most modern denominations seem to be saying that their teachings are really not that important. They teach that their particular way is just one of many roads that lead to heaven, even though Jesus said, "*Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matt. 7:14). Jesus said there is one way. Paul wrote, "*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all*" (Eph. 4:4-6).

## God is the Final Judge

We believe that only members of the church of Christ are going to heaven. Now, does that make it so? No. God is not bound by what we believe. Neither is God bound by denominational teachings that claim that anyone who is sincere is going to heaven. God is going to do what God is going to do. Our duty is to learn His word and obey Him (Eccl. 12:13).

## You Can't Please Everybody

Someone somewhere thinks that you are lost. Someone else thinks that you are saved. No matter what you believe you will always be in this predicament. You can't please everybody, but that is okay because God is the final judge and you can please Him.

Our duty is to follow God's law, the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). We are simply students of God's Word. We believe, based on our study of Scriptures, that modern denominations have crossed the line and are leading people into error. We believe it is a tragedy that people are

being misled. It grieves our hearts that most of them will not learn the truth of their situation until it is too late. Trembling and confused they will ask, “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?*” And then Jesus will declare to them, “*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*” (Matt. 7:21-23).

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*COMING NEXT CHAPTER*

That They all

May

Be

One

John 17:21



Chapter ten

Sprinkling, pouring, or immersion?

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