

So You Think You're Going To Heaven, Huh?

Dalia Sussman, a correspondent for ABC News, wrote a piece called, *Elbow Room No Problem In Heaven*.¹ The article is essentially a poll designed to show how many Americans believe in heaven, and who they think is going there. In it, she writes, "Among all Americans, 75 percent think they'll go to heaven."

Here's what Jesus said:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, *and only a few find it.* (emphasis mine) (Matt 7:13-14) NIV

Those who scoff at the Bible's authority and exalt their own opinions over God's Truth march ignorantly into destruction. In the same article, Ms. Sussman writes, "...among all Americans, 21 percent think that only people who are Christians can go to heaven. Among the rest, 60 percent think both Christians and non-Christians can get in, 7 percent are unsure, and 10 percent don't believe."

This reveals a common belief in our "Christian" culture: *You don't need Jesus to get to heaven.* In fact, 60 percent think they will go to heaven without needing Christ. Here's what our Lord—the One who rules in Heaven—says:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6) NAS

"I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; *if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*" (John 10:7-9) NAS

"This is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:40) NAS

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life...if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:47-51) NAS

All of these verses reflect what Matthew 7:13 affirms: Jesus is the narrow door into heaven. Peter said, "there is salvation in *no one else*; for there is *no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12)

Peter's statement was the topic of discussion on a popular television talk show, where the moderator asked his guests (a Baptist preacher and a Jewish rabbi) if Jesus was truly the only way to heaven. The latter was angry and strident, calling Christians "Jew-haters."

¹ You can find her article [here](#).

Unfortunately, many Christian leaders today have been promoting a Christ-less salvation. Here's an extract from *Christian News*, October 1997. It's an interview of Billy Graham by Robert Schuller:

Graham: "I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the Body of Christ.... He's [God] calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because God has called them. They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven." (p. 15)

Schuller: "What, what I hear you saying that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?"

Graham: "Yes, it is, because I believe that. I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that they have never seen a Bible or heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.."

Schuller: "I'm so thrilled to hear you say this. There's a wideness in God's mercy."

Graham: "There is. There is."

The title of the article? *Graham Believes Men Can Be Saved Apart from Name of Christ*. Mr. Graham didn't come to these conclusions overnight. He had been working with non-Christian groups for years to reach them with the gospel. Unfortunately, he began shedding more and more "nonessentials," until compromise eliminated the need for Jesus Christ.

Graham's not the only one. Joel Osteen, on national television, said at least three different times that he couldn't say that those who have not accepted Christ will be damned. John Hagee says that evangelizing Jews is unnecessary as they are saved by the old covenant and not by Christ. It is the official position of the Episcopal Church that Jesus is not the only name by which we are to be saved.

It's no wonder then that so many Americans believe they can get into heaven without Christ. The preacher says it, therefore, it must be true. An indictment against the Catholic Church is that they've taught their parishioners to listen to the priest, not God's word, since they can't properly understand it.

Judgment Day

In a chilling summary, Jesus describes the fate of many religious people on Judgment day, who cry out to Him in contradiction to their destiny:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day,

“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” Matt 7:21-23

In other words, just because you’re religious doesn’t mean you’re going to heaven. The great divider will be *the person who does the Father’s will*. What is His will? Again, we get our answer from the bible, not from what we think:

(The disciples asked), “What shall we do, so that we may work the works (will) of God? Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (John 6:28-29)

While Billy Graham and his televangelist friends are promoting a Christ-less salvation, Christ says those who believe in Him will get into heaven.

In His dissertation in Matthew 7, Jesus goes on to describe that fearful day: *Many will say to Me on that day...* This is not a handful, but thousands of people who thought they were right with God. They present their religious works as proof of their faithfulness:

...did we not prophesy in Your name?

To prophesy simply means *to proclaim God’s word*. We preached your message of salvation. All those Sunday morning sermons...did they not count for anything? All the folks I preached to and who came forward at the altar call?

...and in Your name cast out demons?

We marched in anti-abortion parades. We voted to ban gay marriage, seeking to rid society of evil. We fervently lobbied to stop stem cell research. We had a gazillion Christian web sites chock full of Christian material. Didn’t those things mean anything to you, Jesus?

...and in Your name perform many miracles?

Didn’t we cover the ends of the earth using modern communications and air travel to preach the word? Didn’t we faithfully reconstruct your life, death and resurrection using the miracle of computer animation and film?

The Bottom Line: There’s nothing wrong with doing all these good things. But Jesus’ response is rather cold-blooded: *I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness*. Their works astounded humanity and had a great effect, yet God didn’t acknowledge them. *I had no knowledge of you and your doings*. Many folks think that He sits on His throne and smiles down while they scurry about doing ”religious” things. In God’s sight, they were ”doing their own thing,” acting apart from biblical authority or prescription.

All of this boils down to one thing: *self-righteousness*. The majority of those who thought they were on God’s side will wave their righteousness as a banner to God:

Look at me, God! I make the sign of the cross every time I pass a church building!

Look at me, God! I had a holy saint in every room of my house!
Look at me, God! I prayed regularly to the Virgin Mary!
Look at me, God! I attended the right church!
Look at me, God! I went through the correct religious rituals every Sunday!
Look at me, God! I never touched alcohol, cigarettes, and I never cussed!
Look at me, God!

In the end, they cry out, “Didn’t you see ME? Did you not know what I was doing?” *No. I was looking for My Son. He was supposed to be in your heart, but I didn’t see Him.* You see, the Bible says that God’s will for us is to become conformed to the image of His Son. (Rom 8:29)

“Be Ye holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44)

An important concept that escapes the attention of many is this: *God is Holy*. Most have this idea that He is like a kindly old grandfather who will arbitrarily excuse our sins. He is not. We’re dealing with Intelligence so vast, it is beyond comprehension. He is the Creator of super-massive black holes—dead stars that can swallow entire solar systems. He designed our DNA code, which, if written down, the books would fill a football stadium.² Scientists have found that even single cell organisms contain machines so complex it boggles the mind.

Thus, when we speak of God’s *holiness*, it too is just as incomprehensible. It cannot be described in words; it can only be proclaimed:

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1-4) NIV

It is especially in its application to Christians that the idea of holiness meets us in the New Testament in a characteristic and distinctive sense. We are called “saints” or *holy persons*, and holiness in the high ethical and spiritual meaning of the word denotes the quality of our life and conduct.

Without a doubt—when it comes to Christians—the term ‘saints’ demands separation from the *world* and consecration to *God*. Just as Israel under the old covenant was a chosen race, so the Christian church in succeeding to Israel’s privileges becomes a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). And the individual Christian, as one of the elect, becomes a holy man or woman (Col 3:12). Paul describes all baptized persons as “saints,” even though they may be far from being perfect. Look at the Corinthian church. They were baptized “saints” (1 Cor 1:2, 14), yet permitted gross immorality to exist among them (5:1ff). (The Catholic notion of sainthood is pure science fiction, totally against what the bible plainly says.)

²When scientists began to understand the vast complexity of the DNA code, many abandoned their beliefs that life appeared by chance. Instead of looking for God, however, they claimed that ancient aliens designed the DNA code and created life. ([The Devil’s Delusion](#), by David Berlinski)

So what are we looking at? We can be holy in *name*, but not always in *fact*. Scripture always assumes holiness as an ideal and an obligation. We think that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts to regenerate or sanctify us (make us into a new person). He is “cleaning house,” so to speak, to make it a habitable place for God. Too often, however, as God takes a load of trash to the curb, we manage to drag more back in.

With all this said, the NT is clear: you can’t claim to be holy—God-like—and live like the rest of the world. You can’t pretend to be “good,” and be without Christ’s Spirit. Yet this is what many hold up as their banner—I’m a *good* person. They may be kind; they may smile and be friendly; they may donate their time and money to charity. They may even attend a religious organization. *But they are not God’s people*. They are basing their eternal reward on their self-righteousness.

The Garment of Righteousness—Jesus Christ

In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a parable about a wedding. In the culture of that time, if you were invited to the king’s wedding, you were given a garment to wear to the event. The purpose of the garment was so that the poor invitees didn’t come in their shabby clothes, and any rich folk didn’t show up overdressed. The garment leveled the playing field, so to speak. Everyone looked the same.

This garment symbolizes Christ. In the story, some guy decides to attend the wedding in his own clothes. He had made the decision, “I don’t need that garment—my clothes are good enough.” In other words, “I don’t need Christ—I can get in here on my own righteousness.” Unfortunately, the king sees the guy and throws him into outer darkness.

“By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us...righteousness.” (1 Cor 1:30) We become “filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:11) Paul wrote of not having a self-righteousness based on legalistic works, “but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:9-11)

The wedding garment makes us all equal. We all look the same. We don’t stand out in contradiction by wearing our form of righteousness. When you put on Christ in baptism, you have donned the wedding garment. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; *for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” (Gal 3:27-28)

The Big Misconception of Heaven

Among many, a traditional view portrays eternal life as a never-ending church service. This unfortunate and un-biblical belief turns eternal life into eternal boredom. Wrongful interpretation

of the last two chapters of the book of Revelation has been the leading cause of this false doctrine.

Regardless of what we *think* heaven is like, the Bible is relatively silent on the matter. Paul apparently experienced a place, "caught up into Paradise and [hearing] inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak." (2 Cor 12:4) The popular notion that Revelation's final chapters speak of heaven falls apart when one examines the context.³

Everyone Wants To Go To Heaven, But Not Today

Kenny Chesney recorded a popular song titled, *Everyone Wants To Go Heaven, But Nobody Wants To Go Today*. Note his own comments carefully:

I don't know anyone who doesn't want to go to heaven, but nobody wants to go today. If you could pick, you wouldn't pick right now. You'd want to live, to do more things, to have more fun. And that's sort of the point of the song, too. It's one of those songs that say, "I'm not only not ready, I've got a little but more fun to have." It's certainly the way me and the people around me try to live, to pack as much as we can into every day...and it's the way I think our fans are living. You can tell when you get out in the parking lot, these are people who have come to have fun, to make a few memories with their friends, and I think that's a great way to live.

This let's-party-and-have-fun-till-we-die mentality is all too prevalent in our self-indulgent culture. Concerning how people never gave a thought of God, note what the bible says about this attitude:

The Lord God called you to repent, to weep and mourn, to shave your heads in sorrow for your sins, and to wear clothes made of sackcloth to show your remorse. But instead, you sing and dance and play, and feast and drink. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry." You say: "What's the difference, for tomorrow we die." The Lord Almighty has revealed to me that this sin will never be forgiven you until the day you die. (Isa 22:12-14) TLB

The Holy Spirit says:

A wise man thinks much of death, while the fool thinks only of having a good time now. (Eccl 7:4) TLB

So you think you're going to heaven, huh? I hope so. I hope to see you there. But you can only get there by the blood of Christ. That's not some sanctimonious babble; it's what the Bible says. Once you draw your last breath, and the eternal darkness cradles you, there is no more hope.

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³ Revelation 21 speaks of nations walking by "heaven's" light and kings bringing their glory into "heaven." Chapter 22 speaks of the Tree of Life, its leaves producing a "healing of the nations." Obviously, earthly kings and nations coming in to get healing are not part of the heaven we're used to hearing about. The language is descriptive of salvation through Christ, who came to save the world—the nations.