

Question: Will All People, Who Believe In Jesus Christ, Go To Heaven?

Answer: The Bible makes it clear that *some* who believe in Jesus Christ will go to heaven, while others who believe will not go. In the passage below you have an example of someone who believes in Jesus Christ (in fact, he is presented as a prophet) and yet is not allowed into heaven.

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor [can] a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt 7:15-23)

There are two ways in which we use the word “believe;” therefore it is important to establish definitions. Sometimes, the word “belief” is used in the sense of merely agreeing with certain truths (“I believe Tom was telling the truth”). Another way of understanding belief is as *dependent faith*. The prophet in Jesus’ illustration was one who merely believed truths about Jesus (in His existence). However, this simple agreement to certain truths about Christ does not mean that they are “believers” according to the Bible’s definition.

In the above passage, Jesus warned His followers (true believers) to beware, because there would be false prophets who would profess to be Christian (sheep), but yet they would not be true believers (“*wolves,*” those which eat sheep). These false prophets would disguise themselves (“*sheep’s clothing;*” v. 15). Their disguise would consist of deceptive speech (“*prophesied;*” v. 22) and deceptive actions (“*cast out demons,*” and “*done many wonders;*” v. 22). The prophets in Jesus’ illustration were those who “believed” in Jesus in the sense of acknowledging His existence and person. However, they did not exercise faith in Christ. In fact, it is quite clear that they were trusting in what they did to get them to heaven (“*have we not prophesied in Your name, etc.;*” v. 22).

These verses teach that it is possible for someone to *think* he is a true believer and yet not be (he is deceived). Biblical belief is far more than simply agreeing with what the Bible says regarding Jesus Christ. When the Bible speaks of *saving faith*, it speaks of belief in the sense of dependent trust or reliance.

Notice three things in this passage:

1. Christ rejected these false prophets (“*depart from Me*”).
2. Jesus Christ described these false prophets (“*false,*” and “*wolves,*” and “*you who practice lawlessness*”); and
3. Christ gave the reason for rejecting them (“*I never knew you*”).

Christ’s followers were to determine the false prophets by their “*fruit.*” Fruit is the result of a healthy tree. Healthy trees produce fruit according to the type of tree it is. If it is an apple tree, it

will bear apples! The **“fruit”** of the false prophets would reveal that they were false. The evidence that they were false was that they were lawless and disobedient. Disobedience was the **“fruit,”** or the result of a spiritual problem.

That tells us that Jesus did not reject them for the **“fruit”** of disobedience. He rejected them for who they were. They were rejected because Christ **“never knew”** them. Christ, in His omniscience, knows all men (John 2:24-25). He used the word **“know”** to suggest a personal relationship. Because they did not have a genuine relationship with Christ, they did not live in obedience; they lived in **lawlessness** (living outside or against God’s law).

Therefore, the remedy was not for the false prophets to become obedient. Many people think: belief + obedience = heaven. However, this is not the case. That would have been like trying to change the apples on an apple tree into pears. Simply teaching someone to do good things as opposed to bad things, does not change their internal nature – it simply makes them a “good” sinner. Simply becoming obedient would not have changed the prophet’s relationship with God. Jesus said He did not **know** them. The solution to the problem was that the false prophets should have established a *personal relationship* with Jesus Christ.

The Bible says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

A person cannot be **“saved”** (go to heaven) by trusting in his good deeds, or his obedience. Salvation is completely God’s work and it is given by His **“grace.”** The word **“grace”** means unmerited favour. If we think that God should let us into heaven because we are doing good, we are basing our eternal life upon what we *do*. However, God gives eternal life as a **“gift”** through Jesus Christ.

Since salvation is by God’s *unmerited favour*, this assumes we understand that we are sinners and that we don’t deserve His mercy and grace.

...there is none righteous, no, not one. (Rom 3:10)

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23)

Recognizing our sinfulness also assumes we understand that there is a penalty for not meeting God’s standards:

For the wages of sin [what we earn because of sin] is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:23)

We must recognize that we are sinners, and that we can’t do anything to earn eternal life, and that we deserve **“death”** (eternal destruction) because of our sin. Therefore, we must confess our sinfulness and *rely upon God alone to save us*, believing that Jesus Christ died, taking our penalty of sin. Jesus said:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

Biblical *belief* is compared to *receiving* – a personal reliance or dependence upon what God has done.

But as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12)

When we receive Christ as our Saviour, the Bible says that we are “***born...of God***” (born again, born spiritually).

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

When we are born spiritually, we become God’s children (see John 1:13, above), and we enter an eternal relationship with Him. That is what Jesus meant by “***I never knew you.***” The false prophets thought they could go to heaven because they believed Jesus to be God, and because they were doing some amazing things for God. They were not trusting in God to purchase their eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reality of their unbelief was demonstrated through their disobedience to God. However, the solution wasn’t simply to change the fruit (disobedience to obedience), the solution was for God to change the tree (nature).

Only those who believe in Jesus, in the sense of relying completely upon Him for salvation, are going to Heaven. Those who rely completely upon Jesus Christ to save them, are born again. Only born again believers are going to Heaven. Jesus said:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40)

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." (John 6:47)

These verses show very clearly:

1. that not all who believe in Jesus Christ are going to heaven;
2. that it is possible for someone to think he is going to heaven and yet be deceived;
3. that obedience does not make a person born again (you can’t cause your spiritual birth, any more than you could cause your physical birth);
4. that true biblical belief results in a person being born of God (spiritually, by the Spirit), and that is when they enter a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ; and
5. the *evidence* that someone has been born of God is the fruit of obedience.