

WHO WILL ENTER HEAVEN?

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In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” This text answers the most important question of all: Who will enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Our deeds, not our claims

Matthew 7:21-23 makes it clear that we will not enter heaven based on our *claims*. We are indeed commanded to do all that we do in word or deed in the name of Jesus Christ (Col 3:17). That means we must do everything in his authority, because he has *all* authority in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18; Acts 4:12). If we do not have Christ’s authority, then we have no authority for whatever it is that we are doing. We might *say* we are doing whatever we are doing in Christ’s name, but that does not make it so. Our works must truly be in Christ’s authority, which means they must be in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament (John 12:48). If our works are not consistent with what is authorized by Christ in the New Testament, then we will not be saved, no matter what we claim about those works. It is the nature of man to justify himself, rationalize what he has done (or is doing), to make excuses and claim his disobedience to God is actually obedience (see the example of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:10-23). The ability to falsely claim one’s evil works are in fact good works is not unique and does not place the possessor of that ability in select company. That is why Jesus says that “many” will be doing that on Judgment Day. Proverbs 20:6 says, “*Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?*” Proverbs 16:2 says, “*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weighs the spirits.*” Proverbs 21:2 similarly says, “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord ponders the hearts.*” Men make false claims about their deeds all the time, but God knows the truth. Rationalization, self-justification and false claims do not deceive the Lord and will not change His judgment. That is why the Lord says, “*There is a way which seems*

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(continued)

right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov 14:12; 16:25). The fact is, only those who *obey* Christ will receive eternal salvation (Heb 5:9; Rom 2:5-11). Only those who *do* the Father’s will enter into heaven (Matt 7:21; Jas 1:22-25; 1 John 2:17). Everyone will be judged by God according to their works, not their claims (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:12-13; 22:12).

Avoiding an unpleasant surprise

Denominations are classic examples of people who claim to be doing their works in Jesus’ name when their works are in fact iniquity. By not wearing the name the Lord has authorized for his church; by not organizing the church as God has authorized; by not worshiping God as He has authorized; by not teaching the truth about the Godhead, faith, grace, works, salvation, the purpose of God, etc., etc., etc. Every denomination is guilty of iniquity. But they all claim to be doing all their works in the name of Jesus. The application of Matthew 7:21-23 is very easy to see. What is perhaps easy to overlook is how this same teaching might apply to ourselves, to members of the Lord’s church. Though we may teach the truth and practice the truth on many things, we can still be in danger of missing heaven by not doing the Father’s will in *everything*. We might teach the truth about the Lord’s one true church, His plan of salvation, and the proper way to worship Him. We might be totally faithful in our attendance of the church assemblies, and we might give liberally of our means to the church. But if we love the world (Matt 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17), if we are not holy (Heb 12:14; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; 1 Pet 1:15-16; 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Pet 4:1-2), if we love the praise and glory of men (John 5:44; 12:42-43), if we follow our own traditions and commandments (Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13; Titus 1:14), if we speak our own words instead of God’s (1 Pet 4:11; 1 Tim 6:3-5), or if we do not forgive others, especially our brethren (Matt 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-4), or if we do not love our wives as we should (Eph 5:25-33; Col 3:19), or if we do not keep *all* of Christ’s commandments (Matt 28:20), we might find ourselves among the “many” who are asking in shock if we did not do many wonderful works in the name of Jesus. We might be among the many who hear Christ say, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” We must be diligent to do all of the Father’s will so that we may actually enter into the kingdom of heaven.