

Reflections on Knowing God and the *Bible* (or Not)

As we have quoted Jesus in our five prior *Assume? • Faith?* Series Blog Posts:

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Jn 8:31-32

Jesus said, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Jn 7:16-17

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Mt 7:24-27

In other words, we can only assume, not know and have saving faith, that Jesus and the *Bible* are true without putting His Words into practice.

And second, we will not know, as “know” is used in the *Bible*, outside the *Bible*-defined placement of Christ and His Word – if He is not first in our lives. But this should not surprise us because this is a key consistent theme of the *Bible* from early on:

- When Adam and Eve decided to place the word of satan above that of God, man fell (as this has been the case, for all men, since then).
- Noah, as an early example, stood out as a God-first man and was saved from the flood.
- Job was another faithful follower of God and even though he experienced great trials was saved from them.
- God’s First Commandment states: “You shall have no other gods before me.” Ex 20:3
- God told the Jews: “And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’S commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” Dt 10:12 -13
- When questioned as to “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus confirmed this is still His expectation: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Mt 22:36 -40
- Within the first 15 minutes of the *New Testament*, Jesus clearly states and warns:
 - “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Mt 6:24
 - Not too long thereafter He says: “any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” Lk 14:33
 - “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Mt 10:39-40

- “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” ^{Lk 9:62}
- We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ^{1Jn 2:3-6}
- Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”
 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ^{Mt 19:23-26}

These verses are not taken out of context, they are *Bible* context! And, today, many feel we can know God and be saved by simply assuming He is God, rather than by knowing Him by and through experiencing His Grace. We may “know” the *Bible* (in the weak sense) by listening to periodic sermons, Sunday School lessons, etc., but not as the *Bible* defines saving faith.

This, undeniably sounds and seems daunting for it is impossible as Jesus tells us! But fortunately, the Christian life is one day, one repentance and one Grace at a time. We are likewise promised (as another equally important theme of the *Bible*):

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ^{Phil 1:6}

“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.” Again he asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” ^{Lk 13:18-21}

To circle back to a key foundation for this series of *Assume? • Faith?* Blog Posts: The *Bible*’s single clearest and most comprehensive statement about how anyone is saved states:

As for you [everyone is a “you” before they (if they) are saved], you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive [those who meet the criteria that follows] with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you [the ultimately saved] have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ^{Eph 2:1-10}

With the last 2 sentences being the evidence of salvation based on real faith, not mere assumptions:

1. We are only saved, “through faith [a true belief – a weak assumption is not adequate] meaning this faith is,

2. “Not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” – this is a special, miraculous, strong and growing, faith with the added and necessary sign that we have been,
3. Created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do [works we have done, and are doing, in and by His Grace].

And as with ALL Graces, this initial greatest of all possible gifts begins with humility, knowing we must have Christ’s Grace to “know” His Word and seek to follow it through His continued and on-going Grace. Grace to make and keep Him first against all the worldly powers working against us.

We have this great promise and sign of Christ’s salvation:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Ro 8:28 - 30

Yes, we can know (must know!) we are saved (Christianity is no blind faith) – we know this because Jesus promises:

Whoever [Everyone!] lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” Jn 3:21

As we related earlier, to summarize, in the words of Jesus:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Mt 7:24-27

Or, in a “picture:”

Sand: Pride • Self • Opinions • Assumptions • Decisions • Weakness • Foolish • Lost

Rock: Humility • Grace • Truth • Faith • Answers • Power • Wise • Saved

The rock: “everyone who hears these words of mine (Christ Jesus) and puts them into practice.”

This is how (and only how) we can know Christ and not just assume we know Him and later suffer the terrible resulting negative consequences!