

Measuring salvation: should we, or shouldn't we?

Some brief reflections

This paper represents a summary of discussions and learning from the **KIF Spiritual Impact Learning Community**, in partnership with the Accord Network. It is intended to encourage dialogue on the issue, and continued learning.

Baseline Principles



The question of whether to measure salvation or not is a hot topic in the ethics of spiritual metrics. There are three principles that seem to come to the fore when considering whether and how to do so:

- Assessing people who have not professed faith in Christ is fully in keeping with Christian ethical and theological norms. We can't carry out our Scriptural mandate to make disciples without it.
- Reporting professions of faith is in keeping with Christian ethical and theological norms. Scripture itself in multiple instances does so of those "baptized" (Acts 2:41) and "saved" (Acts 2:47).
- There is no guarantee that people will convert when hearing the gospel (e.g. Acts 28:23-28).

The Benefits and Costs of Measuring Salvation



There are four potential benefits to measuring salvation:

1. Questions around salvation may encourage or positively provoke respondents to think, and talk about their relationship with God.
2. Keeping the focus on the importance of evangelism and the joy that comes with celebrating the profession of faith in Christ.
3. Improving the way that the Gospel is communicated for greater evangelism effectiveness.
4. Encouraging donors with the 'testimony' and their continued support.

There are four potential costs to measuring salvation:

1. Questions around salvation may negatively impact a person's faith due to the questions being asked, especially in polarized faith contexts.
2. It could lead people to believe that the relationship with you is purely transactional.
3. Creating divisions among people over salvation where none existed before (some might believe that this is a benefit in function of truth).
4. Missing the fact that people you think are not Christian actually really are, and vice-versa.

Three Issues to Keep in Mind that Make Measuring Salvation Complex

1. Do you see salvation as an event (e.g. Ephesians 2:8) or as a process (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:1-2), or both? These different theological understandings have implications for how you measure it, especially when you add cultural dynamics and considerations.
2. To what degree can we measure salvation accurately, and how important is that? People disagree on who is saved or not because of theological differences, and professions of faith have proven notoriously unreliable in terms of truly representing what is in people's hearts and minds and their future walk with the Lord (Matthew 12:22). However, people such as local church elders are consistently called to judge correctly whether people have made sincere professions of faith in order to baptize them. What are the implications in your context of measuring salvation accurately or not?
3. To what degree do our efforts lead people to be saved? As per principle #3, evangelization does not always lead to conversion, an experience that has given rise to the Engel scale. Moreover, those who sow the Gospel may not be the ones to reap the harvest of conversion, given that the timing of conversion is up to the Spirit. Given this, it is very complex to 'attribute' salvation to our efforts as opposed to other activities and/or the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

Tentative Guidelines



1. There are good reasons for measuring salvation, but if we choose to do so we should put our own spiritual growth and humility at the forefront especially in contexts where people consider themselves to already be Christian.
2. While there are unresolved complexities in trying to measure salvation, one can still capture professions of faith alongside increasing fruit in people's lives.
3. We should be very careful about claiming attribution for conversions, as opposed to contribution.
4. The process by which salvation is measured should abide by the overall spiritual metrics ethical principles and guidelines.