

True or False?

Did you know that the Bible teaches that genuine Christians are already living a resurrected life today? The resurrection is more than a future hope—it is a present reality. A genuine Christian has been raised from the dead already, in order to walk in newness of life today.

Colossians 3:1 – If then ***you have been raised up*** with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Romans 6:4-6, 11 – Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...Even so consider yourselves to be ***dead to sin, but alive to God*** in Christ Jesus.

This truth is one of the most precious promises of Scripture for those who truly know and love Jesus Christ. That is because those who are truly know and love Christ have come to experience a genuine conviction of their sin and truly desire to turn away from it. In this present resurrection hope Christians find the power to overcome sin and temptation in their lives. Although even genuine Christians sin, this present resurrection power is always evident to some degree. As one writer put it: “Being a Christian doesn’t produce perfection in your life, but it always changes the direction of your life.”

Here is how the apostle Paul worded this truth.

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore if any man is in Christ, ***he is a new creature***; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Philippians 3:12 – Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Unfortunately, this truth is not often emphasized in churches today. The result is that many people who have never truly experienced God’s life-changing resurrection power have been deceived into believing that all is well between them and God.

Some may object at this point that we are not to judge other people. That is true. However, if it were the truth of the Word of God that reveals the falsity of a man’s faith, then they would stand judged by the truth alone. What does the Bible say? Is it possible for a man to think that he is a Christian and be deceived? Is it possible to claim to be a follower of Christ, and yet never have experienced the life changing resurrection power that enables one to walk in the truth? The Bible clearly says that a person can profess to be a Christian, but in reality be one in name only. The apostle Paul points us to this fact.

Titus 1:16 – They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.

What else does the Bible say about this subject? Perhaps a very eminent example would be a good place to start. I suppose the most eminent and infamous example of someone who appeared very genuine for a time is Judas Iscariot. It could be said of Judas that he had a calling directly from the Lord Himself, he had been gifted to teach and perform miracles (Acts 1:17), he was a minister of the gospel and an apostle, he believed Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and he had a profound remorse over his sin of betraying Jesus. However, despite those gifts and privileges, and his obvious conviction, Judas is said to have been a devil (John 6:70), the son of perdition (John 17:12), and a man who turned aside and ultimately perished (Acts 1:25).

What does the Scripture say about others? What terms and titles and descriptions does the Bible use for others who ultimately prove to be unsaved? The answers may surprise you.

1. A man can be said to have made a profession of faith and not be a Christian.

We have already seen one passage of Scripture that states this truth clearly. But there are others as well.

Titus 1:16 – They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.

James 2:14 – What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Matthew 7:21 – Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Some might object at this point. Doesn't God promise that He will give salvation to all who ask? Are we denying these precious promises of Scripture?

John 1:12 – But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

Romans 10:9 – If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

You are right. We would not deny that those promises are true. However, if the other passages are also true, it must be acknowledged that there is a difference between professing faith in Christ and receiving and confessing Jesus Christ as the risen Lord. Here is how one man describes the difference:

To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him; to confess Christ, is to plead for him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him...Profession is a swimming down the stream. Confession is a swimming against the stream (Matthew Mead – *The Almost Christian Discovered*, p. 55).

To use his analogy, it could be said that even a dead fish can swim downstream. And even a false professor can float downstream when the waters are calm. If all of those passages are true (and they are) then a mere profession to know Christ does not necessarily mean you are a Christian.

2. A man can have much knowledge of God and spiritual things and not be a Christian

There are many examples of people in Scripture where knowledge about God and spiritual things is not a certain indication that a man is a true believer.

John 5:39 – You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me.

James 1:22 – But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Romans 2:17-20, 23 – But if you bear the name “Jew,” and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know *His* will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth...You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

2 Timothy 3:7 – always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It must be concluded that it is possible to learn very much, even be a teacher of God’s word, and yet not truly be a Christian.

3. A man can be actively involved in ministry and not be a Christian

If an example like Judas is not enough to prove this point perhaps some other passages of Scripture will make it evident.

Matthew 7:22-23 – [Jesus said] “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

This active involvement may encompass more than just ministry. It may involve being part of the bigger religious scene, like the thousands who are zealously involved in political activism and other causes that appear to be righteous and God-honoring causes.

Romans 10:2 – For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

If those passages are true (and they are), it must be acknowledged that there are many who live their lives so that outwardly they appear to be motivated by truth and the cause of righteousness, but in the end will be found lacking genuine faith.

4. A man may be outwardly moral and even experience visible life changes and not be Christian

The Bible speaks about those who outwardly hold to what appear to be righteous standards, but whose hearts are not right before God.

2 Timothy 3:5 – holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

Matthew 23:27-28 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Keeping outward moral standards cannot be the only measure of whether a person is truly a Christian.

5. A man may experience sorrow and conviction over his sin and not be a Christian

Acts 24:24-25 – But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you.”

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 – For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Paul knew those who experienced a sorrow for sin that did not lead to salvation. Felix experienced a real conviction of sin from Paul’s preaching that did not result in confession and repentance. There are also examples of those who have a hatred of sin in others, but that do not truly possess God’s salvation. David’s son Absalom hated his brother’s sinful act against his sister Tamar with a murderous passion. In the end he killed his brother Amnon for his sin (see 2 Samuel 13). But Absalom himself proved to be a wicked man. Even conviction cannot be a guarantee of an inward work of God in the heart.

6. A man may have an assurance of heaven and not be a Christian

Matthew 7:21-23 – Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”

There are many today who will tell you they are Christians or that they are going to heaven, but who are living lifestyles completely inconsistent with what God says describes those who are going to inherit the kingdom of God. The Bible says those who live that way and yet think they are going to heaven are deceived.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

7. A man may have faith, a man can believe and not be a Christian

Again some may object to such a bold statement. However, the Bible says there is such a thing as a false faith, or a temporary faith, that is not true or lasting. That is certainly the message of the parable of the sower in Luke 8 and Matthew 13. But there are also other passages that teach this truth very clearly.

John 2:23-25 – Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name**, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man.

There were people following Jesus in John 2 who had believed in His name. They had witnessed His miracles and were convinced that He was sent from God. But Jesus knew that their belief was only an intellectual understanding of who He was, and not an abiding trust in what He would do and provide for them on the cross. In fact, when He did not use His power to be the King that they desired, it was these very multitudes that cried out for Him to be crucified.

The epistles also teach that it is possible to have what appears to be faith, but to not be a Christian.

James 2:14 – What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

The answer to this question of James is a resounding NO! Although he calls it faith, it is clear that James is teaching us that it is not a genuine faith. Genuine faith results in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Genuine faith results in a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Genuine faith results in works (James 2:14).

Perhaps after reading the above you are feeling a bit like the disciples did in Matthew 19.

Matthew 19:24-26 – [Jesus said] “And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” And when the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking upon *them* Jesus said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Then who can be saved? The answer to that question never changes.

Acts 2:21 – And it shall be, that ***everyone*** who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

John 1:12 – But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name.

When we call upon the name of the Lord, or receive Him, we call upon and receive everything that He is, everything He has done, and everything He will do.

That means more than just making a mere profession of belief, or exhibiting any of the characteristics discussed above. It means confessing Him as the Lord that He is. It means being willing to cast off everything that we hold dear. It means recognizing that our sin is an affront to the holiness of God. And it means recognizing that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ—accomplished on our behalf—is the only sufficient way for God to deal with the just punishment every man deserves for their own sin.

1 Peter 3:18 – For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Romans 10:9-10 – If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, ***resulting in righteousness***, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

A genuine believing heart results in genuine and lasting righteousness—not immediate practical perfection, but an obviously transformed resurrection life. The Christian walks in newness of life.

Romans 6:17-18, 22 – But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became ***obedient from the heart*** to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness...But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive [have] your benefit [fruit], resulting in sanctification [practical righteousness], and the outcome, eternal life.

That is resurrection life living according to the Bible. And everyone who has become obedient from the heart knows the reality of being freed from the irresistible power of sin. We may hear the pleasures of sin crying out for us to maintain our loyalty to it, but we are no longer enslaved to it as a master. The reality of being a Christian means knowing by experience the truth of passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. The focus of the Christian's life is different from unbelievers. Affections are redirected. Thinking is transformed. Motivations are entirely different. And the direction of the Christian's life is one that is seeking to make those changes more and more a reality in their life.

Are you living an artificial external religion? Or have you experienced a genuine inward transformation and heartfelt devotion to the God of all grace? Are you “True or False?”

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