

The Certainty of a Saving Faith.

For the last three years I have been a believer in Jesus Christ. I know that He died for my sins, and that it is through belief in His resurrection and faith in Him as our Savior, that one is saved and given everlasting life in heaven. The Bible is clear in the fact that “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9) It is also clear that good deeds and a virtuous life do not save, although anyone who has saving faith will seek and develop these qualities as part of their Christian walk, as evidence of their faith and as an expression of their love of Jesus. Paul speaks of faith, which is vain, or not a saving faith, and Jesus noted that many are called but few are chosen.

These two observations are the root cause of all of my concern and continued preoccupation with this issue. I know that I was called but I don't yet know that my faith is not a “vain faith” and I can only conjecture as to the discernable nature of such a faith. My commitment to Jesus was not a momentous, memorable event. It resulted from a critical yet comprehensive examination of the evidence which led to the only possible and logical conclusion, that He was / is who He said He was. This was an intellectual conclusion for sure, but as a spiritual one, I'm not yet certain, and I don't know how to become certain. Because of the great portion of each day that I spend in prayer, reading the Bible and other religious materials, listening to Bible teaching tapes, discussing the subject, writing these papers, thinking about the matter and trying to mold my life more and more as I believe Jesus would have it be, I suppose I could conclude that mine is a saving faith, if only my heart would tell me so and if my spirit would speak of the matter. But these, for the most part are silent. Only my soul seems troubled and eager for an assurance. I say these things here, when in reality, I don't even know what my heart and spirit feel like, nor is it likely that I would recognize their involvement if it were to happen.

According to the Scriptures, when I accepted Christ as my savior and committed my life to Him, I was born again, that is my old sinful self died, I was given a new heart and

became a new man in the spirit, saved to eternal life in heaven. However, the Scripture also notes that the old flesh remains and continues to desire its sinful ways, thus causing the continuous struggle within, a struggle that I know very well. I know that there is nothing that I can actually do, that Jesus did it all on the cross, that He was made sin, the sin of all mankind, past, present and future, and that sin was thereby purged from all who truly believe in Him. Only perfect, sinless believers can be admitted to heaven. No one is capable of completing a mortal life without committing sin, no matter how hard one try. Thus no one can enter heaven without those sins being purged and forgiven. Jesus' death on the cross was the only way that this could occur. Thus a true faithful believer in Jesus is cleansed and eligible to join Him in heaven.

This all seems much too easy and too wonderful to be true, yet it is true, that is, providing the professed faith is, in fact, true saving faith. But how does one know? How can one distinguish the true faith from vain faith? In order to add a perspective to these questions, I'm reminded of something that I recently heard regarding the Evangelical "crusades" where a speaker inspires many in the audience who are "called to the altar," where they commit to Jesus and are thus "saved." Apparently research into this phenomenon has indicated that as few as 15% or less of those so inspired indicate discernable retention of that commitment. Thus it would seem that these inspirations and so-called commitments are but shallow emotional flames and superficially erasable thoughts having never penetrated to the hearts. What of the remaining 85%? What is the likely percentage of those who remain "committed," 5, 10, 20 years later? Of all these, which were actually saved? The answer seems obvious, yet from an earthly human perspective how can one know if anyone was saved? Only God can know.

How do we achieve saving faith? Clearly it is only through the grace of God. What is the manner of its manifestations? Is it sudden, complete and forever sustaining or is it a slowly growing flower, planted as a seed by God's grace and left for us to nurture? The Scriptures indicate that it happens when it happens and it is then complete and forever. Perhaps also there is a period of preparation before this blessed event can take place. Perhaps before the Lord can plant this seed of saving faith, one must first awaken the

spirit, clear away all the weeds of ignorance and doubt, soften the sin hardened soil of the soul and then enrich it with a recognition of the existence of the Lord Jesus and of His resurrection. It is clear to me that my soul went through this clearing, softening and enriching process. However, I've heard nothing from my spirit, at least nothing that I have been able to recognize as such.

To add further focus to a difficult nature of my dilemma, I'm reminded of a true story, which I believe illustrates the vulnerability of even a most powerful enduring faith. There is a man of exceedingly strong faith and a genuine love for Jesus who is a great Bible teacher and to whom I am indebted for nearly everything I know about the Scriptures and of the Christian walk. In knowing Him, one cannot otherwise conclude but that after judgement day He will surly spend eternity in the company of Moses, and Abraham and the great prophets, discussing their lives and times, and getting briefed on the many wonders that His beloved Scriptures did not fully explain. I have listened to hundreds of hours of his taped lectures on every one of the Old and the New Testament books, and have read his several books on the Scriptures. In the lectures he has been most generous in revealing some of his personal life and the manner of his 40 years of Christian walk He was educated at the U.S. Naval Academy and had a very impressive and successful career as an engineer and as CEO and chairman of the Board of several large high tech corporations. In the course of that career he amassed a large fortune and for some period he and his family lived with great wealth and all that it could provide. Suddenly, all of this was gone and replaced with a series of personal tragedies not unlike those, which test Job of the Old Testament. Not only did he lose his wealth, but he also went deep into bankruptcy and even his best friends abandoned him. After losing his home and everything except a few personal possessions, he and his family moved into an apartment, where due to a severe earthquake, he even lost his few remaining possessions. He admits that for some period during these trials he seriously considered taking his own life in order for his family to collect on a very large insurance policy. It is now evident that this period was both a test of his faith and a clear message from God, not unlike that which Jesus sent to the Ephesians in Revelation, chapter two, which in effect told the church to return to your first love or else! As a result, he is now, and has been for several

years, a full time teacher and minister of God's word, giving comfort as well as knowledge and hope of salvation to millions throughout the world. The grand purpose of this ordeal was to call him to a full time ministry of God's Word.

The point of this story is that this man of great love and faith in Jesus, truly one of the saved by any means of human measurement or definition, actually considered the taking of his life, which is probably the only unpardonable of all sins, because it occurs at the moment beyond which confession, regret and prayer, and therefore forgiveness, are impossible. Certainly until that time when he considered suicide, he believed that through his faith he was saved, and I'm sure that if anyone has the right to that belief he should have had it. However, had he taken his life, clearly it would have been a reason to have at least wondered about His Salvation.

Could I pass such a test of my faith? Might I someday be subjected to an even more rigorous task? Will I pass or fail? How can I know? Charles Spurgeon goes so far as to say that a faith not tested is no faith at all. I find this a little too severe, but who am I at this point in my walk to know much of anything when compared to this incredible man of God?

It is my current conclusion that few, if any, can be certain of their faith until their faith has survived severe testing, such as Job experienced, or until the end of our mortal lives when we see evidences of having persevered to the end. We can only hope and pray and seek an ever strengthening of our faith and to have the armor of God's Word to protect us during those inevitable tests that will surely come.

Why is it that a person's accomplishments are seldom acknowledged until that person has passed away? Perhaps it is because only then can one be certain of the appropriateness of that acknowledgment. One can never know what can happen, what transgressors may occur which might negate or render invalid and premature any intended adulation. Had Hitler died shortly after he had restored the devastated, defeated, post World War I Germany, history would have ranked him as a great and noble man, perhaps a George

Washington or Simon Bolivar. However, his subsequent acts negated these outstanding accomplishments and made him one of history's worst villains. So it is I believe that in many cases one must reserve one's judgment as to the effectiveness of one's faith until the end. At this point of my life, I believe that only the Lord knows with certainty whether or not my belief and faith commitment is, in fact, a saving faith. If it is, nothing will negate it. If it isn't, then one can only pray that the grace of a true saving faith will at some point manifest. In either case, prayer continued learning of the word, walking the Christian walk, and continually examining one's life and one's professed faith are the least and probably the only things that can be done.

Where has all this taken me, and where do I now think I'm going? Putting all of the evidence together regarding my self-analysis, I must, with something less than absolute conviction, conclude that at this moment I am saved. I also conclude that this condition and the quality of my faith require a daily reality check. I suspect that in this realm, complacency is one of Satan's most effective weapons. Vigilance, prayer, and large well digested portions of "our daily bread," as a continuous way of life is what I see at this time as probably the best way of confirming this condition.

By the way, after completing, the above, I read for the nth time the passage about vain faith and now view it in a less ominous context, which I pray, isn't simply the rationalization of a desperate soul. It may well be related to Paul's admonitions to guard against heresy, that is, false doctrine, those not wholly in accordance with the scriptures. These abound everywhere especially today. Paul admonishes us further to check the Scriptures daily and check all things against the infallible truth of the Holy Bible. Even the slight, seemingly negligible deviations can lead to a false or vain faith. I pray that this is what he meant because I believe it is something that I can deal with, rather than some ethereal or spiritual deficiency that I cannot identify, or comprehend.

There are many who call God their Father who will rail against my uncertainty as to my saving faith. This is because Scripture seems to require that we have full assurance of our salvation. I don't disagree in the slightest, but I know that it is the existence in the

heart of a true saving faith, that is, the single most important thing in anyone's life. It's not number one on a list of whatever. It must be the stand alone, ultimate priority of everyone's life who has any sense of the two choices we have for our place in eternity. To be quick to conclude out of wishful thinking, to be complacent, cavalier, or presumptive about the matter should be completely out of the question. I pray to become sure of the adequacy of my faith. But I will not presume that I have it until I find the evidence in me, which demands that assurance. I pray also that your assurance of a saving faith is based on substantiated fact.