

# Will Only The Church Of Christ Be Saved?

**Introduction.** "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" This was the question Nicodemus asked the chief priests and Pharisees in John 7:51 when they were condemning Jesus on nothing more than hearsay evidence. Nicodemus had actually been to Jesus and heard from His mouth what He taught. He knew that quite a different impression was to be had by giving Him an objective hearing.

The report has been widely circulated that members of the church of Christ think they are the only ones who are right, the only ones going to heaven, and that all others are bound for hell. The first impression in the mind of the average person is that this is a claim by one little denomination to superiority over all others, and to some kind of special connection with God.

Sometime this impression has remained because members of the church of Christ have been unwilling or unable to clarify their position. In other instances, persons hearing the charges have turned away in disgust, refusing to hear any explanation from those accused. If you, however, have taken the time to hear this sermon, you may justly claim that spirit of fairness possessed by Nicodemus. We believe, too, that whether or not you agree with all that is said, your impression of the church of Christ will at least be altered.

No satisfactory answer, long or short, can be given until the question itself is clearly understood. So it is with the question, "Will only the church of Christ be saved?" Unless we agree in the meaning of the terms "saved" and "church of Christ," it is impossible for any answer to be satisfactory.

## I. ***What Does It Mean To Be Saved?***

- A. Almost all religious groups claiming to follow the New Testament now agree that a person does something toward his own salvation. No one, of course, can ever earn or deserve to be saved, but he must do something on his own part to claim the salvation which God gives by His grace.
- B. How does one claim God's offer to save? Although it is sometimes overlooked, there is also much agreement on what commandments the Bible gives for us to follow. Every person making any claim to being a Christian would think each of the following to be desirable or beneficial to one's efforts to live as Christ desires:
  1. Believe or have faith (Acts 16:31).
  2. Turn away from sin in repentance (Acts 17:30).
  3. Confess faith in Jesus (Romans 10:9-10).
  4. Be baptized (Acts 22:16).
  5. Attend services and worship in an acceptable manner (Hebrews

- 10:25; John 4:24).
6. Study the Bible (1 Timothy 4:13; Hebrews 5:12).
  7. Live a good moral life (Galatians 5:22-24).
  8. Love God, neighbors and enemies (Matthew 5:44; 22:37-39).
  9. Serve the spiritual and physical needs of others (Galatians 6:10; Matthew 28:18-20).
  10. Exhibit continual growth in devotion to God (2 Peter 3:18).
- C. Where, then, do the differences lie? The most significant difference regarding these matters comes in the question of when the person who starts down this line of deeds is to be regarded as saved. On this matter there are differences which must be recognized.
1. Some teach that "salvation is by faith only."
  2. Another group will say, "No, a person is saved when he has believed and repented."
  3. Still another may say, "He is not actually saved until he has been baptized."
- D. What is the final act of obedience in accepting God's offer to become His child?
1. Galatians 3:27 makes it clear that with baptism a person is placed "into Christ" and where all spiritual blessings are found.
  2. Romans 6:4 teaches about the act where one starts to live the new life. When does walking in the new life begin? After baptism!
  3. Acts 2:41 adds its testimony to the same conclusion for it tells just when those who heard Peter's sermon on Pentecost were considered a part of the disciples. When they had progressed through baptism, they were then considered Christians.
  4. Acts 22:16 reveals a statement Ananias made to Paul. Paul's faith began on the road to Damascus. He had already been praying and fasting for three days. Yet the messenger of the Lord tells him, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins."
  5. Peter tell us definitively that baptism saves us through an appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21).
- E. The major difference regarding conversion among prominent religious bodies, then, is not so much a difference on what the biblical commands are, but a difference on just when one is added to the body of Christ and thus made a part of the "saved" or kingdom.

## II. ***To What Do The Saved Belong?***

- A. Suppose that someone has been saved in the way the Bible teaches as we have just explored. Of what group is he or she now a part?
1. They have been baptized into the body (1 Corinthians 12:13).
  2. They have been translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13).
  3. They have been born again into God's family (John 3:5).

4. All of these are merely figures of speech which represent the church of the Lord, the church we find in the New Testament!
- B. One can see that the body (Colossians 1:18), the kingdom (Matthew 16:18) and the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15) are all synonymous. In fact, there are several instances where the kingdom and the church are synonymous.
1. The church is "a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36); hence, it is a spiritual kingdom (John 3:3-8; Romans 14:17).
  2. One is called out of the world and into the church by the gospel (1 Peter 1:22-25; 2:5-9; Ephesians 2:16; 3:6). One is called unto His kingdom by the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).
  3. The Lord's supper is in the church (1 Corinthians 10-11). The Lord's supper is in the kingdom (Matthew 26:29).
  4. By one Spirit, we are baptized "into one body," the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). We are "born of water and of the Spirit" to "see" or "enter" the kingdom (John 3:3, 5).
  5. The temple, tabernacle, house or church is not made with hands (1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6; 8:2; 9:11). The kingdom was made "without hands" (Daniel 2:44-45).
  6. Christ is the savior of the body, the church (Ephesians 5:23). Christ will "deliver up the kingdom unto God" (1 Corinthians 15:24).
  7. We are heirs and possess an inheritance in Christ, the church and the kingdom (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:11; 3:6; 5:5).
  8. We are saved by the blood in Christ, the church and the kingdom (Ephesians 1:7; 2:16; Colossians 1:13-14).
  9. After His death, Christ was made head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11). "In thy kingdom" equals "into thy glory" (Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:37). Christ entered into His glory after His death (Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 1:11).
- C. The church is known by several terms in the scriptures.
1. "The church" (Ephesians 3:10).
  2. "The church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2).
  3. "The church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23).
  4. "The church of Christ" (Romans 16:16).
  5. None of these, however, were ever intended to be an "official title" for the church; they are, rather, merely expressions which tell to whom the church belongs or to whom the saved are committed. Whatever a congregation decides in regard to its name, the church must be called what God calls it!
  6. Christians today usually refer to themselves as "the church of Christ" because this is one of the phrases used in the scriptures and

- it signifies to whom we belong.
- a) We wish the situation were as in the days of the apostles when one could speak merely of "the church," and all would know that he referred to all those who are saved by the blood of Christ.
  - b) The saved were known simply as "the church" because it was the only one in existence during the apostles' time. There were simply no denominations or the Catholic Church in existence then.
7. When a person is saved, he becomes a member of the Lord's church, figuratively called the family, kingdom and body. The church spoken of in the New Testament, then, is simply the collection of all the saved, for the Lord adds to it everyone He saves (Acts 2:47).
- a) The church does not save; it is the saved. It is misleading to say that salvation is in the church; the church is composed of people who enjoy salvation (Ephesians 5:23).
  - b) The church was not something that Jesus established and finished on Pentecost. The church is the temple of God made up of living stones (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5). If there were no living stones, there would be no temple.
  - c) Some have the concept that the church is like a little red wagon that Jesus is going to take to heaven and we must get in if we want to go. Christians are not passengers, they are the nuts and bolts, the metal and paint of the wagon itself.

**Conclusion.** Now to answer the question with which we began: "Will only the church of Christ be saved?" If we substitute the expression "church" for "church of Christ," which, as we have seen from the scriptures, refer to exactly the same people, then the question will read: "Will only the church be saved?" Since we have seen that the "saved" and the "church" are just two names for the same group of people the answer is obvious. Yes, only those in the church will be saved. We might even substitute the expression "saved" for "church," since they refer to exactly the same people, and thus make the question read, "Will only the saved be saved?"

The real difficulty raised by the question of whether only those in the church of Christ will be saved is learning to see the church of Christ from an undenominational point of view. It is certainly not helpful when we speak of the church in a denominational way. Phrases such as, "I'm church of Christ," "are you church of Christ." "that's church of Christ doctrine," "he's a church of Christ preacher" and "the church of Christ is right" all frame the church in denominational language.

We would have no right to believe that only those in "our denomination" would be saved with all other denominations being lost, for no part of a whole can reasonably claim to be the whole. When it is seen that what we term "the church of Christ" is just a scriptural name for all those who have

been saved by God's plan, then it is not hard to understand that only those in this church have the promise of salvation.

The church of Christ is not a denomination. When we use the term "church of Christ," most people assume that we refer to a denomination by the name "church of Christ." Let me state as emphatically as possible that if a denomination exists today named the "church of Christ," then membership in it is in no way essential to salvation.

We plead for you to follow His directions in being saved. Then the Lord will add you to the saved, His church. In fact, you have no promise from God of being saved any other way. If you would be "in Christ" and saved from sin, then do what God commands for salvation.