



HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE SAVED AND ETERNALLY SECURE?

Part 1

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INTRODUCTION

In a letter to Jean-Baptiste in 1789, and re-printed in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* in 1917, Benjamin Franklin wrote the enduring and recurrent phrase *"But in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."* Although this philosophical phrase was a rather fatalistic and sardonic idiom, it is still popular in modern times as most people relate to its practical applicability to everyday life. However, from a biblical viewpoint this idiom is only partially correct, as it is also a certainty that in this world every human being from the beginning to the end of history will choose if he or she will spend eternity in either heaven and eternal bliss or hell and eternal torment.

Although this decision would seem to be an easy choice, there are many noteworthy diversions that can minimize the reality and importance of this eternal decision. Today, many people find it much easier to not repent of their sins than submit their lives to Christ and become accountable to God which is similar to the self-imposed legalistic righteousness of the Pharisees mentioned in numerous biblical accounts. Instead, it is commonly fashionable to be considered a good person, live a commendable life, be a member of an established church, sing in a choir, being associated with an established religion, raised in a Christian

family, and other similar notable attributes that by-pass the exclusiveness of repentance and faith required by Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven. Several examples are:

- A recent survey by America's Research Group of millennials (born after 1980) who regularly attend church indicated that 40% stated outright that they "*were not born again*" and 65% said they believed "*being a good person would get someone into heaven*"
- A recent Pew Study indicated that about 60% of people in American evangelical churches believe "*many religions can lead to eternal life*" and 70% of Americans with a religious affiliation agree that "*many religions lead to eternal life*"

"OTHER" THEOLOGIES

Not surprisingly, there are numerous "*other theologies*" that stand in stark contrast to Christianity. Virtually all of these religions claim to have the answers to life's major questions-problems and/or confidently proclaim similar promises such as "*All roads lead to heaven, It doesn't matter what you believe in, as long as you believe in something, There is one God-He loves you, You can enjoy your best life now*" and so on. Interestingly, all major world religions except Christianity teach one common theme; the way to be reconciled to God is through works and rituals.

Other popular variations of other/alternative theology themes are doctrines based on religious beliefs that substitute *easy believism* that stands in stark contrast to the exclusivity of biblical truth. Some examples are:

Christian Universalism¹

Christian Universalism includes the belief in the doctrine of universal reconciliation, the view that all human beings will ultimately be restored to a right relationship with God in heaven. Two distinguishing features are "*At last every individual of the human race shall become holy and happy,*" and "*Hell may or may not exist, and if it does, it is not eternal.*"

Philosophical/Religious Pluralism²

All religious paths to heaven are equally valid, promoting coexistence. As a result, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was completely unnecessary.

Hyper-grace Theology³

Describes a new wave of teaching that emphasizes the grace of God to the exclusion of vital teachings such as repentance and confession of sin. It is believed that all sin, past, present, and future has already been forgiven, so there is no need for a believer to ever confess their sin. As a result, believers are not responsible for their sin and when God looks at the human race, He sees only a holy and righteous people.

Free Grace Theology⁴

A popular viewpoint that is based on the principle that responding to the *call to believe* in Jesus Christ through *faith alone* is all that is necessary to receive eternal life and guarantee an assurance of heaven. Then, if a person further responds to the *call to follow Jesus*, they become a disciple who will experience sanctification and also receive particular rewards based on works accomplished for God on this earth.

With numerous religions, theologies, books, videos, movies and television programs devoted to eternal life and heaven, is it possible for a person who is committed to securely knowing that they are saved, born again, converted, a Christian, a believer, in Christ, and/or other applicable terms to *unconditionally* know that they are saved and going to heaven? Lets consider that question by looking at the following four considerations:

- Common Evangelical Definitions
- Born Again
- How Do You Know You Are Saved
- How Do you Know You Are Eternally Secure

COMMON EVANGELICAL DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are commonly used in Christianity and are presented for a scriptural reference and an overview clarification of these terms.

GOSPEL

The word *gospel* literally means *good news* and occurs 93 times in the Bible, entirely in the New Testament. The basic elements of the gospel are clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6:

- Christ died for our sins
- Christ was buried
- Christ was raised from the dead on the third day
- Witnessed by over 500 people
- Our salvation and eternal life in heaven are guaranteed through Christ

SALVATION

Broadly defined in our discussion, salvation is a spiritual deliverance from the judgment of sin, the wrath of God (Romans 5:9), and from a death and eternity without Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). Essentially, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His subsequent resurrection achieved our salvation (Romans 5:10, Ephesians 1:7) and is merited to us by the Grace of God. Salvation is determined by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) and demonstrated by faithfulness to obey God's will alone. However, the issue of losing one's salvation is a matter of significant debate and controversy within the Christian faith as some Christians live in fear

of being able to lose their salvation and eternal security. Conversely, there are some Christians that believe that a believer will not lose their salvation. To answer this dilemma, let's review scripture.

Initially, a "Christian" is not a person who has *simply* said a prayer, raised their hand, walked down an aisle, and/or attends church on a regular basis. Although these items as well as other noteworthy actions can be a part of the Christian experience, they are not the foundational emphasis of the biblical attributes of a Christian. A true Christian can be biblically defined as a person who has fully trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord, possesses the Holy Spirit, and has fully submitted to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). 1 John 2:3-6 clearly defines the difference between a person who is a true Christian and a person who is not; *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word; truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."* Obedience is the external and visible proof of salvation. The test of obedience to Christ as Lord constitutes assurance that a person is genuinely saved. Based on the previous definition, a true Christian/believer cannot lose their salvation. Eternal life/security by definition cannot be temporary as Romans 8:39 clearly reveals that; *"there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

On the other hand, people who profess to be a Christian and know Jesus Christ at one time but do not display the characteristics of a Christian and/or later deny Him were never really saved to begin with. 1 John 2:19 says; *"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."* A true believer will not depart from the faith (Philippians 1:6). As a result, those who do so are revealing that they were never truly saved (John 8:31, Hebrews 3:14). Remember; *"Now, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Romans 8:9)."*

CONVERSION

To convert is defined as *"to turn"* which indicates that a person turns away from something to something else. To convert to Christianity, a person must turn to Jesus and eternal life from sin and eternal damnation by repenting from sin and exercising faith in Jesus as Lord. Acts 16:30 asks the question; *"What must I do to be saved"* which recognizes a need for conversion and salvation. The simple answer is found in John 3:16.

CHRISTIAN

The word *Christian* was first applied to the apostles in Antioch and means “*of the party of Christ*” because they were followers of Christ and had committed their lives to walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). The evidence of a true Christian is displayed in both faith and action (2 Corinthians 5:17, James 2:18). The Bible defines a true Christian as one who has personally received Jesus Christ as Savior, who trusts in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness of sins, has the Holy Spirit residing within, and whose life shows evidence of change consistent with faith in Jesus Christ.

CARNAL CHRISTIAN

The word *carnal* is translated from the Greek word *sarkikos* and means fleshly. Its usage is found in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 where Paul is speaking to the Corinthian believers (brethren) about their carnality, so we can conclude that Christians can be carnal. However, when a person is saved from sin and eternal judgment (2 Corinthians 5:21), a true believer cannot fall away so as not to return to a previous position of salvation (Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 3:15). Still, believers do sin but can be forgiven no matter how many times they do sin. The mark of a true believer is they always come back to Jesus.

Nevertheless, there should be serious doubts about a believer who claims to be a Christian but lives a life that says otherwise as a person who lives a life that is controlled by sin is not truly a Christian. Remember that “*whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, James 4:4.*” The key point is that while Christians can be carnal for a time, a true Christian will not remain carnal for a lifetime. From a practical perspective, there are only two types of Christians (and you should be able to tell the difference).⁵

Note: The word “*backslide*” does not appear in the New Testament but does appear in the Old Testament and applies to the constant backsliding of Israel in turning their backs and rebelling against God (Hosea 11:7).

FAITH

Saving faith must demonstrate itself to be genuine by producing (or accompanied by) good works. Remember that it is possible to *profess* saving faith but not *have* saving faith (James 2:14-26) as even the demons believe and tremble (James 2:19). The presence of good works distinguishes true faith from a mere claim to faith.

EASY BELIEVISM

A common source of this phrase is in regards to those who believe that they are saved because they prayed a prayer with no real conviction of sin and no real faith in Christ as their Lord. Praying a prayer is easy, but there is more to salvation than just mouthing words. Remember that James 2:19 says; “*You believe*

that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble." The basic problem rests with an understanding of the word believe and/or belief. True salvation comes with a genuine repentance and resultant life change. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says; *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* Some people say *"I believe in God,"* or *"I prayed a prayer."* Easy believism fails to recognize that a person must accept Jesus Christ as Lord and **exhibit a changed life**.

CONFESSION

The act of confession can be separated into two perspectives. First, the passage in Romans 10:9 states; *"that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* refers to salvation in which God has taken our sins and removed them from us *"as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgression from us"* (Psalm 103:12). However, this confession must be accompanied by a deep personal conviction, and without reservation that Jesus is that person's master. It must be remembered that this is not a simple acknowledgement that He is God and Lord of the universe as the demons even acknowledge that to be true (James 2:19).

Second, a continual confession of sins is necessary for cleansing and to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation.

ADVOCATE

Christians have a spiritual advocate in Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1) who defends our case before God. Although mankind has broken the Law and is accused before God by Satan the accuser (Revelation 12:10), Jesus Christ acts as our defense who presents a solution for our sinfulness that is based on His death on the cross that paid for our sins. As a result, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law for sinful mankind so that our punishment for sin can be placed on his shoulders and we can be declared not guilty (Matthew 5:17, Romans 3:24, Isaiah 53:55).

HEAVEN

The word *heaven* is found 276 times in the New Testament alone. Specifically, Scripture refers to three heavens (2 Corinthians 12:2) as follows:

- 1) The sky or firmament that contains the clouds
- 2) Interstellar/outer space that contains stars, planets, etc
- 3) Dwelling place of God where Jesus promised to prepare a place for true believers (John 14:2-3, Revelation 21:1-7)

The reality of heaven is impossible to fully describe (1 Corinthians 2:9), but it is easy to state that the best attribute of heaven is the presence of our Lord

and Savior (1 John 3:2) where we can enjoy his presence for eternity. *See Revelation 21 for a description of the New Heaven (New Jerusalem).*

HELL

Interestingly, significantly more people believe in the existence of heaven than the existence of hell, and it is also not unusual for people to believe in the reality of heaven while rejecting the reality of hell. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly and explicitly states that hell is a real place where the people who reject God are sent after death (Revelation 20:15), and is the infinite and the eternal just penalty for death that mankind has inherited because of sin (Romans 6:23). Due to the reality and eternal nature of hell, Jesus spent more time warning people about the dangers of hell than He did in comforting them with the hope and reality of heaven. The description of hell in the Bible does not elaborate on its specific location, but it does give an account of what being in hell is like:

- Bottomless pit (Revelation 20:3)
- Compared to burning (Mark 9:48, Matthew 18:9, Luke 16:24)
- Compared to being in utter darkness (Matthew 22:13)
- Associated with intense grief and horror (Matthew 8:12, Mark 9:44)
- Place of wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30)
- Eternal fire (Matthew 25:41)
- Everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- Lake of burning sulfur where the wicked are tormented day and night (Revelation 20:10)

The preceding accounts of hell describe a location that is far worse than humans can ever imagine. However, through Jesus Christ, mankind can escape this eternal fate (John 3:16, 18, 36) and spend eternity in heavenly bliss.

ATONEMENT

A concise definition of atonement is *“the redeeming of humanity by the death of Jesus.”* Because of sin, mankind is destined to spend eternity in hell as payment for our sins. Romans 3:23 delineates that all of mankind are sinners and the penalty for sinfulness is death (Romans 6:23). However, the death and shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross satisfied the payment that is due for the sinfulness of mankind (Isaiah 53:5) as mankind is unable to save itself and needs a substitute for its sinfulness. The death of Jesus Christ is the substitutionary atonement for that sinfulness and a pathway to eternal life (1 Peter 2:24).

REDEMPTION

Redeem means to *buy out* and is only possible through the blood and death of Christ (Colossians 1:14). The death of Christ on the cross redeemed believers from sin and its consequences and also purchased their freedom from eternal damnation (Matthew 20:28, 1 Timothy 2:6). To be redeemed is to be forgiven,

justified, set free, adopted into the family of God, and reconciled (Psalm 130:7, Acts 30:28).

CONDEMNATION

Rebellion and sin against God began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) leading to death and the alienation from God by Adam and Eve. As a result, their sin has been passed on through all of mankind causing mankind to be under the condemnation of God. To have no condemnation means to be found innocent of an accusation (not guilty) and no sentence pronounced. The Bible clearly states that every human being will be judged by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10, John 5:27), but believers who are in Christ Jesus will not be found guilty on Judgment Day (Romans 8:1, John 3:18).

REPENTANCE

A practical definition of this word is *to change ones mind* as scripture indicates that true repentance is a change of mind that will result in a change of actions (Acts 26:20). Repentance always brings a person to the point of saying; *"I have sinned"* and means it. A person proves the power of repentance by being the opposite of what they were previously – accomplished by the grace of God. This is a sure sign that God is at work in a believer's life. Anything less is simply sorrow and/or shame for having made a foolish mistake. Initially, unbelievers repent of their sins initially when they are saved, and then as believers, continually repent of their sins to keep the joy and blessing of their relationship to God (1 John 1:9). The foundation of Christianity is the resurrection and repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

JUSTIFICATION

From a biblical perspective, justification is to declare righteous, to make one right with God. This means that God declares those who receive Christ to be righteous, based on Christ's righteousness being imputed to the accounts of those who receive Christ (Romans 3:23-26, Romans 5:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:21). We are justified and declared righteous at the moment of our salvation. Justification brings life for all who believe (Romans 5:18-19).

REGENERATION

Another word for regeneration is rebirth and is related to the biblical phrase *born again*. In the natural state, mankind is dead in trespasses and sins until being made alive (regenerated by Christ) which happens when a person places their faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:1). Regeneration results in a radical change from degenerate to regenerate and a new quality and character to our lives, a new principle of life (Romans 6:4).

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Scripture describes a righteousness person as right or just, trusting and holding to God (Psalm 33:18-22). However, it is not possible for any person to attain

perfect righteousness on his or her own merit, as God's standard is perfection (Romans 3:10). But, righteousness is only possible through the cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:21). Believers are made righteous in the sight of God on account of what Jesus Christ has done.

RESURRECTION

Lets consider the perspective of resurrection from the following four viewpoints:

- First, the first great resurrection was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20 among others) and is the foundation of the Christian faith and the Gospel (Acts 13:30). Jesus was crucified, died, buried, and rose the third day according to the scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), was witnessed by over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:12-34), and He is coming again. Without the resurrection, the Gospel becomes another hollow religion. If God does not have the power to overcome death then He is not worthy of our faith and worship and we have a lack of hope. If we believe in Jesus Christ and His resurrection, then we will also experience a resurrection and an eternal life that Jesus gives from sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:53-57). The resurrection is the triumphant and magnificent victory for every believer. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is important because it proves who Jesus is
- Second is the perspective of the resurrection of believers that will occur at the time of the rapture (John 14:1-3, 1 Corinthians 15:12-34, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). All those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will be resurrected at the rapture as Christ takes believers back to heaven with Him (John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and will be comprised of Christians who have died and those who are still alive. At this resurrection, believers will be given new resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)
- Third is a great resurrection that occurs when Christ returns to earth (His second coming) at the end of the tribulation period (Revelation 6-18). Some people who were left behind after the rapture and go through the tribulation period will be saved although some will die for their faith (Revelation 6:9-11, 7:9-17, 13:7, 15-17, 17:6, 19:1-2). These believers (those who are dead and still alive) along with the believers who were resurrected at the rapture will reign with Christ for 1,000 years during the Millennium (Revelation 20:4-6)
- The fourth or final resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennium (thousand year reign of Christ) when all of the unbelieving dead of all the ages (John 5:25-29) are raised to appear before Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11). They will be judged and their punishment will be commensurate with their works. If their names do not

appear in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27), they will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15)

PROPITIATION

The word means "*appeasement*" or "*satisfaction*." The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross satisfied the demands of God's holiness for the punishment of sin (Romans 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:3). So Jesus propitiated or satisfied God (1 John 2:1-2).

SANTIFICATION

Sanctify means to "*set apart*." A believer has been set apart by becoming a member of the family of God (1 Corinthians 1:30). This act is a work that God performs and is an intricate part of salvation and a connection with Christ (Hebrews 10:10). Sanctification can also be viewed as believers are to be set apart in their daily lives (1 Peter 1:14-16).

SIN

The biblical definition of *sin* is the transgression of the law of God and rebellion against God, which is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Sin had its beginning with Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-15, Luke 10:18) when Lucifer (renamed Satan) was not content with his status (pride) and wanted to be higher than God (1 Timothy 3:6). He then brought sin to the human race in the Garden of Eden where he tempted Eve; "*to be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5). When Adam and Eve rebelled and sinned against God (Genesis 3), sin was then passed down through all generations of mankind (Romans 5:12).

Another type of sin is that which is committed every day by every person. Because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, we constantly commit personal sins. However, believers have been freed from the eternal penalty of sin and by confessing those sins to God and asking for forgiveness, we are forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

ANTINOMIANISM

The word antinomianism means against the law and comes from two Greek words, *anti*, meaning "against;" and *nomos* meaning "law." Paul addresses the issue of antinomianism in Romans 6:1-2; "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*" that confronts the issue of legalism. Although Christians are saved by grace, antinomianism is not a license to *willingly* continue to sin under grace.

Part II

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BORN AGAIN

According to statistics, there are about 4,200 religions in the world. Based on this statistic, a speculative question that is often asked is; *“why the large existence of so many religions?”* The biblical explanation for the large number of religions is found in the first chapter of Romans:

“(19) Because what may be known of God is manifest (obvious) in them, for God has shown it to them. (20) For ever since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, (21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened”

Romans 1:19-21

These verses indicate that the truth of God is seen and known by every human being in history, yet it has been rejected by the foolishness of the dark hearts of mankind. This is a primary reason why the *“all roads lead to heaven, religious rituals, salvation by works”* and other viewpoints of secular mankind and secular religions offer the ability to attend a church and/or be associated with some type of religious organization and feel like a person has fulfilled some type of a religious and/or eternal obligation. Also, these viewpoints are commonly perceived by many people as being able to be reconciled to God through works and rituals, thereby earning their way to heaven and assuring some type of eternal security. Regrettably, these people do not want to submit to a God who is sovereign, omnipotent, and a judge as they would be more comfortable with an easy pathway to heaven and/or a distant figure that can be called upon for help when necessary.

Although many people may surmise they are a Christian the account of the narrow and wide gate in the book of Matthew paints a completely different picture by stating that *few* will make the right decision for eternal life:

“(13) Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”

Matthew 7:13-14

In these two verses, Jesus indicates there are two gates and two groups of people as follows:

- First, one gate is narrow and difficult to find and the other gate is wide and easy to find, yet both gates *imply* that each is the way to heaven and eternal life but only the narrow gate leads to eternal life. The narrow gate is by faith, constricted and precise, and represents true salvation that leads to eternal life (Acts 4:12). The wide gate includes all religions of self-righteousness and works with numerous ways to eternal life, but leads to hell, not heaven
- Secondly, the two groups of people that are mentioned are differentiated between the *few* that find the narrow gate and the *many* that use the wide gate. Christ continually emphasized the difficulty of following Him (Matthew 10:38, 16:24-26, Acts 14:22). Salvation is by grace alone, but is not easy. It calls for knowledge of the truth, repentance, submission to Christ as Lord, and a willingness to obey His will and Word

Note: A complete set of notes from the July 29, 2015, Dove program "Which Way to Heaven" with Perry Atkinson and John Mittendorf can be requested from hispeoplerejoice@gmail.com

So, based on the account of the narrow and wide gate and the statement by Jesus that few will find the narrow gate, let's consider the primary aspect that leads a person to the narrow gate, salvation and eternal life.

In the scriptural dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus (the Pharisee) that is found in the 3rd chapter of John, Jesus specifically outlines the requirement for salvation and specifically uses the term "*born again*." Additionally and for comparative purposes, the account of the Rich Young Ruler that is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke specifically explains how to acquire "*eternal life*." So, let's first go to John and consider the phrase *born again* and then consider the dialog between Jesus, the Rich Young Ruler, and the phrase *eternal life*:

(1) "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him. (3) Jesus answered and said to him, most assuredly; I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (4) Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be **born again** when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? (5) Jesus answered; most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be **born again**. (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it,

*but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (9) Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be? (10) Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? (11) Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the son of Man who is in heaven. (14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have **eternal life**. (16) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"*
John 3:1-16

In this classic passage, Nicodemus came for a clandestine meeting with Jesus at night regarding a missing element in his life; eternal life. Of particular interest, Nicodemus had an impressive assortment of earthly qualifications that consisted of:

Pharisee

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, an expert in moral laws, and likely had memorized most all of the Old Testament, as he had likely studied the scriptures since he was 5 years old.

Sanhedrin

Nicodemus was an esteemed member of the Sanhedrin that was the highest court in Israel (Supreme Court of Israel) and was comprised of 70 men. There was no higher membership in Israel. Nicodemus is called "*the ruler of the Jews*" in v. 1.

Theologian

Jesus refers to Nicodemus in v. 10 as the "*teacher of Israel*." This indicates that he was a renowned master-teacher in the nation of Israel and an established religious authority *par excellence*.

Status

Nicodemus enjoyed a high level of importance among his fellow Rabbis, other teachers, and within the nation of Israel.

Nevertheless, even with the distinguished attributes of education, status, religious affiliations, precise work ethics and an advanced level of theological training, Nicodemus knew there was a missing ingredient in his life and came to Jesus wanting to know how to obtain eternal life. At the beginning of their discourse, Jesus answers a question that Nicodemus does not ask (although Jesus knew the heart of Nicodemus) by stating in verse 3; "*Most assuredly I say to you,*

unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." A more literal translation of this sentence would be:

- *Most Assuredly* is also found as *verily, verily, or truly, truly*. All of these phrases are translated from the Greek word *amen* which is used as an emphasis marker and introduction to a statement of pivotal importance⁶
- In the phrase *born again*, "again" from the Greek word *anōthen* is translated as *born from on high* or *born from above*⁷
- Therefore, a rough translation of verse 3 into modern language would be:
"Listen Up, Listen Up Nicodemus, unless one is born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God"

Jesus then expands on verse 3 by stating in verse 5; *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Here, Jesus is not referring to literal water but to the need for cleansing as described in Ezekiel:

(24) "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out from all countries, and bring you into your own land. (25) Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. (26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep My judgments and do them."
Ezekiel 36:24-27

When water is figuratively used in the Old Testament, it typically refers to renewal or spiritual cleansing, especially when used in conjunction with "spirit." What is figuratively described in v. 25 is explained as literal in vv. 26-27. The gift of the "new heart" signifies the *new birth*, which is regeneration by the Holy Spirit⁸ (Ezekiel 11:18-20). The heart stands for the whole nature. The spirit indicates the governing power of the mind that directs thought and conduct. A stony heart is stubborn and self-willed. A heart of flesh is pliable and responsive. The evil inclination is removed and a new nature replaces it. Therefore, Jesus made reference to the spiritual washing or purification of the soul, accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God at the moment of salvation (Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5) as a prerequisite for belonging to His kingdom.⁹

As Jesus indicates in John 3:1-16 that being born again is necessary to enter the kingdom of God and acquire eternal life, then what does it mean to be "*born again*," remembering that born again can also be referred to as *regeneration*, which is defined as "*a secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us.*"¹⁰ Now, let's begin by considering the 3rd chapter of Titus:

(4) *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, (5) He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing or regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”*

Titus 3:4-7

- First, notice that the transformation (regeneration or born again) described in verses 4-7 is not based on human effort. God must act **before** salvation occurs. Salvation comes not because of works (anything that we do) but by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. In this context, human deeds (works) are clearly downplayed (*“not because of works”*) as the emphasis is on **divine action and initiative**. To highlight this crucial point, let's look at the 2nd chapter of Ephesians:

(8) *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast”*

Ephesians 2:8-9

Although we are required to believe in Christ as Lord for salvation, even that faith is part of the gift of God that saves and cannot be exercised by one's own power. Salvation, therefore, in every respect, **is not your own doing**¹¹

- When a person is called by God and realizes they are sinners (Romans 3:23), it is then their responsibility to either accept or reject salvation that is provided by the grace of God. Acceptance results in being *born again* from above. This not only includes more than an intellectual belief in the claims of the gospel, it also includes a trust and commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior that will result in a new nature (John 3:18) and a **total life change** from regeneration
- Divine life then enters the new believer (Titus 3:3-7) and results in a radical change as the Holy Spirit draws the believer to Jesus. This is a supernatural event that results in a brand new life (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- This transformation is the beginning of new radical changes (2 Corinthians 3:17-18) such as loyalty to Christ, love for the brethren, resistance to sin, a clean heart, a new manner of living, etc
- The new believer now has a new eternal relationship with God and the right to become *children of God* (John 1:12-13). However, this right does require an accountability to God
- The end result and acceptance of this free gift is eternal life in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23, Titus 3:7)

With the previous overview of the phrase *born again*, let's now turn our attention to the dialog between Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler and consider the requirements for *eternal life* as outlined in Matthew (the same account can also be found in Mark 10 and Luke 18). Interestingly, the following account of Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler bears striking similarities to the dialog between Nicodemus and Jesus as both these men had an impressive array of earthly qualifications, yet each knew they were missing eternal life and specifically came to Jesus for the answer. Let's look at the 19th chapter of Matthew and see how the Rich Young Ruler mirrors many people of today as Jesus describes the way to eternal life:

(16) *"Now behold, one came and said to Him, Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have **eternal life**?"* (17) *So He said to him, why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to **enter into life**, keep the commandments.* (18) *He said to him, which ones? Jesus said, you shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not bear false witness,* (19) *Honor your father and your mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (20) *The young man said to him, all these things I have kept from my youth, what do I still lack?* (21) *Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.* (22) *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions"*
Matthew 19:16-22

This scriptural account is called the "Rich Young Ruler" since he was rich (v. 22), young (v. 20), and a ruler (Luke 18:18). As the account begins, the man approaches Jesus and directly asks; *"what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"* As a side point, eternal life is virtually synonymous with expressions such as *"entering the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20) and being *"saved"* (Matthew 19:25-26). Similar to Nicodemus, this man has numerous earthly qualifications but is aware of the fact that eternal life is missing from his portfolio. Remarkably, after Jesus lists the commandments that should be kept, the young ruler confidently states; *"All these things I have kept from my youth, what do I still lack"* which indicates he believes that he has kept not only the laws that Jesus listed, but also the entire law, which they represent. However, in his sincere pursuit of righteousness, he considers himself to be faultless concerning the law that Jesus challenges him on.

Knowing this man was looking for a way to earn his salvation on his own terms, Jesus directs him to *"sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me."* Instead of giving one more task to complete for eternal life, Jesus gives him a requirement that went to the heart of

the issue; his money and his desire to retain control over his own life. In short, his primary problem was that he coveted his wealth. At this point, the young man *“went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (v. 22).”* Sadly, the young man decided that Jesus was asking too much if that meant he must give up his wealth. Thus, he was breaking two commandments; (1) he did not love his neighbor as himself (give to the poor) and (2) he did not love Jesus with all his heart (he loved himself and his money more). Far from *“keeping all the commandments”* as he had claimed, the young man had made an idol of his wealth and loved it more than God, and was also unwilling to change to follow Jesus.

Does the account of the Rich Young Ruler sound familiar to modern times with the common reluctance of people to follow Jesus Christ as Lord, particularly when considering the following admonition in the eighth chapter of Mark?

(34) “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me. (35) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. (36) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? (37) Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Mark 8:34-37

Although there are numerous similarities between the account of Nicodemus, the Rich Young Ruler and the modern secular world we live in, there are two notable differences between the two men:

- It is surmised by many scholars that Nicodemus became a follower of Christ after his night visit with Jesus in John 3:1-10, as John 19:39 records that *“Nicodemus who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds”* after Jesus was removed from the cross. Nicodemus braved the anger of the rest of the Sanhedrin to help bury the body of Jesus. This act showed more courage by Nicodemus than the disciples of Jesus who had fled
- The eventual acceptance of Jesus by Nicodemus and the total rejection of Jesus by the Rich Young Ruler (when both were seeking eternal life)

Part III
June 16, 2017

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE SAVED

This vital question is succinctly answered in the New Testament book of James. In this portion of scripture, James gives a composite test by which his readers can evaluate whether their faith is living or dead. Lets look at verses 14-26 (with emphasized portions) as follows:

(14) ***“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (17) Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (18) But some one will say, you have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (19) You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble. (20) But do you want to know, O foolish man, **that faith without works is dead?** (21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? (22) Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? (23) And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God. (24) **You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. (25) Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? (26) For the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”*****
James 2:14-26

In these verses, James is emphasizing the vindication before others of a persons claim to salvation and is clearly teaching that salvation is determined by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) and demonstrated by faithfulness to obey God’s will alone (Ephesians 2:10). James main point is the only possible evidence of true faith is works which is the *result* of true faith! Notice that in verse 19 that James specifically underscores that *“even the demons believe (faith)”* but obviously lack any Godly works.

Some biblical examples of works exhibited by a true Christian is displayed by a combination of the following considerations:

Walks in the light:

A genuine Christian does not walk in darkness (loves worldly pleasures) but only in the light (Colossians 1:12-13, 1 John 1:7), and asks for a continual

cleansing from sin (1 John 1:9):

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"

Ephesians 5:8

Continual confession of sin:

A continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation (Psalm 32:3-5, Proverbs 28:13), and God continually cleanses those who are confessing. This can also be viewed as a resistance to sin:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"

1 John 1:9

Obedience to God's commands:

With a change in heart attitude and an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a true Christian is directed towards Godly values and not personal desires:

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in him. He who says he abides in him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"

1 John 2:3-6

Love of the brethren:

A love for the Christian brethren displays genuine fellowship and salvation:

"He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him"

1 John 2:9-10

Does not love the world:

God hates a love for the world (John 15:18-20). An absence of love for this world (don't lust after it) should characterize the life of a true Christian (Romans 8:12-17):

"Do not love the world of the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"

1 John 2:15

Endurance:

The ultimate test of true Christianity is endurance (Mark 13:13, Hebrews 3:14). Those who are genuinely born again endure in faith, fellowship and the truth (1

Corinthians 11:19, 2 Timothy 2:21). The departure of people from the faith, truth, and the church is their unmasking:

"They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest (apparent), that none of them were of us"

1 John 2:19

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE ETERNALLY SECURE

Before we answer this question, let's first define a "Christian" as a person who has fully trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior and also possesses the Holy Spirit (John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Ephesians 2:8-9). Also see the previous definition of Salvation and Christian on page 4 of these notes.

Next, let's take a quick look at a portion of scripture in Hebrews that is often used to support the premise that a true believer *can* lose their salvation:

"(4) For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the holy spirit, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame"

Hebrews 6:4-6

This passage of scripture has been subjected to substantially different interpretations. The central debate concerns whether the descriptions of vv. 4-5 depict people who were once true Christians. However, there are three primary interpretations as follows:¹²

1. Verses 4-5 describe true Christians, implying that Christians can "*fall away*" and lose their salvation. This can be characterized as the Arminian/Wesleyan view (Arminian views are based on theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian Jacobus Arminius 1560-1609)
2. Most argue, however, that although these people may have fully participated in the Christian community where they experienced enlightened instruction in the Word of God, saw public repentance and where the Holy Spirit was at work in powerful ways, and they fall away, they were not true Christians because they had not made a true, saving response to the gospel, resulting in genuine faith, love, and perseverance. The phrase "*fallen away*" in verse 6 involves a **sustained, committed rejection of Christ** and a departure from the Christian community

3. The warnings are addressed to true believers, and although they will never *completely* fall away (apostasy), the warnings are still the means that God uses to challenge them to persevere in their faith

As the preceding interpretations have long been debated and can have merit, this author favors viewpoint #3 with the focus on the fact that apostasy warnings are truthful warnings that work in every case to effectively keep true Christians from the precipice of apostasy. Those who do not heed the warnings are showing themselves to be deaf to the voice of God and thus, are not true Christians (John 10:26-27). Biblical apostasy warnings should all be taken literally and seriously.

In opposition to the viewpoints by some that it is possible for Christians to lose their salvation and the assurance of eternal life, let's now look at *some* of the many scriptures that guarantee the salvation of *a genuine Christian* is secure forever:

*"(27) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (28) and I will give **eternal life** to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. (29) My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand"*
John 10:27-29

*"(38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us** from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus"*
Romans 8:38-39

*"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will **complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ"*
Philippians 1:6

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has **everlasting life**, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"*
John 5:24

*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have **eternal life**"*
John 3:16

In summary, the preceding verses indicate that *a true Christian (who preserves)* cannot lose their salvation. Most, if not all of what the Bible says happens to a believer when they receive Christ would be invalidated if salvation could be lost. Salvation is the free gift of God, and God's gifts are irrevocable as summarized by the following verse in Romans:

"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable"
Romans 11:29

In closing, if a person is in Christ, and preserve, they should rejoice, as their salvation is secure forever as eternal does not mean temporary or conditional!

CONCLUSION

Although we have considered various foundational aspects of biblical scripture, the primary focus of this discussion is *"What is the best explanation for your purpose in life?"* If the Bible is true (and the historical evidence indicates that it is), then each person should be concerned with their future destiny and specifically, where you will spend eternity. The Bible clearly says; *"All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), and those without a personal acceptance of God will spend eternity in a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). However, God has provided an alternate choice, and that choice is a free gift that only needs to be accepted by you; *"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16), and; *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13). This is God's message to you, so have you accepted his free gift of eternal life?

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