

Question: Is it true that some churches think they are the only ones going to heaven? What would Jesus say about this?

When some Christians have strong convictions about something the Bible teaches, they may take it too far. This may lead to the assumption that anyone who sees things differently is wrong and cannot enter heaven. In my experience this is a problem that has crossed many denominational lines and has led to disrespectful and unChristlike accusations. There are serious problems with this reasoning that can be corrected by reflection on the life of Jesus and what the Bible says.

One problem is the presumption that any human can pass judgment on another's eternal destiny in heaven or hell. That is a role God, the Father, has reserved only for Christ, His Son (John 12:44-48; Acts 10:42; 17:31). Jesus did say: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Such righteous judgment can only be done by declaring the word of the Lord. Those who reject that word from our Lord bring this judgment upon themselves (John 12:48). But as the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes" (1 Corinthians 4:5). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-5).

This does not mean it is wrong to hold definite convictions that are different from what others may believe. But these convictions should be declared with a gracious respect for those who may understand things differently (Colossians 4:4-6); and one should never use these personal convictions as a basis for judging the hearts, motives and eternal destinies of those who may disagree with these convictions. Even in a dispute with the devil, the archangel Michael "did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment" (Jude 9). He left the rebuking in the hands of the Lord.

Part of the problem may be that some Christians believe that a person must be right on every matter in order to be received into heaven. But our relationship with God is not based on our ability to understand and do everything exactly right. Our relationship with God is based on the grace of God and an obedient faith in what

Christ has done (Romans 3:21-28). Who am I to think that the grace of God can cover my mistakes and not those of others? I choose to leave it in the hands of a good, gracious and just God.

Finally, I am reminded of the time one of Jesus' disciples said to him, "Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." Jesus replied, "Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:49-50). Unfortunately, there are some people who have passed judgment on those who are not part of their group. I would sincerely pray that they will listen to the words of Jesus, declare his message as given in scripture only and allow him to do the judging.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2012/12/14