Can We Know We Are Saved?

(by Doy Moyer)

Our culture conditions us to doubt just about everything. Postmodernism denies that we can really know much of anything, as truth is basically created subjectively within ourselves. Everything is in question, and anyone who claims to actually know anything may be branded as arrogant. This attitude gets transferred into religion. Today’s culture says that no one religion is right for all, you shouldn’t judge anyone else, and you should never think you have actual truth. While Christians may not imbibe all of this mentality, we are still affected by the seeds of doubt. Accordingly, we cannot really know that we are saved, and we cannot judge others as being lost.

Yet another way in which we begin to doubt our salvation is through our constant worry that maybe we haven’t done enough, or that we can never actually be good enough, or that we have been so bad that we can’t possibly deserve salvation. The reality is that we ought to feel that way. None of us have done enough, are good enough, or deserve salvation. If our confidence in salvation is based on our own goodness, we will constantly be in doubt because we know we can never measure up. As Scripture says, ***“There is none righteous, not even one … There is none who does good, there is not even one”*** (**Romans 3:10-12**, quoting **Psalm 14**). However, if we understand that our confidence lies in God, not ourselves, then we can take on a new perspective and a greater confidence. This knowledge will not be of an arrogant sort, but rather will be one of humble acknowledgement of, and submission to, the promises of God through Christ Jesus. But let’s start back a little earlier.

***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”*** (**Proverbs 1:7**). True knowledge of God, who we are, and our relationship to Him must begin with our reverence and respect for Him. If He tells us that there are certain matters that we can know, then it is not arrogance to affirm such knowledge. Rather, humility in recognition of His wisdom and knowledge should cause us to accept His affirmations. After all, Christians are to grow in God’s grace knowledge (**2 Peter 1:5**; **3:18**), which surely includes knowledge of His will along with the gracious acceptance of His promises. What, then, does Scripture tell us about what we can know relative to salvation?

**First**, salvation is only in Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). This is grounded in His Lordship, and that fact is something we can “know for certain,” as Peter says: ***“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ —this Jesus whom you crucified”*** (**Acts 2:36**). This knowledge is based on Jesus being raised from the dead, as Peter argues in this sermon.

**Second**, based upon this knowledge of Jesus and the resurrection, we can know that our labor is not in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:58**). Paul argues that the gospel message — that Christ died, was buried, rose again, and appeared — is the basis for our own confidence that we will be raised from the dead and inherit the heavenly kingdom (vv. 20, 50). If Christ was not raised, our faith is vain (vv. 12-19), but since He was raised, we can know that all we do for Him is worthwhile: **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”** (**vs. 58**).

**Third**, if we are in the Son of God, we can know that we have eternal life. John wrote, **“*And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life"*** (**1 John 5:11-13**). In this text, our confidence in eternal life is based on 1) having the Son, and 2) what is written. Both of these are given by God. We can have confidence in eternal life because of what God has done through the Son and what God has given through His revelation. By God’s grace, we can know that we have eternal life. Don’t let anyone rip this confidence from you. Stay in the Son, stay in the Word, and you will know.

**Fourth**, we can have confidence through Christ to draw near to God: ***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** (**Hebrews 4:14-16**) Consequently, we need to make sure that we endure in Christ, and as long as we do, we may keep that confidence: ***“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised”*** (**Hebrews 10:35-36**). Notice that it is possible to “throw away your confidence.” If we fail to endure, doing the will of God, we will no longer have the hope. Losing our confidence, here, is not like misplacing or losing things that we intended to keep safe (e.g., keys). We don’t wake up one morning and ask, “now where did I put my salvation? I lost it.” No, this confidence is something we throw away (cast away) by failing to endure. Hang in there. This is the point. ***“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”*** (**vs. 39**).

**Fifth**, we can know that practicing sin will cause us to be lost. ***“For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”*** (**Ephesians 5:5-6**). In our wishy-washy world of “don’t ever judge anyone for anything,” we’ve lost this sense of certainty that some people are, without question, lost. We’ve been deceived with empty words, thinking that we can remake God in our own image — a god who is non-judgmental and accepts everyone regardless of how they choose to live. Don’t be deceived. Those who ***“do not know God”*** and ***“who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”*** will be lost (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**).

Is it possible, though, that we may be wrong? Yes, it is possible to be deceived. This is why it is vital that we continue to learn, grow, and examine ourselves in light of the Scriptures (cf. **1 Corinthians 11:28**; **2 Corinthians 13:5**; **James 1:21-25**). We are not basing this knowledge on mere feelings, for feelings come and go, causing us to be tossed about in our confidence. Rather, we are to base this knowledge on the promises of God. ***“This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life”*** (**1 John 2:25**). ***“Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming”*** (**1 John 2:28**). Through God’s grace and promises as revealed in His revelation, and as we shun the flesh to live by the Spirit, ***“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God”*** (**Romans 1:16**).

Salvation is by the grace of God, not by anything good we have done (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). We certainly cannot boast. Through faith, we will receive this grace, but disobedience and refusing to do God’s will means that the Lord will not know us in the day of judgment (**Matthew 7:21-23**). We can know we are saved because God’s grace makes such knowledge possible. We can also know that we are lost because God’s revelation makes it clear enough. Let us live in God’s grace and will in such a way that we may say, with Paul, ***“For I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day”*** (**2 Timothy 1:12**).