

Can We Know How & Where We Stand with God? Is There a Reliable Test?

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” . . . “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” . . . “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” Jn 3:4-7

“Evangelical, black, and Latino Protestants tend to respond similarly, with about two-thirds of each group answering in the affirmative. In contrast, only about one third of mainline Protestants and one sixth of Catholics (Anglo and Latino) claim a born-again experience.” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*

Well, being “born again” (in spite of Jesus’ teaching) doesn’t seem to impress many professing Christians as a meaningful test. In the same way, many affirming Christians are confused and embarrassed if asked: “Are you saved” even though “salvation” and “saved” are frequently used *Bible* terms as in the following statement of Jesus:

“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Mt 10:22

In spite of largely being “pickers and choosers” of what we accept from the *Bible*, and what Jesus says in particular, there is certainly almost universal agreement among conservatives (many only grudgingly) who assent to the following because it is in the *Bible* and liberals who really like it since it sounds so tolerant and progressive:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” Mt 7:1, Lk 6:37

Besides the key reason being that God is the only legitimate and final Judge, not us, from a practical standpoint there is a great (if even possible) challenge in Life to examine ourselves much less judging others. No one can absolutely know, for anyone else (no matter how close to them, how “good” they are, what they say . . .) whether they are born again/saved or not. The great question is: Can we confidently even examine and judge ourselves? The following Bible verses tell us we can, and indeed we must:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? 2Co 13:5

For only then can we hope to live in God’s hope and Grace:

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb 4:16

Have we/Do we/Are we judging our salvation subjectively (how I *feel* about it in comparison with other people), logically . . . or objectively? Are there reliable objective ways to do so?

Maybe we can by starting with the *Bible’s* hallmark (its simplest, clearest and most comprehensive) teaching on being saved for it gives us several key clues and tests:

As for you, 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 with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you 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

But before telling us anything about being saved these verses tell us **why we must be “saved”** – our condition until we are “born again”: Everyone, is dead . . . following the ways of (enslaved by) the devil and, as a result, objects of God’s wrath.

We are then told **why anyone is saved**: by God’s great love for us even though we are dead and, as such, unable to do anything to reach out to, repent, seek . . . Him and His forgiveness. For just as a dead person is unable to do anything, Jesus uses the analogy that to be saved we must be born again – for, like a dead person, neither can anyone unborn do anything to effect this birth which leads to us being told the **how anyone is saved**: “it is by grace” (in simple, everyday, language as God’s gift).

Then we are told **God’s goal and objective in saving**: “that in the coming ages [eternity] he might show the incomparable riches of his grace,” one aspect of God’s Glory:

Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.

I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth –

everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made. Isa 43:5-7

They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations . . . as an offering to the LORD. Isa 66:19-20

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” Jn 17:24

The saved, born again, are promised they are going to glory in God’s Glory for eternity.

And just so there is no possible confusion about this greatest of all promises (to give us a greater ability to examine ourselves), the *Bible* then **expands and confirms how (the means through which) anyone is saved**: “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” while, at the same time, making it crystal clear “this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” In other words, this is not the dead-man’s faith all people have (everyone has faith – faith in themselves, the world and devil), rather saving faith is the born-again gift of Grace-faith Jesus gives us in the new birth (faith in only Him to save us now and forever).

And then we are given the **great earthly/“for”/test and proof of our salvation**: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” It is clear these are good works to be completed after we are saved (not as any basis or reason for our salvation) and they are not random, general or man-devised good works, but good works “God prepared in advance [uniquely and personally] for us to do” and for which He, then, is responsible to communicate to each Christian personally, giving them the specific abilities and resources at the exact and precise time He set for these good works to be completed.

In the interim Jesus gives us several other tangible promises and signs we are on-track:

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Jn 6:27-29

Even going so far as to promise:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [all our earthly needs – our food, clothes, shelter . . . everything we need to live] will be given [Graced] to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Mt 6:33-34

God is able to [and will – He has to if we are doing the good works He planned for us to do!] make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work [He planned in advance for us to do]. 2Co 9:8

Which, if we are doing this it will mean unequivocally that we will (as another proof and evidence in our examination):

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! 2Pe 3:18

And as yet even further proof, on which we can examine ourselves:

The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Jn 1:14

Whoever 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

Do we then have any “if only I knew what God wanted . . .” excuses? But even with all this concise and clear instruction, there is the remainder of the *Bible* given to us to show us what God expects of us as long as we are alive and on earth and, in doing so, evidence of authentic salvation. So that our “seeking first” and “work of God” is evidenced in our heeding Jesus’ great challenge:

If anyone [everyone who] chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Jn 7:17

At this point it is easy to imagine some thinking “This is all something I have never heard before – I have never really heard that Jesus said much if anything testable or practical” to which the only comment would be that this means a person is either not reading the *Bible* or reading it all wrong. Because Jesus said:

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? Jn 3:12

Jesus did not say a lot about heaven because we could not understand it if He did and, in any case, there is going to be a new heaven and a new earth (2Pe 3:13 & Rev 21:1) before the end of time so that anything He tells us now would be “outdated” by the time we got there. Read the *Bible* (and especially what Jesus tells us) for the practical and “earthly,” what He is telling us now, as a basis for faith-building and examining ourselves to make sure we are truly in the faith.

And while we cannot (and, therefore, are not to) judge individuals, we can assess whether churches are preaching the Gospel (the truth). But in doing so we cannot take the leap that a specific church defines or determines the condition of its members – there are many many churches that would not know Jesus if He walked in and preached a sermon to them. Yet in even unfaithful churches, God has placed true Christians who, while being concerned, may or may not even realize their church is a weak or dead church – they are so single-minded about their good works prepared in advance, the greatest being their personally seeking first the kingdom of God

and His righteousness, that they may not see the faults of their church – all the while they will be a light of truth in the surrounding darkness.

In light of the above, if considered credible, there is a single critical and obvious next question: “Are we told who God gives this special Grace of salvation to?” And as we should expect, the *Bible* does tell us this very, very important point – not once, but three times:

God mocks proud mockers but **gives grace to the humble**. Pr 3:34, Jas 4:6 & 1Pe 5:5

And, as an “element” in being born again and being saved, this humility is a Grace itself – something no one inherently has in their dead state, but which God will give to all who ask (as all do in being born again).

So, without making this write-up longer than the *Bible* itself, suffice it to say that in being dead and not yet born again we can have no foresight or ability to examine and judge ourselves, but the above should provide more than enough hindsight for examining ourselves as to whether we have been born again and are in the faith and, if not, reveal to us our lost condition so we can respond to the Voice we are hearing now to humble ourselves for His Grace:

“Ask and it will be given [Graced] to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Mt 7:7 - 11

And as a short PS of some additional clear *Bible* indications of being born again and saved, for our periodic personal examination, the following are simply a few of many we find in the *Bible*:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is [Grace] from God. 2Co 5:17-18

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. 1Th 1:2-5

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Phil 3:13-16

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God . . . 2Th 1:3-5

And maybe the greatest of goals and blessings, and a tangible and testable proof of being born again, saved, right with God? Do we have the reality of the three-fold promised indissoluble bond

(His grace, love and fellowship) to God, one He initiates and we are to prize, guard and protect by His on-going Grace?:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. ^{2Cor 13:14}

For all personal relationships and connections are dynamic, not stagnant – they rise or fall, but will not stay the same unless they are dead.

That the great majority of people, in whatever society and with whatever religion, believe they are “right” with God, is a reality substantiated by polling. In contrast, Jesus says the way is narrow and few are saved. Who will we believe? And how can we test it? In the final analysis we test it by life or no life – and life in Christ is best and most surely evidenced by a desire for God and His Word for we are told multiple times:

Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ^{Dt 8:3, Mt 4:4}

Similarly, we can look at our lives, find the one thing that is most important to us (that we cannot get enough of) – this is our God.

Examine yourselves [frequently] to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ^{2Co 13:5-6}

For, life (eternal life) depends on it!