

## **“How Can I Know I’ve Been Saved?”**

Question: Have you been saved? Are you sure? Do you know beyond the shadow of any doubt that God has forgiven you of your past sins? I believe that if the word of God is true—and it IS—that we CAN absolutely know whether or not we have been saved. The apostle John assured the saints of old that there are things that we can know, such as the fact that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, because the Spirit of God bears testimony to that fact. He said that the Spirit, the water and the blood all testify to the fact that Jesus was and is the Christ: the Spirit, who vindicated Him; the water of His baptism, which was God’s sign of approval of Him as He began His ministry; and the blood shed on Calvary, which sealed our redemption and the new covenant. All of these, John says, bear witness to the truth claims of Jesus. John goes on to assure them as follows:

**John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”**

He is speaking to believers who have a present, continuing, obedient faith, and he says that it is possible to possess the hope of eternal life. We can have life in Christ now and in eternity. We CAN know if we’ve been saved. But how? How can we know that God has forgiven us of our sins and that we have life in Jesus? Let’s look to the scriptures for the answer.

To be saved from sin is to be pardoned from sin. God, the holy and righteous judge, is the only One who can grant such pardon. He is the offended, we are the offenders. Therefore, pardon takes place in God’s mind and not ours. If someone sins against you, it’s up to you to extend forgiveness to them. They can’t just say, *I’m going to forgive myself on behalf of them or well, I just feel like that person is a reasonable, good, loving and fair person, so I think that he would/has forgiven me.* No, it’s up to YOU to extend the forgiveness to THEM if they have offended you.

You may go out and break some law of the land. You can try to reconcile that in your mind or justify or pardon yourself in your way of thinking, but you’re not off the hook; the government is going to hold you accountable for that. It’s up to the authorities that be to issue a pardon from the penalty for that crime. In the same way, pardon must take place in the mind of God and not our minds. So, how can we know that we have been pardoned in the mind of God? That’s a very good question. Evidence of any pardon must come from Him rather than from within ourselves. A criminal cannot pardon himself; his pardon must have the seal of the governor.

There are many people today who claim *oh yes, I’ve been saved, or I believe that God has forgiven me of my sins.* In fact, the overwhelming majority of people today who claim any kind of belief in God or heaven would tell you that they believe they are saved and are on good terms with God. But the evidence that they offer for that claim is often incredibly subjective. How do you know that you’ve been forgiven of your sins? How can you be sure that you’re in a right relationship with the Lord? Some will offer as evidence of pardon a dream or a vision, some kind of supernatural encounter. They can be very convincing with this: *I had a dream and I awoke from it understanding that God loves me and has forgiven me of my sins...*and so on. But the Bible warns us about dreams.

**Ecclesiastes 5:3 “For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.”**

What he means by that is the business of the day, which is on our minds anyway, influences what we dream about. Many times our dreams are simply the product of what our minds have been dwelling upon, even if it's on the subconscious level.

**Jeremiah 23:25 "I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed."**

Those prophets Jeremiah spoke about were telling lies in the name of the Lord. In other words, you can't trust a dream. Now, there were visions that took place in the book of **Acts** that facilitated the gospel getting to someone who had not heard it. But not one person was saved by what was revealed, shown or said in any such vision. Someone says, *what about Saul of Tarsus? Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. Was he not saved when Jesus appeared to him?* Some will claim, *I was saved like Saul: I saw a light. I heard a voice.* Saul saw a light, indeed. Jesus met him on the Damascus road when he was on his way to commit more persecution against Christians. But when Jesus confronted and spoke to Saul, it was not an evidence of pardon. He wasn't saved on the Damascus road. We can read what the Lord said to him.

**Acts 9:6 "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."**

Some would think that the Lord said, *Arise, your sins are now forgiven and you are a child of God.* But that's NOT what the Lord said. Saul was told to **"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."** That's the way it always happened--even when there was a vision involved that facilitated getting a gospel preacher to a sinner--it always involved the gospel being preached by a man to one who had not heard the gospel, so that they could hear it, believe it, obey it and be saved.

Well, Saul later called Paul recounts his conversion of how he went and waited in the city until Ananias came to him and told him this:

**Acts 22:16 "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."**

What was the evidence of Saul's forgiveness? Was it not the gospel that he heard? *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins...?"* Would God not be faithful to His word if He did what Ananias, who was speaking on behalf of the Lord, told Saul that He would do? That if he was baptized, his sins would be washed away.

We can also read about the first Gentile convert to Christianity, Cornelius. He received a vision as well.

**Acts 10:30-33 "And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."**

What was the vision all about? It was all about getting Peter down to the house where Cornelius was, so that he and his family could hear the gospel, obey it and be saved. The angel of the Lord didn't speak forgiveness or peace to Cornelius. He didn't give him some evidence that he had been saved because he hadn't been saved. He told him to send for Peter, who would come and tell him what to do to be saved. Peter, who himself had received a vision also to convince him to go down to this Gentile's household and preach the gospel, goes to Caesarea to Cornelius's house and he preaches to him commanding him to do what?

**Acts 10:47-48 "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."**

There you have it. God has orchestrated this coming together of Cornelius's household and Peter, and as Cornelius said, "**Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.**" (v.33) So, visions and supposed 'supernatural encounters' are NOT evidences of pardon. When visions occurred in the first century during the miraculous age, it was to get an inspired man in contact with an uninspired man so he could hear the truth of the gospel and be saved.

Then others will say, *I know I've been pardoned because I heard a voice, a still, small voice.* Be careful. Remember in **I Samuel 3** when the Lord spoke to Samuel in the night, but he thought it was the voice of Eli, the priest. Samuel mistook the voice of God for the voice of a man. Today, we have the very opposite going on: there are a lot of people mistaking the voices of men for the voice of God. Be careful about these voices that you claim to hear and would follow.

Some will tell you, *I have a good feeling. I really can't explain it, it's better felt than told, but I wouldn't take a stack of Bibles this tall for this feeling I have in my heart, I know in my heart that I have been forgiven and that God smiles on me because I am saved.* Friend, be careful. Feelings are entirely subjective. If feelings were evidence of divine approval, stop and think: that would make all religions in the world illegitimate. Every religion in the world has sincere followers, whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not. Pagan religions have sincere followers. People throughout the ages who sacrificed their babies to pagan idols and pagan gods were sincere! They had a good "feeling" that they were pleasing said deity, but that doesn't make their religion legitimate. And a feeling doesn't make your religion legitimate either.

Notice that during the ministry of Jesus the people who were personally forgiven by Jesus received His word of pardon. We read about the paralytic in **Matthew 9**, who was brought to Jesus on a pallet and let down through a hole in the roof, to the room where Jesus was teaching. Remember what Jesus said to him?

**Matthew 9:2 "And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."**

Remember what Jesus said to the penitent thief on the cross?

**Luke 23:43 "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."**

You see, while Jesus was here in His flesh, walking among men and speaking to men, He could distribute His forgiveness and His divine blessing and favor as He saw fit. But now, it's different. Jesus still pardons men, but He does so on the terms of His will. The Hebrew writer makes that abundantly plain.

**Hebrews 9:15-17 "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."**

We understand this concept in temporal affairs. As long as I am alive, I can give my property and my possessions to whomever I wish, as I see fit. I can give you or another person a thousand dollars, as long as I have it to give. I can deed a piece of property over to you, if I have one to give. But when I die, it changes. When I die, I have a will that goes into effect, and only those who meet the conditions of the will are entitled to and will receive the inheritance. The Hebrew writer is telling us that that's exactly what happened when Jesus died. His blood sealed the new covenant and now, we are saved on the basis and upon the conditions of the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came and revealed the terms of pardon after Jesus' death. Those terms are now contained in the word which the Holy Spirit inspired and left for us.

**Ephesians 1:13-14 "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."**

Paul says that we have "***the earnest of our inheritance,***" in other words we have the evidence of salvation in the form of the Holy Spirit. Someone says, *that's how I know: I have the Spirit. I have the Holy Spirit and that tells me that I'm saved.* Let me ask you this: how do you know that you have the Holy Spirit? Friend, you don't know one thing about the Holy Spirit that the word of God hasn't told you about Him. In fact, you wouldn't know that there WAS a Holy Spirit without the word of God, which the Holy Spirit revealed. Even the miracles of the first century that the Holy Spirit empowered men to perform didn't prove that there was a Holy Spirit; the miracles of the Holy Spirit proved the word that the Holy Spirit was inspiring men to speak.

So yes, the Holy Spirit evidences our salvation, but He does so through the testimony of His word.

**Romans 8:14-16 "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:"**

What a wonderful passage! Notice that he says that ***the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*** We don't have to guess, we don't have to wonder. It's not up to us to think or feel if it is the case...***the Spirit bears witness with our spirit.*** How does He do that? The Spirit doesn't communicate with anybody through feelings and intuitions. The Holy Spirit communicates through the form of words (**I Corinthians 2**).

Notice also that Paul says that *the Spirit bears witness with our spirit*, not to our spirit. In other words, there is a harmony that exists between the Holy Spirit and what He has revealed and what the human spirit has responded to. Here are some examples:

**Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

The Spirit says that I must hear the gospel. The human spirit receives the hearing of the gospel. It hears the gospel and processes what it hears and mingles it with faith, if it is a good and honest heart.

**John 8:24 “...for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”**

The Spirit says that belief in Jesus as the Son of God is essential. Do you believe? You say, *oh yes, I believe. The Holy Spirit says that I must believe, and my human spirit has responded to that. There is a harmony here in what the Spirit says I must do and what I have done in order to be saved.* Wait a minute, though. That’s not all that the Spirit said. The Spirit said that you must repent.

**Acts 3:19 “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;”**

Did you really repent of the sinful life that you were living? The Holy Spirit says that that is a condition of your sins being forgiven. Have you also confessed Christ before men?

**Acts 2:37-38 “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”**

**Romans 10:10 “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”**

What confession?

**Matthew 10:32 “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”**

**Acts 8:37 “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**

Did you confess Christ before you obeyed Him in baptism? I might add, it’s hard for a baby to do that. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Peter as he preached on the Day of Pentecost to tell those people how to receive the forgiveness of sins.

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The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this to the church at Galatia.

**Galatians 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”**

That's what the Holy Spirit says that I must do. Those are conditions placed upon our salvation—not by me or any other preacher. Not by some creed, but by the Holy Spirit. Were you baptized for the remission of your sins? Understand that most preachers—MOST preachers today DO NOT preach that baptism is for the remission of sins, even though the Bible says that it IS. And they don't baptize for the remission of sins, even though the Bible says that's WHY we're to be baptized (**Acts 2:38**).

So, does your idea of salvation match up with the Holy Spirit's testimony? Does *the Spirit bear witness with your spirit* that you, indeed, are the child of God? It doesn't matter what I say or what you say. It doesn't matter how you feel or what you think you saw or what I think I saw or heard in a dream or a vision or some kind of epiphany. The question is this: does the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is written down in the scriptures, match up with your claim to salvation?

If you go out and purchase a piece of property, you record a deed. You want a deed that entitles you to that property. You don't go away from that transaction saying, *well, I just feel like this land from about here over to about there belongs to me*. That won't pass. Or you can't say, *Farmer Brown came and told me that this acreage over here is mine*. If Farmer Brown is no longer around, how are you going to verify that? How are we to know that you are telling the truth? A deed will verify it.

You see, the Holy Spirit sealed our redemption through His revelation which announces, offers and assures us of the terms and benefits of pardon. Therefore, we can trust what we can read in the scriptures. I would not believe nor trust what I could not read in the Bible. Your feelings, think-so's and hope-so's don't guarantee anything. But we can trust the word of God. Isn't it so very sad that we'll be so very careful with menial and mundane matters of life, but turn around and be so very careless and unconcerned when it comes to our eternal souls? We'll require a deed of property, a title as evidence that we've bought a house or a car, yet with our souls we're content to say, *well, I have a feeling. I just feel good about it. I think God has forgiven me*. Well friend, God gives us a deed. He gives us a title. And that is the testimony of His word, if we've met the conditions of the gospel, laid out in His word.

Have you obeyed the gospel? If you haven't, you're not saved. I know that sounds harsh, but it's true. You're not saved. But you can know today beyond the shadow of a doubt that God for Christ's sake has forgiven you of your sins, and that you are His child. We would be so happy to help you take the steps of obedient faith outlined in the word of God and baptize you into Christ today.