

Question #6: If one were to confess Jesus as Lord and repent, then suddenly die, is he going to heaven?

To begin with, Jesus said some things that bear on this tough, yet sensitive question:

"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" (Matthew 7:21).

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

"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God'" (John 3:5).

"If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:47-48).

Often this question is posed as a "death-bed confession" or: "If someone dies on the way to baptism after he has confessed Christ and repented, will he go to heaven?" In personal Bible study I would first ask—"Is this a real-life situation or just a hypothetical possibility?" This is significant for a number of reasons, but most importantly to see where the person I'm studying with is at. Is he grieving over a loved one who died and their salvation is questionable? Or is he playing games like Constantine did—manipulating the church of Rome in his day and waiting until the last possible minute to get "saved." Of course "*God is not mocked*" (Galatians 6:7), but many people today do not have any fear of the Lord.

Actually, this question came up recently in a personal Bible study here with a couple of elderly folks. The first Scriptures we went to concerned God's position; that He desires that everyone be saved. I Timothy 2:3-4 states: "*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" And to His people in the church, God has written: "*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*" (II Peter 3:9).

It is not God's nature to take away a person's opportunity to be saved. Quite the opposite is true. He wants everyone to be saved. I often tell people who have lost unsaved loved ones, "God loves them more than we do: He'll do what is best." I'm sure of this because of how the Bible describes God."

Also, it needs to be pointed out that God has not given the Christian a ministry of condemnation, but instead a ministry of reconciliation. This is explained fully in II Corinthians chapters 3&5. In II Corinthians chapter 3, Paul points out that the Old Testament law was "*a ministry of death*" (II Cor. 3:7) and

“the ministry of condemnation” (II Cor. 3:9). In verse 6, the Scriptures clarify that Christians are *“servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (II Cor. 3:6).

In II Corinthians chapter 5, especially verses 16-20, Paul explains that Christians have been given *“the ministry of reconciliation”* (II Cor. 5:18). In the next verse we find the following statement: *“...and He [God] has committed to us the word of reconciliation”* (II Cor. 5:19). The section ends with this summary and appeal: *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”* (II Cor. 5:20).

Christ Himself initiated and exemplified this ministry of reconciliation. Regardless of the questions a person may have, I always try to go to John 12:47-48 in the first couple of personal Bible studies. I have the person I’m studying with read these two verses out loud from their Bible. Then I point out that in verse 47 Jesus states that He did not come to judge (or condemn) anyone—even those who do not “keep” or obey His Word!

Then I will ask: “According to verse 48, what will judge each of us on the last day?” What a person does upon being asked this question, as well as his answer, really gives insight on where a person is at. The answer of course is *“the word I [Jesus] spoke is what will judge him at the last day”* (John 12:48b). Therefore we are not to “judge” or condemn. Not even Jesus does that, according to v.47. Instead, His word is what will judge! Add to this the Truth that *“the Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35). Therefore, each one must do his best to submit to God according to His terms given in the New Testament. Trying to find a loophole, or an exception to God’s written directions, will never do.

To me this is so beautiful! Our job is to get the Word of Christ out—that’s all. Then people can decide for themselves. I often share that God is most gracious in this, for He has given us an open-book, pass/fail test, and He has given us the rest of our lives to figure it out and get it right! Also I will often add, as I did most recently in a personal Bible study on this question, II Peter 1:3. II Peter 1:3 indicates that Jesus’ Word contains ***“everything pertaining to life and godliness.”***

Also with regards to this question, I always stress that salvation is not just a one-time event. This paves the way for future studies on *“the gospel”* as defined in I Cor. 15:1-8 and our obeying *“the appearance”* portion the rest of our lives in *“walking in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4). The passages in which the phrase *“being saved”* is used in the NT Scriptures show that our salvation is an on-going process that unfolds during the entirety of our lives. My notes for the recent personal study I had on this question included Acts 2:47b, I Cor. 1:18, and II Cor. 2:15, which are written about or directly to Christians. Also, Titus 3:5, and its referring to the ongoing *“renewing by the Holy Spirit,”* is a favorite of mine on this subject.

Usually, I try to end a study on this question without pulling any punches—for the sake of the one asking the question. I express my concern that “you don’t want to ever be in that position yourself—being on your death bed and hoping to gain salvation at the last minute!” Now is the time, today is “the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2). You are the only one who can determine your salvation with Christ: you can’t decide, or do it, for anyone else. My ministry is to help individuals prepare for eternity. And, of course, be a good example of growing in Christ and preparing for eternity myself!

In summary, surely our Father God would not “pull the rug out from under someone,” nor allow anyone to die who honestly is trying to be saved in Christ Jesus! That is not the nature of the God of the Bible. God desires all men to be saved. If this were not true, I would not serve Him. And so we commit ourselves to Him with full surrender of everything we are and have, according to His written word—because He alone is worthy! May we be found faithful in His sight. God has entrusted the gospel to men; we must obey it ourselves and then share it with others. This means that He has faith in us, as we have faith in Him!

Steve Compton
Circa 2005

Personally, I have loved ones who have died, who were good and fine people: some even had confessed Christ and were living for Him to the best of their ability. But, to my knowledge, they did not obey the gospel as clearly stated in such Scriptures as I Corinthians 15:1-8, Romans 6:2-4, and Acts 2:38.

This causes me much sorrow and grief. I am so thankful that Jesus loves them even more than I ever could! But Jesus says: “*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matthew 10:38). As my Lord, I am committed to follow, obey, and teach for Jesus according to His Word—regardless of what others may do or say - even regardless of my own thoughts and feelings! As Jesus Himself faced the same choice in the Garden of Gethsemane and gave us these Words to live by: “*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will*” (Matthew 26:39). And then finally on the cross: “*Your will be done*” (Matthew 26:42).