

# HOW DO YOU KNOW?

By

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*“God...hath spoken unto us in His Son.”* (Hebrews 1:2)

While auditing a class in Texas Tech University I heard a professor of anthropology ridicule young Christians who affirmed their faith: “How do you know you are saved?” he asked. “Did God come down and say, ‘You are saved’?”

In answer to such skeptics many believers today are seeking a subjective experience, to find proof that God is really there, that He does indeed tell them they are saved.

But in seeking experiential proof they are missing the obvious answer already given. Did God come down and say you are saved? The answer is, Yes. God indeed came down in Christ Jesus and spoke words to assure salvation to Christians.

“Which is easier to say?” Jesus asked. “Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, arise and take up thy bed and walk?” Then He healed the cripple by the words of his mouth, thus proving that when He spoke words of forgiveness, they were reliable. (Mark 2:1-12)

Man’s mad desire for power, to wrest it from Christ and exercise it by changing the world to suit himself, sweeps him off his feet into a baseless philosophy of change, with the result that he cannot believe that words recorded 2000 years ago still have validity. Things have changed, he claims, so that what Christ said then has no power for today. Therefore we must seek a current experience, a word that comes in modern garments to catch the sullied eye of sophisticated man.

**CHRIST THE SAME.** “Experiential” religion and the emotional “high on Jesus” now pass for the Christian faith. Some are saying, “We need a NOW experience,” as if God had changed His mind somewhere along the way since He said, “This is my beloved Son; hear ye Him;” as if Christ’s words have been cancelled. Some use the text that “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, yea and forever” (Heb. 13:8) to prove that we should expect the same audible voice of Christ and the same miracles that were seen by the apostles. But the text proves just the opposite. Since Jesus is the same, He does not need to give new instructions and new signs. “My word shall never pass away.” It is gross disbelief to insist that He keep repeating Himself to each generation, and proving His word with signs and wonders and experiences.

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). It was the “sinful and adulterous generation” which He said seeks after signs. Such is the person who delights in talk about Jesus but is ashamed of His word, who minimizes doctrine (Christ’s word)

and emphasizes “knowing Christ personally.” One cannot “know Christ personally” until he knows the truth about Him as revealed in Scripture, not just general things about Him, but know the mercy and grace manifested in the crucifixion and the purpose of the whole process.

To know Christ and experience fellowship with Him requires that we know what He said and what He did in redeeming us from sin and death. These things are not known through our experiences, but through the teaching of the apostles. It was not until Peter’s preaching on Pentecost that an explanation was given of how man is saved by Christ’s death. Even people who had seen Jesus in the flesh had to hear doctrine from an apostle before they could “know Christ” in saving faith. It was Jesus Himself who said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Such truth is found nowhere but in the Bible, and is what we term “doctrine” (teaching). Christ certainly intended for us to learn His doctrine. It is dismaying to see men paraphrasing the Bible and offering it as a “translation” when it is nothing more than their own personal interpretations of it. Such works as “The Living Bible” and “Living Letters” clarify the author’s opinions, but actually change the message given. This is appropriate to the culture that defies God’s laws and seeks to establish its own.

Jesus said, “The word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). He has spoken no new words and given no new revelation. However exciting and traumatic our experiences may be, and I have had my share of them, they tell us nothing about the truth of God and the means by which we may please Him.

**WORD-POWER.** Carnally minded man can think of power only in the way it is seen or felt through the senses. He forgets that all power is invisible, and the most awesome power of all is word power. By a word armies march; by a word men are exalted or debased; by a word the course of a nation is changed. Words in the home result in emotional stress that is felt in business, government and all of society, altering the lives of millions. James did not overstate it when he said that the tongue is a little member but boasts great things.

If a man’s words have such power how much more the word of Christ? He was the Word that was “in the beginning with God. And all things were made through him...” (John 1:1-3). God’s power is in His word. “By the word of Yahweh were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6). In creation words expressed the will of God and caused that will to be realized. He spoke and it was done. The Hebrew letter says that Christ is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3).

By words from His lips Jesus wrought His great works. To the sea He said, “Be still.” To the palsied He said, “Arise.” To a man dead four days He said, “Lazarus, come forth.” And it was through His word that men heard that their sins were forgiven. To the palsied man, “Son, thy sins are forgiven.” To a woman caught in adultery, He said, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.” What possible experience could ever mean so much as to know that the Lord had spoken words of forgiveness!

When the Holy Spirit came with power to the apostles it was exercised by the words from their lips that the Gospel and the means of remission of sins might be made known. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." The keys of the kingdom were these words, given by Christ to Peter, to which three thousand responded that day and were "added" to the church. When the apostle Paul came on the scene (he whose life was full of experiences) he declared, "The gospel...is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). He preached not himself and his experiences, but the word of God with reference to Christ's death and resurrection, and the power was felt throughout the world.

Power is not in our subjective experience. The power is in what God has done through Jesus Christ and this is effective faith. The power of God is that power which He Himself has to cleanse us from sin through Christ's death, and when He pronounces us clean, we are clean. That pronouncement is made through Scripture, that which "God...has spoken unto us in His Son."

Our generation is characterized by doubts and fears, by a frantic search for meaning to life. Churches are changing their creeds to make them acceptable to unbelievers. The testimony is not, "God says," but "I think." Where Paul said "I know" his modern counterpart says, "I feel."

Instead of looking to the record given by Christ, millions are lusting after the excitement of a new experience. They want to find a richer experience than faith in the gospel because they fail to see the glory of the gospel, the fact that Christ has made us fit for Himself by His death and resurrection. They are turning their eyes inward on themselves, when the true object of our attention should be Christ and His commandments. The sentiment prevails that those of us who take refuge in the revealed Word are depending on the "letter" of the law, where those who exult over experiences are living by the "spirit." They fail to understand that evidence of the operation of the Holy Spirit is not signs and feelings but the fruit of truth. The experience Jesus demands of us is the experience of obeying His Word.

Once, after Jesus had performed a great miracle, a woman burst forth and exclaimed "Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps that gave thee suck." Indeed, what an experience Mary had in being the mother of the Messiah. Could there be a greater experience? Yes! Jesus said, "Yes, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

**GRACE.** The grace of God is not something that is generated within man or produced by man's experiences, but something which is wrought by God through Jesus Christ, and that nearly 2000 years ago on the cross. It is known to us only through the Scriptures, specifically in the doctrines concerning Christ's coming into the world as human flesh, meeting the death penalty on the cross and rising from the dead in order that believers might also be resurrected to live in His presence forever. This grace is the same to all people, for all time.

Granted that to realize the forgiveness of sins and the hope of immortality is a glorious continuing experience, and to live under Christ's commands is to experience many dramatic changes, afflictions and victories, still it is none of this that gives power to save. The experience which saves us is that which Christ experienced when He died on our behalf and then rose from death to be our Mediator and Sovereign King. We can never experience anything even close to this. But we can believe it. I can believe that He died in my place. I can repent and be baptized and know that my sins are forgiven, and know that I have assurance of eternal life.

How do I know? Because He said so.

Thus joy is not dependent upon experiences – these may sometimes be joyful and sometimes tearful – but it is the product of believing in Christ, the “peace and joy in believing.” (Rom. 15:13)

Nothing that comes in the way of experience can remove this joy and peace. It is given in power through the word of God.

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