



## Can I Be Sure That I Am Right With God?

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How can we be right with God? The answer to this question is worth more than knowing how to make a fortune. What cause for rejoicing and gratitude! What a spring of energy! What strength in trouble and courage in defeat to know one is right with God! When we speak of God, we're speaking of him in whom we live and move and have our being. He's the author of life, the preserver of life and our judge. To know we are right with him is worth more than all other knowledge in the world.

### Presumptuous?

Some people say, "But that's a bit presumptuous, isn't it?" It is not presumptuous, it's common sense. Suppose you meet me and there's a lady with me and you say, "Is this lady your wife?" and my answer is, "Well, I'm not sure, but I hope so." You would think me somewhat strange. Or, if you pointed to one of my children and said, "Is this your child?" and I said, "Well, I'm not sure, but I hope so." That would be more than strange. Or suppose there was a car outside my house and you said, "Is this your car?" and I replied, "I'm not sure." You would surely think that I am more than unusual.

The salvation one hopes one has but isn't sure will do no more good than the money one hopes one has and isn't sure. Paul did not say, "I hope I know in Whom I have believed." Job did not say "I hope my Redeemer liveth." Paul said "I know in Whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him unto that day." Job said "I know that my Redeemer liveth and He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth....Whom my eyes shall behold and not another."

### The Testimony of John

Yes, we may know how we stand with God. In fact there's one whole book of the Bible devoted to it — the first epistle of John. The Greek word for "know" occurs in this epistle forty times. Consider the following typical passages from this book, because if

you read it through you can answer for yourself the question whether you have eternal life right now, whether God has accepted you, whether all your past guilt has gone.

And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected (1 Jn 2:3-5) We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 Jn 5:18-20)

Did you notice? "We know," and "we know," and "we know." But don't misunderstand that verse which says, "We know that anyone born of God doesn't commit sin." The writer is speaking about presumptuous, willful sinning, not the slips, the failures which we hate and detest and fight against. The same epistle says "If any man sin we have an Advocate" (1 Jn 2:1), and "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:8), and "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).

So you must not let your assurance be shaken by your failures and mistakes. To be human is to err but the Christian hates to err. He hates sin and fights it and flees from it. But even when a Christian does his best, he still must pray the Lord's prayer "Forgive us our trespasses."

In 1 John 5:13 it says: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."

Don't think that eternal life is something future. Eternal life is ours the moment we believe and for as long as we believe. It refers to a quality of existence as well as to its duration. The New Testament certainly teaches that we can have assurance. "We **know** we have passed from death unto life," "We **know** we have eternal life," "we **know** we are of God."

In ancient Israel the priests had to know their



pedigree or they could not be priests. And the soldiers had to know their pedigree or they couldn't go to war. Read about it in Nehemiah 7:61,64 and Numbers 1:18-20. And today we cannot be the priests and soldiers of Christ unless we know that we have been born again and that God is our Father.

If you've laid hold of Jesus as your savior, you have eternal life and know it. In the Gospel of John every chapter except two speaks of believing. The word "know" which in the epistle of John is found forty times in its Greek forms, occurs approximately seventy times in the Gospel of John. Believing in Christ and knowing our salvation go together. Let me read you one or two verses from the gospel of John:

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he hath sent" (Jn 6:28,29).

Now notice verse 40:

For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

### **Believing — What It Is and Isn't**

The question we must ask now is, "What is this believing?" If he that believes has eternal life, what is this believing? The Jews asked for a work of God to do and Jesus said, "This is the work, that you believe." It is vital because the same book says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him (Jn 3:36). Also, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he" (Jn 8:24).

What is this believing? One preacher says, "It means coming to Christ." What does that mean? Am I to sit on nettles all the time because the preacher doesn't tell me how to come to Christ? I can't fly to Christ, I can't walk on my feet to him. I come to Christ with my mind and my heart. I come to Christ by believing what he says.

The word "belief" comes from two old words "by live" or "live by." I believe what I live by. It is sometimes made too easy. It is sometimes made too hard. But if we see Jesus, that seeing brings believing, it creates it.

Let us talk about what it is not. Believing is not repenting. We can't even repent of ourselves. The Bible calls repentance a gift. We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience, than we can be pardoned without Christ. We can no more repent perfectly than we can live perfectly. But the cross is the wonder-working rod that can bring water out of the rock, repentance from our hard hearts. Repentance does not make us see Christ but to see Christ makes us repent. That's what it says in Acts: "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4).

The gospel is the opposite of legalism. Legalism says, "If you are good, God will love you." The gospel says "Though you are not good, God loves you. Believe it and he will make you good." We're not to look for holiness in order to be accepted of God. We are to accept our acceptance and that will bring holiness.

So faith isn't repenting and faith isn't reforming either. One might just as well try to leap over the moon

as serve God in the flesh. Whatever is not of faith is sin. Any attempts to reform oneself before one has accepted one's acceptance is sin. The Episcopalian Church has thirty Articles in its famous Creed and one of them says this:

Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit are not pleasant to God forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace. Rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but that they have the nature of sin.

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In other words, all our attempts to reform are so many splendid sins unless we believe what God has said about his love for us and Christ's death for us. No one is ever saved till they give up trying to save themselves. God is the author of life, one can't give it to oneself. It is like someone drowning. He has to give up his efforts, give himself up to the savior who has gone out to help him. We have to give ourselves up to Christ. Faith isn't reforming. It isn't trying, either.

### **Faith and Its Accomplishments**

Faith is trusting and trusting is reposing in the arms of Jesus, realizing that he has done what we could never do, believing that as we're not saved by our good works, neither are we lost by our bad works. Yes, we are saved by works, but not our own. We're saved by Christ's works. The Bible says the gift of God is eternal life. Don't try and buy it, it's a gift.

Read the last verses of Romans 5. Five times there we are told that righteousness is a gift. That shouldn't surprise us. The best things are free. What do you pay for a ray of sunshine? A drop of water? The sight of green grass and blue hills? A smile from a friend? The embrace of a spouse? Love that is bought is prostitution. God is not in that business.

So if you see your sinfulness, don't wait to make yourself better. How many people that think they are not good enough to come to Christ! How foolish to think that we can become better by our own efforts! The Bible asks the question, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? So can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." There's help for us only in God. We mustn't wait for stronger persuasion, for better opportunities, or holier tempers. We can do nothing for ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are. That's how the lepers came to him, that's how the blind men came to him. Just as they were.

He won't leave us as we are. The promise of Scripture is he'll cause us to keep his statutes, he'll cause us to walk in his way, he'll write his law in our hearts and our minds and we'll love to run in the way of his commandments. We'll walk at liberty because we keep his precepts. The righteousness of the law will be fulfilled in us who walk no longer after the flesh but after the Spirit. Sin will not have dominion over us because we've learned that we're not under the law as a method of salvation, we're under grace. And once we're under grace, sin loses its charms.



It's finished, yes, indeed  
Finished every jot  
Sinner, this is all you need  
Tell me, is it not?

**The Scripture says:**

"And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteous" (Rom 4:5) "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8)

So faith, trust or belief, is not repenting, it is not reforming, it is not trying and it is not feeling. Too many confuse faith and feeling. They are different. You can't help your feelings. If we could help our feelings, we'd never have a headache, we'd never feel ill, we'd never have a toothache. The Bible doesn't say, "He that feeleth" or "He that feeleth and believeth" hath everlasting life. Faith is not feeling.

Dwight L. Moody had trouble with one lady when trying to get this across. At last he said to her, "Madam, what was it that saved Noah, his feelings or the ark?" And she saw it. Christ is our Ark. The storms of the wrath of God have beaten upon him but if we're in him, we're safe and we'll be lifted up to the mountaintops of heaven and rest in him there.

- Look to Jesus, weary one, look and live
- Look at what the Lord has done, look and live
- Though unworthy, vile, unclean, look and live
- Look away from self and sin, look and live.

**Jesus the Center of Faith**

This faith that saves us is not faith in faith. Looking at our faith is like a man plucking his eye out to see whether it is in good shape. We're not to look to self, we're not to look to anything that we have. It's not faith itself but faith in Christ. Faith is the hand that takes him. It's Christ who is our life and our righteousness.

Hudson Taylor once said, "Not a striving to have faith but a looking off to the Faithful One is all we need." Do you see it? Christ received is holiness begun, Christ cherished is holiness advancing, Christ counted upon as never absent would be holiness complete.

**To believe means to put God back into the center of one's thinking.**

We don't mean by faith, just a mental "yes" or an "amen" to a set of doctrines, because the Scripture says, "The devils believe and tremble." They are certainly not right with God. What then is faith? Faith is a right relationship to a person, not to a creed. The heart of Christianity is not a set of beliefs, it is Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Substitute, our Surety, our Representative. When we receive Christ, we receive righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, redemption. Everything we need is in him.

We are not to seek for purity. When we receive the Pure One, Christ, purity will come. We are not to seek for patience, we don't have any. We are to receive the Patient One and then patience will come. We are not to seek for endurance, we don't have any. We are to seek for the One who endured in our stead. So faith is a relationship to a person. It has three ingredients: knowledge, assent, commitment. Our Lord said, "And this is eternal life, that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent" (Jn 17:3).

We need to know about Christ, who he is, what he's doing, what he's doing. And that knowledge becomes a

part of faith. We need to know that we are sinners, that we've broken his law, that none of us has any claims on God, that we've lived selfish lives, that we're judgment-bound. And then, seeing the disease, we look to the Great Physician and we assent to what he says about our case. That's our second point — assenting. Assent needs to become commitment. Even the devils assent that God is.

**The Test of True Faith**

I like the old, old story about commitment that's been told a thousand times by evangelists concerning Blondin taking a wheelbarrow across a tightrope over Niagara Falls and then asking the crowd did they believe he could put a man in there and safely take him across. There was a young minister who said, "Yes, Blondin, I believe. I think you could." Blondin said, "Get in the wheelbarrow." But the minister disappeared. He wouldn't commit himself. We have to get into the wheelbarrow with Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to him. If we believe in a doctor as a doctor, we'll go to him if we need a doctor. If we believe in a banker as a banker, we'll go to him if we need a banker. If we believe in the Savior as a savior, we'll go to him because we all need him.

So faith has knowledge, assent and commitment. It has been illustrated so often in Scripture. When the Israelites took the hyssop, which was just a weed outside their houses, and dipped it in the blood and applied it to the lintels and doorposts, that was faith. When the bitten Israelites looked at the serpent on the bannerstaff, that was faith.

Adam and Eve in the beginning took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and died spiritually. When Jesus came as the second Adam, he said, "Take, eat." And the taking of the emblems in the Lord's supper is symbolic of what faith is all about. It is receiving Jesus. "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth," says Scripture.

Man lost life by his unbelief. We regain life by believing. We've got to dance Adam's dance backwards. We have to repent of our unbelief, of Adam's unbelief, in order that we might live and live forever. To believe means to put God back into the center of one's thinking.

The greatest philosophical problem of our day is that of the one and the many. Man's search is for a single ordering principle that will bring unity to the manifold phenomena of life's experience. The answer to the philosophical problem of the one and the many is that God is the One and spiritual sanity comes when we recognize that. It was Archibald McLeash who said, "The sickness of our day is the sickness of disorder, multifarious phenomena, undisciplined, unorganized, uncomposed. Our desperate need is to impose upon the world of chaotic phenomena an order of understanding."

That understanding only comes through the gospel. The human mind cannot rest in a world uninterpreted. Only in Christ is truth, peace and righteousness found. You can know today that you have eternal life for whosoever will may come and all manner of sin and blasphemy will be forgiven unto those that come. For Christ has promised, "He that cometh I will in no-wise cast out." Come today, receive, believe and live eternally. □