

Will the Good People of All Churches Be Saved?

by Keith Sharp

Introduction

A few years ago I called on a young man and his wife for a home Bible study. The young man had left a denomination to become just a Christian, but he had subsequently quit attending the worship assemblies of the church. I asked some questions to try to discern the problem. He in turn asked me if I believed that people in other churches were lost. He thought members of the church of Christ were much too narrow minded. The vast majority of religious people agree.

Certainly this question deserves our attention, for it involves the salvation of souls (Matthew 16:26-27). So, we inquire, will the good people of all churches be saved?

Basis of Answer

The apostle Paul commands, "Test all things hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). But, what shall be the standard by which we test? If we answer the problem on the basis of our feelings, what our parents say, human wisdom, church creeds, or the advice of most preachers, almost all will conclude, "Yes, the good people of all churches will be saved." But we must "walk by faith" to be saved (2 Corinthians 5:7), and "faith comes by hearing ... the word of God" (Romans 10:17). So, to be correct, we must set aside all merely human sources and consult the Scriptures.

What Do the Scriptures Say?

The opinion that the good people of all churches will be saved is based upon at least four assumptions. We will test each of these assumptions by the Bible to see if they are true.

Will Good Morals Alone Save?

If people who are morally good will be saved regardless of what they believe and practice, then good morals alone will save. Is a morally upright life all that is necessary to salvation?

The Roman centurion Cornelius was

a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1-2).

Furthermore, he was "a just man" and was so morally good that, although he was a Roman soldier, whom the Jews generally hated he had "a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts 10:22). I dare say you will not find a man more pure in life than was Cornelius. And yet, he was in need of salvation (Acts 11:13-14). You see, despite his upright life, he, as all others except Jesus, had sinned (Romans 3:23) and thus had earned death (Romans 6:23).

Friend, unless you have lived a sinless life, and you have not (1 John 1:8-10), good morals alone will not save you. In fact, if good morals alone will save, the death of Jesus was unnecessary, for there are morally upright people who are Moslems, Jews, pagans, and even agnostics, infidels, and atheists. Will these people be saved apart from Christ?

Is One Church as Good As Another?

The contention that the good people of all churches will be saved is also based on the assumption that one church is as good as another. Is this true?

It is certainly true that one human denomination is as spiritually good as any other. But does this mean that such denominations are as good as the church Jesus built?

For example, God accepted the sacrifice of Abel while He rejected that of Cain (Genesis 4:3-5). Why? Because Abel's sacrifice was "By faith" (Hebrews 11:4). He offered what God commanded (Romans 10:17), whereas Cain did not. Was one sacrifice as good as another? Was a sacrifice based on opinion as good as one offered by faith?

Or, consider the gospel message. Is a gospel from man as good as that from God? No, the gospel of Christ "is the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16), but all human gospels bring a curse (Galatians 1:6-12). We must speak what we believe (2 Corinthians 4:13), and "faith comes by hearing ... the word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is never as good to walk by opinion as it is to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

So, then, are the denominations of men as good as the church Jesus built? Christ certainly did build a church (Matthew 16:18), and He has but one (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). The Pharisees were a sect of Jesus' day. When the disciples warned the Master that a saying of His was offensive to this sect, He replied:

"Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:13-14).

If a preacher says the same thing about a human sect today, most people think he is a narrow-minded bigot. Was the Lord a narrow-minded bigot, or did He simply have the courage to state the truth? Now, honestly, dear friend, is a human denomination as good as the church built by the Son of God?

Do Denominations Belong to Christ?

But, someone objects, the various denominations are simply a part of the church Christ built. This is a third assumption. Is it true? Paul pleaded with the Christians in Corinth not to have divisions, but to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." He rebuked them for wearing sectarian names as signs of party loyalty (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Does that sound as if the Lord approves of His people believing and teaching contradictory doctrines and belonging to religious sects?

Does God Have a Choice?

Finally, when people contend that the good people of all churches will be saved, they assume God has simply left it up to man what to be religiously. They assume God has no choice in the matter. Is this true? Friend, it is not enough to believe Jesus is Lord, we must "do the will of" God (Matthew 7:21). The Lord adds the saved to His church (Acts 2:47). Salvation is only in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:10-12). Christ saves His body (Ephesians 5:23), and the church of Christ "is His body, the fullness of Him" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Do you really think the Lord has left it up to us to be members of any church that strikes our fancy?

Conclusion

Friend, the Bible most assuredly does NOT teach that the good people of all churches will be saved. In the Day of Judgment many who thought they were saved will be lost (Matthew 7:22-23). You see, salvation is only in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10), in His body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

You can be a member of the church Jesus built. If you will believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess before men your faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for the remission of sins, Christ will save you (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 3:19; 2:38). He will then add you to His church (Acts 2:47), the body of the saved (Ephesians 5:23).