

Proof of Faith

How do you know you're saved?

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. (2 Cor 13:5-6) NASU

If you're a Christian, you will one day question your faith. There will come a day when the past will be analyzed, and you'll try and recall what you were thinking when you went under the water. You will look at recent sins you've committed and weigh them against the hope of that faith. You will come across Paul's words quoted above. You will ask the question, "Am I *really* a Christian?" Or, "Maybe I wasn't quite ready when I was baptized." If you're like me, you'll one day see yourself as a disappointment before God; a sinner; a screw-up; a pretender; a person convinced that "good and faithful steward" will not be part of the dialogue when your number finally comes up.

Those who thump their bibles and proclaim, "I've *never* doubted my salvation!" will one day have their turn in the barrel. I don't mean getting stressed out over some worldly disappointment. I'm referring to a trial that brings you to the snapping point; where you want to give up and die. It's a test that drives you to your knees, where you finally surrender it to the Lord.

So how does one know if he or she is a child of God?¹

Love As Proof of Faith

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (1 John 3:18-24)

John is saying that our own heart testifies as to our salvation. The second issue deals with obedience to "love one another." This is a natural manifestation of the "Spirit whom He has given us." This idea of love as proof of one's faith and salvation is elaborated on in 1 John 4:

¹ This is assuming, of course, that you've been saved through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. If you don't believe baptism is part of the salvation plan, click here.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:11-21)

Notice the proofs of our faith:

- Proof that we are joined with God: He has given us of His Spirit.
- Proof that we are joined with God: We confess (agree) that Jesus is God's Son
- Proof that we are joined with God: We are joined in love
- Love completes us, so that we can stand in confidence on Judgment Day
- There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment

One negative proof is also shown:

- The person who doesn't love his brother can neither love God

Christ's edict is for us to obey His commandment, but how? By taking care, watching out for, and being there for one another. This kind of love is not always easy, as Paul infers—"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2) Who wants to carry around someone else's problems? Are you the only one hoping to go to heaven? Are you going to leave your brother or sister fallen down on the side of life's road? If you don't want to get involved with another's troubles, you are probably not a Christian.

At times, these confrontations can be contentious and ugly:

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19, 20)

"Any among you" means 'anyone in the church,' including the elders. People get into all kinds of false doctrines, so the notion that anyone can believe anything without any consequence is Satan's lie. Straying from the truth = error + multitudes of sin = death of a soul.

Works as Proof of Faith

Works are the *public* proof that you are a child of God. They are proof of faith. (James 2:14-26) However, James defines these works as helping others in need, not “acting” religious.

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:15-17)

Works are also defined as aligning our will with God’s. When you read further, Abraham was “considered righteous when he offered his son Isaac on the altar.” He also mentions Rahab the prostitute, who was considered righteous for helping out the spies.

Thus we see that walking around with a bible, wearing a crucifix, and wearing a syrupy smile—acting religious—is not a proof of one’s faith. The evidence is tangible and concerns interaction with others and God.

Jesus said that we are “in Him” producing fruit. (John 15:5) Those who don’t remain “in Christ,” and don’t bear fruit—good works—are plucked from the vine and tossed into the garbage heap. (John 15:6) Secondly, God sees the *motive* behind what you do. From the heart is supposed to flow a desire to do God’s will. If you become angry and unwilling to give away half your DVD collection because of immoral and worldly content, your heart is probably not right. If you hem and haw about dropping 20 dollars into the collection plate, you would do well to keep the money; God desires a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:7)

When we confuse works with external appearances, we get into trouble. We judge others by appearances and adopt various personal strategies to appear religious to others. This was the trap of the Pharisees. They judged Jesus by their own appearance standards (external, *public* traditions), even though His works were sufficient proof of His divinity. (John 10:25; 38)

Many gauge church attendance as another measure of personal faith. However, unsaved men and women sit in pews every Sunday morning in churches across America. Thus, “going to church” is not a measure of faith for either believer or non-believer.² Only God can see the true church. A bunch of well-dressed folks inside of a building at an appointed time is not necessarily the church. It’s the Holy Spirit indwelling the heart and producing visible works that makes up the church. Remember, it was faithful “church folk,” if you will, who crucified Christ.

There are good people who believe that what we wear, listen to, read, or say is all proof of one’s faith. After all, Jesus said, “You shall know them by their fruits.” (Matt 7:16) When Christians practice righteousness, (1 John 3:10) those things are done “in Christ.” (1 Cor 4:17; Eph 2:20) They are done publicly so that God may be glorified. (Matt 5:16) The good that Christians do in this life are not to *prove* their worth for heaven, but are supposed to be proof of the Holy Spirit.

² The term “going to church” is a misnomer. The church is the body of true believers, not a public place of worship.

(Matt 25:37-40; Gal 5:22) *Scripturally*, it is love of others and God that qualifies as a good work, not mowing the church yard or being the song leader.

Where it gets sticky is in the area of motive. *Why* do we do good works? Why does someone “go to church”? Or, why do we carry ourselves a certain way? Is mowing the church yard a good work? Is looking like an unmade bed so as to fend off lustful looks a measure of faith? Is it helping someone down on their luck? What is the true measure or fruit of our faith?

Faith On Trial

When a piece of metal is bent or dented, it becomes strongest at those points of distortion. It's the same with faith—each time a trial bends and hammers you, your faith becomes stronger. James writes, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4) NIV

When trials come our way, “pure joy” is the usually the furthest thing from our mind. As humans, faith—absolute trust in God—at times eludes us. This testing that results in perseverance gives us the ability to get to heaven.

Before his death at Nero's hand, Paul wrote, “I've finished the course. I've kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7) Christians today don't compete with what Paul, Abraham, or our Lord had to contend with. Pious sermons on how we're “disciplined by the Lord” (Heb 12:4-8) have a hollow ring in our society. Afterwards, we climb into our SUV, drive to our home in the suburbs, throw some thick steaks on the grill, and sit slack-jawed in front of the big-screen. Like the Israelites, we have “fattened ourselves for the day of slaughter.” (James 5:5)

External devices such as clothing, hair, make-up, pictures of Jesus, crucifixes prove nothing. Some of the biggest sinners in the world sport large gold crosses chained to their neck.

Life can become difficult, so by doing or having something religiously tangible comforts us. However, when the storm of true testing comes, the foundation begins slipping because we've not built our faith upon the Rock. (Matt 7:24-27)

Conclusion

Although scripture is clear otherwise, folks still use outward appearances to bolster their faith. By behaving, dressing, and acting “religious,” we will eventually *become* the Perfect Christian. By switching to classical music instead of rock 'n roll, we will slowly change inside. By reading certain literature instead of worldly novels, we can refine our spirit to better please God. In other words, by becoming “good” in our own culturally-determined sense of the word, the Holy Spirit will more readily indwell our heart and God will therefore love us more.

Toting a bible, dropping our hemline, removing our make-up, or trading in the Mercedes for a Chevy can be good things. However, the heart must motivate the change. Change will never motivate the heart; only the Holy Spirit can do that.

Romans 8:29 says that God predestined us to become “conformed to the image of His Son.” Although salvation is the free gift from God, (Rom 6:23) we are expected to “no longer be conformed to this world,” (Rom 12:1) but conformed to Christ’s image. “It is no longer I who live,” wrote Paul, “but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live, I live *by faith in the Son of God* who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Gal 2:20)

It is not putting on airs, or going through the motions of some ceremony, but in our day-to-day living. Dressing a certain way doesn’t change us, *Christ* changes us from within. How? Through His Word. Peter said to “long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it, you may grow *in respect to salvation*.” ‘No word’ = ‘no growth,’ which means your salvation is at risk. “Faith comes by *paying attention to* the word of God.” (Rom 10:23)

Most Christians open their bible only when they’re in the place of assembly. Some use it to see if the preacher is quoting the right passage. Personal meditation and embrace of the Word, however, is lacking. The only real study going on in today’s church is done by the person preparing the lessons.

Christians must have a desire for the word. Do you have David’s desire for the Word?

Psalms 119:97-105

Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.

If you don’t embrace God’s word like David did, this is perhaps the number one proof that you don’t have a saving faith.