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Being sure about our salvation

What makes someone a Christian? Perhaps you have asked that question. You may even have asked it about yourself. ‘Am I a Christian? Can I be sure that Jesus Christ has saved me from sin? Do I really love God?’

We can easily think we know the answers to these questions, yet we need to be cautious. Jesus Christ himself warns us that we can be mistaken. Think of what he said, as we read it in Matthew chapter 7 verses 22 and 23. There Jesus says that many people will tell him they prophesied in his name, or cast out demons, or did many wonders. Nevertheless, Jesus will tell them, ‘I never knew you.’

It follows that we need to be sure that Jesus has accepted us. We need to know whether we are Christian believers. In this book I want to help you do that.

Let me make the point first of all, that we *can* know for certain that Jesus Christ has saved us from sin, and made us his people. It is easier to be sure of this than some people think. For one thing, God tells us in the Bible that we can find out whether we belong to Jesus Christ. ‘Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith,’ God says to us (2 Corinthians 13:5). Then the apostle Paul tells us he is sure that nothing can separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). So we *can* know for sure that God loves us. David, in the old Testament, was certain of this, too. See what he says, in Psalm 27 verse 1, ‘The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?’

If you are not sure whether God is your saviour, think of it like this. All who receive Jesus Christ are called the children of God; ‘to all who did receive him ... he gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1:12). Have you received Christ in the way the Bible speaks of receiving him? Do you believe that Christ died in place of sinners, himself bearing God’s anger against their sin, instead of them? Do you know that you are a sinner? Have you turned away from all sin? Have you turned to Jesus Christ as your King to rule over you, as your Priest to pray for you, and as your Prophet to teach you? Are you resting and relying on Jesus Christ alone to bring you to God? Do you want to thank him and please him with all your heart and all your being? Well — what more can be meant by receiving Christ? If you have received Christ like that, the Bible assures you that you belong to God — you are one of his children.

I want to say how important it is to know that God has saved us. Our very life depends upon it. Yet Jesus warns us that the gate which leads to life is small and the way is narrow, and there are only a few that find it (Matthew 7:14). So it’s important to be sure we *are* on that way to life.

If we want to be sure, we must let the Bible teach us. The Bible is the rule which must guide us. If the Bible makes it clear that you belong to God — then accept it gladly. On the other hand, if the Bible shows you clearly that you are not a true Christian do not try to hide from the truth. There is no other guide to the truth than the Bible, as the Holy Spirit helps us to understand it.

In conclusion, we know if we are Christian believers. We can be sure that we belong to God. And it is most important that we know whether or not we are saved by Jesus Christ.

How is it, then, that so many people are uncertain about these things? Perhaps you yourself are not really sure. ‘Am I a Christian?’ you may perhaps often ask. ‘I think perhaps I am, but I’m not certain.’ Well, many people are unsure like that. Why? Let me suggest a few reasons.

First, people do not know about God and his ways of doing things. They do not realise that God did not have to send Jesus Christ into the world. There was nothing about us that made him do it. God did it because he loved us, not because we deserved it. ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son’ (John 3:16). There was no reason for God to love us. In fact, one of the first things a real Christian learns is that there is nothing good in him at all. Sin affects everything about him. That’s why the real Christian makes so much of Jesus Christ. He is the only one who is good. He is the only one who can do us good. He alone can forgive our sin and bring us to know God. So the true Christian lives now to please the Lord Jesus, and to become like him in character. This is God’s way of doing things. If we do not know about this way, we can never be certain whether we are Christians. The Christian’s hope is all in God. God alone can save sinners.

However, some people are unsure whether they are Christians because they do not know that God deals with people in different ways. They forget that people come to Christ by different means, and at different speeds. Zacchaeus came to Jesus Christ at once when Jesus called him (you can read about that at the start of Luke 19). Paul had to wait for three days (as we find in Acts 9). One person’s experience of coming to faith in Jesus differs from another’s. There is no one pattern which, in itself, makes you a Christian.

In the same way, no two Christians are equally holy. Some live very good lives. Others make sad mistakes and at times do what is wrong. Some enjoy God’s blessing and seem to be friends of God in a special way. Others enjoy far less of this nearness to God. Even so, all are true believers.

Secondly, we can be unsure about whether we are Christians because we are not honest with God. If we are holding on to some sin, though we know it is wrong, and if we are not asking God’s forgiveness and his help to fight against evil, then no wonder we are unsure whether we belong to God. If we are refusing to do what God says is right, we will be confused about whether we love God.

Thirdly, if we don’t really *want* to know whether we are real Christians, it is not surprising that we are confused about it all. We need to make some effort to see if we are born again. ‘Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves’, said Paul (2 Corinthians 13:5). We must work hard at this, says Peter (2 Peter 1:10) ‘be eager to make sure of these things,’ he says. If we spend all our time on our own interests, and are not even trying to settle this important question, no wonder we are still confused.

Fourthly, some people look for the wrong signs of being a Christian. Then because they cannot see these signs in themselves, they wonder whether they belong to God. For instance, some people think that real Christians can never sin. And then, because they themselves sin, they think they cannot be Christians. Yet the Bible shows that Christians sin from time to time. The apostle Paul describes his life as a struggle with sin (Romans 7:14-25). In the same way, others think that true Christians always receive direct answers to their prayers. But this is not a sign of a true believer. See what the Psalmist says in Psalm 13:1: ‘How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?’ Still others expect a special sense of the Holy Spirit, telling them they belong to God, as Romans chapter 8 verse 16 describes: ‘The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’. But they forget that believing in Jesus Christ comes first, and only then does the Holy Spirit assure us we belong to God; when you believed, you ‘were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit’ (Ephesians 1:13). If we look for such signs of being a Christian, which are not really signs at all, we are going to be confused about whether we belong to God. I hope you can see by now that it is important for us to know whether we are right with God, and that we can be sure about this.

I hope you can see, too, why people are confused about being a Christian. They forget that salvation is God’s gift, and not something they deserve. They forget that God deals with

people in a great many ways: quickly with some, more slowly with others. They forget that true Christians differ in holiness; they look for signs of being a Christian which are not true of all Christian people.

May I mention some other mistakes people make about being a Christian?

Firstly, a person can belong to God, yet not know it. The apostle John said; 'I write these things to you who believe ... that you may know that you have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). This suggests that there were people who did not know that they had God's life in them.

Secondly, not everyone is equally certain about belonging to Christ. One person may only feel able to say, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' (Mark 9:24). Paul, however, could say, 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God' (Romans 8:38-39). In the same way, the confidence of Christians can change: it does not always remain at the same strength.

Thirdly, true Christians cannot always answer all the arguments against their faith, yet all Christians will always know they believe Christ; 'I know whom I have believed' (2 Timothy 1:12).

There is also a false confidence in Christ. Parables like that of the wise and foolish virgins, at the start of Matthew chapter 25, teach us that many can appear to be true Christians, but have no real, personal faith in Jesus Christ.

I hope you can see that we need to be sure we are genuine Christians — and that we *can* be sure of that.