

The Danger of Counterfeit Faith

The most frightening prospect facing a man is that of spending eternity in the lake of fire. Those in the lake of fire will drink of the undiluted wrath of God (Rev. 14:10.) Furthermore, we are told that the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever.

The most marvelous prospect facing a man is that of spending eternity with the Lord. Scripture pictures this as eternal bliss.

What a contrast! What a difference!

Obviously, then, the most important question facing a person is, "Will you spend eternity with the Lord or will you spend eternity in the lake of fire?"

The Bible gives us the basis for the answer to this question. Unfortunately, much of what the Bible says has been distorted, even by those claiming to preach the gospel. We live in a country where over 40% of the adults claim to be born again, yet, it's clear that most of those who claim to be born again are living in sin with essentially no interest in what God says about their lives.

If you were to quiz one of these people about their faith, they would assure you that they believe in Jesus Christ. In fact, they would further assure you that they believe that Christ died for their sins and that their sins are forgiven. There are many not claiming to be born again that claim faith in Christ.

Yet such people are frequently assured that if they have 'believed in Christ' then they can be sure they are saved even if their lives reek with sin. It is surprising that even some who claim to be students of the Word, write and or endorse articles pushing such ideas.

We believe that such ideas are totally contrary to the Word of God. Unfortunately, there are many who are constantly being assured by such teachers that they are saved when they are not. The situation is so bad that it is safe to say that the vast majority of those who say they are saved are not. Indeed, many (if not most) of those in conservative or fundamental churches may have been deluded into believing they are saved because they remember some 'going forward' experience in the past.

Much of the trouble begins with a defective gospel. Men are told to believe in Christ without ever being told to repent. They are not told the awfulness of sin. Oh, they may be told the awful consequences of sin but they are not told the awfulness of sin. God is never pictured to them as one who is full of wrath at sin but rather He is pictured as one who is only too willing to ignore sin.

Not that there isn't some truth in what is said. But, a half gospel is not gospel, it is serious error. The scripture talks of those who believed but were lost. One interesting case is that of Simon the sorcerer. Turn to Acts 8 and read the entire account. Several times in the narrative, the case of Simon is separated from that of all the others who had believed. We are told in verse 13 that Simon believed, But later in the verse we see that Simon was overly interested in the miracles that Philip and possibly others did. In verses 18 and 19, we find that Simon wanted the apostolic gift of being able to confer on others miraculous power and offered money for this. It

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is clear from what Peter said to Simon that he was not saved. (That he needed according to verse 22, was to repent for, as Peter said to Simon, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.")

Yet, some will assert that Simon was saved because the passage says that he believed. With this in mind, let us consider John 8:27-44. In this passage a group of people who believe on Jesus are called children of the devil.

Let us look at the passage in greater detail. The immediate context does not mention any great miracles so we can't claim that they only were fond of His miracles.

No, the scripture clearly teaches that their faith was on Christ as He was teaching them (verses 27-30).

In verse 31, Jesus addressed those who believed on Him. His comments were totally unlike those normally given today to those who profess to believe on Christ. Christ told them that they were truly His disciples if they continued in His Word and that in so continuing they would truly be free (verses 31-32).

This does not for one moment teach that one who truly trusts the Lord is not immediately saved. What it does teach is that one who truly trusts in the Lord will continue in His Word. The concept of trusting in the Lord and then having no abiding evidence of salvation in the life is absolutely foreign to the testimony of scripture.

There was a very basic point in Christ's near rebuke of those who had believed. He wanted them to see that they were in total bondage to sin and unless the Spirit had done His perfect work in their hearts, they were not saved. This very important doctrine is in most instances today totally missing from any gospel preaching. The Bible declares time and time again that apart from the Spirit's sovereign work, men will follow the dictates of their depraved natures and will turn their backs on God. Oh, they may have a temporary interest in the things of God. They may show a temporary interest in the Word, in prayer, in purity of life. They may even show a temporary interest in testifying. But, if their interest does not endure, it is evidence that it was not the work of God. It was rather from another source. It was counterfeit.

Years ago in Columbia Missouri, there was a young man who was very active in church as well as other Christian organizations. I was told that he was always eager to give his testimony. He was eager to study and to engage in other activities which are normally taken as evidence of being saved. He clearly stated that he had trusted the Lord.

When I arrived in Columbia, some who knew John suggested that I call on him. He had quit attending services when certain things had happened in his church. Imagine my surprise when John assured me that though he once believed on Christ, he no longer did. In fact, John had become a confirmed atheist, because John had totally renounced God, Christ and the Bible. Christians seem to have no problem in admitting that he was no doubt never saved.

But, suppose John still claimed to believe while no longer showing interest in the things of

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God. Suppose he lived in open immorality. Suppose he drank heavily, etc. Would Christians then admit that this was a mere professor of eternal life and not a possessor? I think not! They would only continue to state, "But, he believes".

Let us again join the narrative in John 8. Remember that in verses 31 and 32, Jesus is addressing those who had believed on Him. This was not some number counting evangelist trying to drum up support for his ministry. This is the commentary by the Holy Spirit. These men believed on Him.

When our Lord told them that they should continue in the truth and they would be truly free, they rebelled (verse 33). They assumed that they were never in bondage to anything because they were Jewish. Christ's response to them was that they were in bondage to sin (verse 34).

They so hated this doctrine of "total depravity" that they desired to kill Him (verses 35-37). Those who profess faith in Christ clearly fall into two groups--those who find it impossible to believe that they were ever in total bondage to sin and those who are able to admit it. There are those who freely admit that their salvation was the sovereign work of God and those who ultimately find such teaching abhorrent and wish at least the feeling that they were able to do the slightest thing if only to believe, and the Bible makes it clear that the one group are truly saved and the other consists of lost people on their way to hell.

For, in trusting Christ, we must repent. We must come to the end of ourselves. We must come to say that in our flesh dwells no good thing. It does not matter that some of us may have been raised in Christian homes--we are still totally depraved. It does not matter that we have never broken important laws (in the sight of others) -- we are still totally depraved. It does not matter that we fear God we are still totally depraved. It does not matter that we attend fundamental, dispensational, even Calvinistic churches we are still totally depraved. No defense based on environment or inheritance can change this one thing unless God the Holy Spirit supernaturally intervenes and changes our hearts, we are totally depraved. We need to be set free, we can't escape of ourselves. God must free us.

How the natural man hates this truth. He may like some of what he hears in the gospel, but he hates this. He may believe, but he hates this truth (Of course, we realize that such faith is counterfeit).

The response of the believers in John 8 to the doctrine of total depravity proved that they were not truly saved but were the children of the devil (verses 37-44).

Yes, the faith that the Holy Spirit gives is often counterfeited. While we fully agree that Matthew 13 belongs dispensationally to another dispensation, we must also state that there are some important interdispensational truths here as well. One is found in certain aspects of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9) which has an inspired interpretation in verses 18-23. Notice that the seed that fell on stony ground was received with joy. It was the Word of God that was received. Yet such seed was soon gone for the ground was not good. In fact, we can list some interesting parallels between true faith and counterfeit faith;

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1. Both are in Christ -- John 2:23,24
2. Both are based on the Word -- Matt. 13; 20, 21 3.
3. Both are accompanied with joy -- Matt, 13;20,21

But, one is generated by a depraved human heart and the other comes from the Holy Spirit. One involves bad ground and the other good ground. The difference is crucial.

The preaching of the gospel has become so distorted that we seldom hear the full message as Paul preached. Paul included repentance and faith (Acts 20:21). The Gospel certainly includes:

1. **Truth about God** -- His nature, character and standards. Men must be brought face to face with the fact that God is a holy and sovereign. He hates sin and He hates sinners -- the Bible so teaches.
2. **Truth about sin** -- there must be a conviction about sinfulness. Men must be told how ugly and terrible they really are. The Bible teaches that men are rotten sinners not just little sinners, Yet, many who claim to know the Lord object to such teaching. Perhaps we should pray for their salvation for they have not faced up to what God says about them.
3. **Truth about Jesus Christ** -- men must understand the person and work of Jesus Christ. The incarnate Son of God paid the penalty for the sins of those of God's choosing. And He rose from the dead and lives today. Jesus Christ is either your judge (Acts 17:31) or your savior.
4. **The SUMMONS of the Gospel** -
 - a. BELIEVE -- there must be faith in Jesus Christ
 - b. REPENT -- there must be a renouncing of all that you are outside of Jesus Christ.

Notice in Romans 10:9, 10 that men are called upon to confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God had raised Him from the dead. Men must be in submission to God to be saved. Anything else is counterfeit, and, any gospel that ignores this aspect of conversion is not the gospel, Indeed, BE CONVERTED is perhaps a better translation of the word translated REPENT.

To you who profess to know Jesus Christ as your savior. What is the basis of this conviction" Is there present evidence in your life of the work, of the Holy Spirit? Is there a willingness on your part to renounce all that you were and are (apart from Jesus Christ)? Or, do you rebel against this basic doctrine of the total depravity of the human heart--your heart!

We urge you to trust Christ and to repent. We urge you to test your life to see if you are saved. There is a strong connection in scripture between disobedience and disbelief (the same Greek word is translated both ways--compare Heb, 4:6,11 where it is translated unbelief with Eph. 2:2; 5:6 where it is translated disobedience),

When you come face to face with a truth of scripture you never before heard, do you fear God enough to study it through? Or is it of no consequence to you that your beliefs may not be in agreement with God's Word?

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Is your faith genuine or counterfeit? Search your heart and see! Don't go to the past in your life. Look for the evidences of life in your present behavior and attitude.

And, if it becomes your concern that your faith may not be genuine, fall on your knees before God, repent and trust in Him. He promises to save all who genuinely come to Him, and the faith God gives endures.