

The Most Religious State

Jason Patrick Hilburn

Survey conductors at Princeton Survey Research Associates International claim that Mississippi is the most religious state in America:

Mississippi is, far and away, the most religious state in the country – ranking first among the 50 states in a nationwide poll in four categories: the importance of religion to residents; the frequency of prayer; the attendance at worship services and the certainty of a belief in God . . . Mississippi scored highest across the board, with 82 percent of Mississippians saying religion was very important in their lives; 60 percent saying they attend services at least once a week; 77 percent saying they pray daily; and 91 percent saying they believe in God with absolute certainty. Other Southern states also ranked high in the poll, with Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee and South Carolina all scoring 70 percent or higher on the importance of religion in people's lives. North Carolina was eighth with 69 percent; Georgia ninth with 68 percent, Kentucky 10th with 67 percent and Texas 11th with 67 percent . . . At the other end of the spectrum, fewer than four in 10 people living in New Hampshire and Vermont, which each scored 36 percent, and Alaska, with 37 percent, said religion is very important to them. The national average: 56 percent of citizens who say religion is very important to them.¹

Although it is interesting that there are apparently so many religious people in Mississippi (and in the South in general), there is also a question which needs to be answered – Do all religious people go to Heaven? If not, then which religious people go to Heaven?

First of all, we know from the Scriptures that those who do not have faith in Christ will not go to Heaven (John 8:24; 14:6; Hebrews 11:6). Those who are not Christians may call us “narrow-minded” because we teach that any accountable person who is not a Christian will not enter Heaven, but so be it. We follow and defend our Lord Jesus Christ and the Truth. The world contains millions of people who are religious, but the majority of them are not following Christ.

If we turn our attention to those who believe in Christ, we must then ask if they are truly obeying the Lord. Even in Jesus' day there were those who believed that He was the Son of God, but they were still lost because they would not obey Him: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43; cf. 8:30-44, 52; 14:15; Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; James 2:14-26). Many who consider themselves religious because they believe in Christ are actually lost because they will not obey God's command to repent and let go of their sins: "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness...*" (Acts 17:30-31). Many who believe in Christ will be forever lost because they are ashamed to talk about Him or His Words in the company of others (Mark 8:38). Many who believe in Christ have not been immersed in water for the purpose of having their sins washed away (Acts 22:16), and thus their sins are still staining their souls. The Bible teaches that once a person is baptized for the remission of his sins, he is added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Salvation is only found in Christ's church (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23); therefore all those outside of Christ's church are lost. Those who are not members of Christ's church may call us "narrow-minded" because we teach that any accountable person who is not a member of Christ's church will not enter Heaven, but so be it. As previously stated, we follow and defend our Lord Jesus Christ and the Truth. To say that one is a faithful member of Christ's church is equivalent to saying that he is a Christian, and vice versa.

Someone may ask, "Will all those who become members of Christ's church go to Heaven?" Sadly, many of those who have had their sins washed away by the blood of Christ have chosen to leave the light and go back into the darkness of sin. Once we have contacted the blood of Christ in baptism (Revelation 1:5; Acts 22:16; Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:38), there is a condition we must meet to remain in contact with that blood: "*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:6-7). Those who refuse to remain in the light by faithful living also refuse the cleansing power of the blood of Christ! It would have been better for them never to have known the Truth than to turn from it (2 Peter 2:20-22; cf. Heb. 10:23-31). Once

we have obtained the grace of God through Christ, that grace teaches us that *“we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Titus 2:11-12). *“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him”* (1 John 2:3-5).

One may ask, “Among those who became Christians, who will go to Heaven?” Those who love God with all their being (Matthew 22:36-38); love their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:39); help those in need, such as the fatherless and widows (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10); refuse to continue in sin (Romans 6:1-11); study and rightly divide God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15); refuse to support false doctrine (2 John 10-11; Romans 16:17); speak as the Bible speaks (1 Peter 4:11, 16); faithfully attend the assemblies of the Lord’s church (Hebrews 10:23-31); worship God in spirit and in Truth according to the New Testament pattern (John 4:24; Colossians 3:16-17); pray to God on a regular basis (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17); do what they can to spread the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20); and anything else God commands us to do in His Word.

The more we study the Bible, the more we realize just how narrow that gate to Heaven is: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14). In this same sermon Jesus went on to explain that not all who claim to be Christians will enter Heaven: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth 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”* (Matthew 7:21-23). The sad truth is that most religious people do not practice *“pure and undefiled religion”* (James 1:27). If we will go to Heaven, we must all become members of Christ’s church and be faithful!

<http://www.TheBibleDomain.com>

REFERENCES

¹ <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/81155.html>