

The Professor and the Possessor

Do you possess that faith that accepts God's grace of salvation and eternal life? Or do you merely profess to possess? Are you sure? How do you know? In the final analysis, there is nothing in this mortal life more important than the possession of salvation. And it is only through possession of a true and saving faith that God's amazing grace and eternal life can be obtained. The stakes are infinite and, therefore, too great to rely on anything less than the whole and true word of God, through which to determine whether you possess or merely profess the real born-again Christian faith.

In one sense, the first question is a silly one. Who would profess to possess, if they didn't believe they possess what they profess? However, I doubt that you believe that everyone who is a professor is actually a possessor. Surely, some are mistaken or deceived, or simply ignorant of what constitutes a saving faith. But that's not you or me! We are both surely possessors of that saving faith! Would it in any way disturb your complacency or certainty to learn that Christian polls indicate that as many as ninety-one percent of those who call themselves "born-again" Christians, that is those who profess to possess, do not believe fully, if at all, in the basics of what Scripture tells us is fundamental to being a true "born-again" Christian? That is basics, such as the virgin birth; that Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven; that we are saved by grace through faith alone; that Jesus is the only way to eternal life? And they didn't even ask whether or not confession, repentance and obedience were significant elements! Does it concern you, as it does me, that a similar percentage of those who "come to Christ" as a result of many evangelical efforts, such as the Billy Graham crusades, were found a year later to be expressing little or no resemblances to what one might consider evidence of being "born-again"? In fact, many were found to be embracing false religions or no belief at all! Yet I suspect that many believed, and continue to believe, that they were saved by that one act of profession!

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) comes powerfully to mind when I hear of such disturbing evidences. So, also does Matthew 2:16 and 22:14, where Jesus tells us that

many are called, but few are chosen. It seems quite evident that it is far more frequent for someone to recognize a calling than it is to validly conclude that one has been chosen. By chosen it means to be a possessor of the saving faith. On the other hand, could that “calling” have been somehow misunderstood, by the many? Could it be that through insufficient knowledge of Scripture, or wishful thinking they jumped to that comfortable but false conclusion? Could the “calling” of the “many” thereby become construed in such a way as to lead one to become a professor, but not one of the “few” who actually become possessors? The above noted statistics certainly suggest that there must be something of that tragic nature afoot in the so-called Christian Community.

Perhaps at this point you are still absolutely certain that you possess salvation and find this message not relevant to your spiritual condition. If so, then you must surely believe that you are one of the less than ten percent of the professors who actually possess the saving faith and are thereby in the born-again status. If you are, then I would ask you to consider the following. When was the last time you chose to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” In Philippians 2:12 the Holy Spirit tells us we must do that. It doesn’t say to do but once, or more than once. However, if we take seriously our need for salvation, we may sense that this is something to be repeated occasionally, if not for any other reason than to reset our course more accurately. Also have you been periodically applying 2Corinthians 13:5 where we are told “examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith, prove your own selves.” This also seems to suggest periodic reappraisal of our spiritual condition. But why would the Holy Spirit urge this examination if a saving faith was so easy and obvious? Jesus said in John 8:31 “...if you continue in my Word then you are my disciples indeed.” Here, as well as elsewhere where His words are recorded, some truly believed and put their trust in Him, thus becoming possessors, while others simply acquiesced to the truth of His words but were not rooted in a saving faith. They were the original “empty” professors. We know that to be His disciples we must possess that saving faith through which we become born-again. But you can be a disciple only if you “continue in the Word.” That sounds like an on-going process of study and application of the Word. That means the whole Scripture. The following, taken from “Life and Habit” (London: Jonathan Cape 1923, page 112) is

an excellent commentary expressing the same message regarding the empty professor, that is the visible church, and the possessor, here depicted as the invisible church.

“The general sense of our Lord’s teaching here would seem to be what the Theologians have sought to sum up for us in the doctrine of the visible and invisible church. To belong to the former, to be brought up in its atmosphere, to be played upon day after day by its gracious influences is in itself an immense advantage which ought to predispose one to become a member of the real church (called invisible, because only God knows with accuracy who belongs to it), ie: to the body, not merely of traditionalists and conformists and outward adherents, but of genuine believers of those who have accepted God’s offers of salvation, and have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and are learning to grow up into His mind and ways. Apart from that, membership in the outward church is not nearly enough.”

In that same vein, consider 2 Timothy 2:15 “...study to show thyself approved unto God...” I don’t believe that you want to be “disapproved” of God. This verse again requires study of the Word. Do you, and have you seriously studied God’s Word, or simply read portions of it? We are admonished by Scripture to study and to know God’s Word. One vital reason is because, as Scripture tell us over and over again, that in these end times there will be many false witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:15), false brethren (Galatians 2:4) false prophets, (Matthew 7:15), false Christ’s (Matthew 24:24), false accusers (2 Timothy 3:13), false teachers (2 Peter 2:1) etc. We are also told to “...take heed that no man deceive you.” (Matthew 24:4) and many other warnings regarding doctrinal deceit. Some of the largest “Christian” churches in the country are deceiving hundreds of thousands of “seekers” through blatantly false doctrine, because their followers don’t know Scripture and, therefore, cannot discern truth from cleverly masked falsehood. Imagine how many more are deceived and led to false or inadequate belief by the more subtle deceivers who fill the airways, the literature, the podiums and the pulpits. Many teach comforting, easy-does-it, but effectively damning doctrines and directives for achieving salvation. They spew platitudes including the niceties of Christian life, but fail to tell it like it is, when it comes to teaching how to become, and what it means to be, a possessor of faith.

The path to salvation is not a cakewalk, contrary to many commonly held views in the Christian community. Until the Holy Spirit has settled in the new heart of a redeemed person who has fully given himself to Christ Jesus, it is never easy, comfortable nor convenient to give up the old ways. Even then, it is a moment-by-moment commitment. Faith, confession, repentance and obedience are inexorably woven into the fabric of the possessor of salvation. A professed faith absent any one of these components is not a saving faith.

While we are at this issue of assurance as to possession of a saving faith, let us look at a few more “inferences” about this, which the Holy Spirit has given us. In Colossians 1:23, we are told that we are saved “...if ye continue in faith grounded and settled and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” In 1Corinthians 15:1, 2, Paul says “---I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you which also ye have received and wherein ye stand by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you unless ye have believed in vain.” Believed in vain? That means to believe in a way other than that which leads to possession of a saving faith. This is the same message as in the parable of the sower. Also Hebrews 3:6 says, “..but Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm onto the end.” There is no doubt that this means that faith and its evidences must continue through to the end, in spite of all the adversities which will necessarily come along to test us as we proceed through life to the end. In 2Timothy 2:15 the Holy Spirit through Paul tells us to “....study to show yourself approved of God.” Is that rhetoric to be ignored? I think not! Study what? His Word of course! In John 8:30 Jesus says “If ye continue in My Word, then ye are my disciples indeed.” To continue in His Word is to know His Word and to then continue to learn more and more of His Word, and to live His Word. Clearly He is telling us here that this is the mark of a disciple, one who is redeemed, and one who is a possessor. We are told in 2Peter 1:10 “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure...” Have you made it sure? Are you sure it’s sure?

This reminds me of the tragic case of Charles Templeton. (See his autobiography or my essay “How to Loose Your Salvation”.) This was a man who, for over 20 years, professed the Christian faith. During the 1950’s and 60’s he evangelized to millions all over the U.S., Canada, and Europe, on his own, and with Billy Graham. It is said that early on he was more popular and effective than Billy Graham. Yet, after 20 years of solidly professing the faith and compellingly preaching it, he suddenly renounced it and even claimed there was no God! He spent the rest of his life “preaching atheism.” Did he ever possess what he so powerfully professed, literally to the whole world? Of course, only God knows what was in his heart, but the evidence is certainly very disturbing, not only in terms of his soul, but also for the many he may have misguided into believing they possess what they may only profess.

Can all of the above noted admonitions be in order to periodically reconfirm that you haven’t lost that saving faith you believed you had? Of course not! If we ever had it, we can never lose it. The crux of all of this may be summarized by one word, EVIDENCE! Evidence of the possession of a saving faith is expressed by conviction, repentance, a changed life, forward movement in faith, increased love and fellowship toward and with brethren, perseverance, etc, etc. Everything in Scripture is for our learning and appropriate application. Therefore, it makes sense that because our hearts are hopelessly wicked and deceitful, none of us should rely on the absolute certainty of our own conclusions as to whether we possess salvation until we have thoroughly and prayerfully purged our souls of any possible reason to doubt. That is why we are so many times urged to “check it out,” to reconfirm the evidence. If that were not so, why would the Holy Spirit insert so many of these expressions which call us repeatedly to self-examination? To be a fruitful self examiner it must involve much prayer, conviction and confession in a spirit of true humility, without any pride of faith, for it is such pride which can so often be found in the heart of an empty professor, which impedes his or her from becoming a possessor.

Do you ever feel that you are backsliding in your zeal for the Lord? If it tends to become prolonged, do you ever become concerned? Does the possibility ever enter your heart

that your salvation may not have been real? Perhaps you haven't felt this, but I have, and even that great nineteenth century English pastor Charles Spurgeon had those moments of doubt and despair. In one of his sermons he spoke of times when even he was unsure, and when he felt the need to "examine" his faith, to again "work out" the truth of his salvation. In his sermon called "The Bite of Iniquity", he tells how he knelt down in anguish, and said, *"O'Lord I long to have this point decided, am I thine or am I not? If so why am I thus? Why is it that these confessions and these warrings are carried on in my spirit? Show me wherefore thou contendest with me, and why my sin contends with me. O'Lord show me where I am vile!"* Near the end of another one of his sermons, where he is describing the triumphal entry of Jesus into heaven with His raptured and resurrected, Spurgeon pauses to ask his audience *"Shall thy voice help to swell the everlasting chorus? Sometimes, I fear it shall not. There are times when the awful question comes – what if my name should be left out when He reads the muster-roll? Brethern, does not that thought trouble you? Will you be there – shall you see this pomp? Will you behold him triumph over sin, death and hell at last?"*

Can you answer Spurgeon's question with absolute assurance? It seems that many of us, both possessors as well as professors do sometimes tend to backslide down that slippery slope toward perdition. However, those who possess are always stopped and caught on the Rock, the rock that is Jesus. With His loving hands He catches us and guides us back up and out of our pit, ever closer to our ultimate eternal destiny. For Charles Templeton, He didn't do that. Spurgeon tells us how he viewed those times to be *"...of essential benefit to us. We have grown strong by these grieves; the rite of iniquity has made us wiser, more cautious, more patient, more humble, more affectionate, and made us more firm in our belief in our Savior afterwards, than we had ever been before."*

By now, you are either angry with me, disgusted, or I pray, concerned enough to "examine" and "work out" your faith. Remember, there is strong evidence that a vast majority of those who comfortably profess their faith do not possess it. Why is this? How could this tragic condition have developed? I doubt that this great disparity in number between those who profess vs those who possess was always the case in the

Christian community. Surely there were always more professors, than possessors, but it is difficult to believe that it was ever 10 to 1. The answer however, as with most things, can be found in the Bible. Scripture tells us in 2Timothy 3:1-5 “this know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away.” (Emphasis mine) And in verse 7 “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

After all this, perhaps you might want to take stock in yourself, to see how much possession there is in your profession. On balance, do you believe that you are a better Christian today than you were a year ago? If you are a possessor, you must be a better Christian, because in Philippians 1:6, the Holy Spirit tells us, “being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” In whom does He do this good work? He works in those who are born-again (born of the spirit) those who possess the saving faith. His purpose is to make His adopted children more and more Jesus-like. Can God ever fail to do what He has said He would do? Can His promised effort in you be so negligible as to go unnoticed year after year? Silly questions. If you can’t feel His working inside or see evidence of it on the outside, maybe it is time for an in-depth examination of the basis of your profession.

How can you do this? You can’t! Not without the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit. Before you can examine yourself in any meaningful manner you must be humble enough to recognize the potential need. Any pride of faith you feel must be eliminated from your soul, and you must be truly ready to “examine” and “work out your salvation.” With life eternal at stake, is there any reason to not seek that reassurance?

There are many great Christian writers who have addressed this concern. One who characterizes the nature of saving faith most beautifully, and has identified the principal

Scripture verses, which provided God's words in this regard, was Jonathan Edwards. In "A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affection" written by Edwards around 1746, we find what he called "holy affections" or a zeal for holy things and for God. Edwards also noted that whereas the principal evidence of life is motion, so the principal evidence of a possessor of a saving faith is holy practice, that true salvation always produces a continuing change in the nature of the convert. Therefore, whenever profession does not accompany repentance and a confession of conversion, it means that the person is not a possessor, that is, he is not a redeemed Christian. Thus he further notes that "Assurance is never to be enjoyed on the basis of a past experience. *"There is need of present and continuing work of the Holy Spirit..."* **THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF WHAT THIS PAPER IS ALL ABOUT!**

Edwards set down eleven evidences of a possessor of a true born-again Christian faith as it can be discerned from the Scriptures. These are presented as questions and are here simply listed for further study along with the relevant Scriptural verses from where they are derived. (They are not multiple choice)

1. Do you enjoy fellowship with Christ and the Father? (1 John 1:2,3)
2. Are you sensitive to sin? (1John 1:8-10, Romans 7:14-25)
3. Do you obey God's Word? (1 John 2:3-5)
4. Do you reject this evil world? (1 John 2:15-17, 5:19); John 17:14-16; Corinthians 4:4)
5. Do you eagerly await Christ's return? (1 John 3:2, 3:1, Corinthians 15:49, Titus 2:11-13, Phil 3:20,21)
6. Do you see decreasing patterns of sin in your life? (1 John 3:4-10, Romans 6:14, 17,18)
7. Do you love other Christians? (1 John 2:9-11, 3:10, 16, John 13:35; 1 Peter 1:22, John 8:44)
8. Do you experience answered prayer? (1 John 3:22-24, 5:13-15, Psalm 37:3-7)
9. Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit illuminating Scriptures? (1 John 4:13, 2:27, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 12, Galatians 4:6, 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:19)

10. Can you discern between spiritual truth and error? (1 John 4:1-6, 5:1, Romans 4:25, Acts 17:11)
11. Have you suffered rejection because of your faith? (1 John 3:13, Peter 2:20, 4:4, 5:13, Philippians 1:28, Corinthians 4:13)

It is evident that these questions and Scriptural references can be helpful in assessing the reality of one's own salvation and eternal security. However, they are all suggestive of an on-going process, a day-to-day moment-by-moment continuing condition of the heart. It must be acknowledged that none of these questions can be answered yes in a completed sense, but only in terms of whether there is an "upward" movement, a progression no matter how small, in the "yes" direction. In order to understand the full meaning and importance of these questions, one must be well versed in Scripture and really know what God expects of His own. How can you know you are His own unless you also know what He expects of His own, and are in the continuing process of attempting to achieve it?

By now many who have read this far will believe that I have beaten this subject to death, and should get off of it. Those who need the message the most may well be the ones who feel this the strongest. But please bear with me a little longer. Give this old fool a couple more minutes and a few additional drops of patience. Even if you don't believe that you need to hear more, perhaps there is someone you know who does, and with whom you might want to share even these last observations. Please know that all that I write here, as well as my other papers, come from a heart that grieves for the unsaved, and especially for those who have been led to believe they are saved, but are not.

Let's go back to page one and to the Barna poll which tells us in effect, that there is about a 10:1 ratio of those "Christians" who believe they are born-again, that is, who profess the saving faith, but that in all likelihood do not possess it, as compared to those who more likely do possess the grace of salvation. As noted earlier, this distinguishes the visible church from the invisible church.

One of the difficulties with speaking or writing in this manner, about the issue of salvation, is the inevitable accusation of judgment. "Who are you to say who is saved

and who is not?" Sooner or later their question, in its accusatory form, enters the discussion, quickly ending any further meaningful dialogue. For the record, let it be known that where salvation is concerned, I do not judge, for Scripture tells us that no man can so judge, because salvation is of the heart and only God knows what is in the heart. Could it be that this also applies to each of us regarding our own hearts? If only God can judge what's in the heart, how can we be certain that we know our own hearts?

The Barna poll tells nothing more than Scripture has been telling us for nearly 2000 years. That is, that in these end times there would be many more professors than possessors of God's saving grace. Genuine truth can only be found in Scripture. Science and philosophy provide much information and sometimes stumble upon a true fact, but Scripture is THE truth and nothing but the truth. It is not about the factual truths such as $10 \times 10 = 100$, but truths involving the soul and spirit, salvation and eternity. If one had never heard of such a poll, or even listened to a sermon or lecture, or read any written word other than Scripture, one could, if the reading was Spirit led, know with absolute certainty that the professors of today many times outnumber possessors of saving faith. This warning is a primary theme of the entire New Testament. Find one Epistle, which does not, in one way or another, warn of the coming apostasy, of false teachers, and false prophets purveying false doctrine, false gospels, and false Jesuses. How could it be otherwise when Scripture tells us that these would, if it were possible, even fool the elect? Preaching of a half Gospel can be as damaging as a false gospel. Repeated exposure to pleasant half gospel truths can make one feel good and believe that one has really heard the Word, and therefore knows enough to understand the process of salvation. What is the result? Profession without possession! Like any half-truth, it is deceit, and therefore, a lie as sinful as any lie. It seems evident that the single most pervasive cause of the great disparity between possessor and the mere professor is the widespread Scriptural ignorance, which prevents the mere professor from becoming a possessor. How many really know Scripture? How many simply accept what they hear from the pulpit, on radio, and T.V. and from fellow "Christians," and accept it as truth without ever going to the Scripture to prove that those things be so? Who bothers to do as the Bereans did as told in Acts 17:11? How can you even begin to live the Truth if

you don't even know what it really is? Anything learned regarding faith, grace, salvation, Jesus, and Christianity should be regarded as merely hearsay until it is clearly verified in Scripture. Limiting your knowledge of Scripture to what you hear or read from man has a strong likelihood of being terminally and eternally fatal!

If it is needed to express the primary theme even more clearly, one needs only to go to chapter two and three of the Book of Revelation. Here Christ Jesus Himself, in His seven letters to the seven churches spells out in sequential order, the entire history of the Christian church from the beginning through the end times in which we now live. The end time's church is the church of Laodicea. This is the only church about which Jesus has absolutely nothing good to say. In every other church, that is throughout all the church ages until the present age, Jesus had some redeeming quality to mention, but not about the church of our present age. This age is characterized as the church of Laodicea, which means "Rule of the People". The name itself may be viewed as prophetic because one might interpret this definition as "democracy." It is through a democratic process that biblical scholars suggest that the anti-christ will achieve his power. He will be "elected" as world ruler by the "democratic" process. In considering this age of "Rule of the People" one is reminded of the awful period referred to in the Old Testament as the time of the Judges when "everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes."

Jesus speaks of this end time church as "lukewarm" in the faith. The church claims to be "rich" and to have need of nothing." But Jesus calls this church, ignorant of the fact that it is "...wretched and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked." What an indictment! Are you part of this "lukewarmness" of the church or are you zealous in the faith? Are you personally as ignorant of the status of the church as Jesus says we are? Of course not! If you thought you were, you know that you would immediately set out to learn about that of which you were ignorant. The trouble is, we are all victims of the unknown ignorance! We simply cannot know that about which we have no knowledge that it even exists! Again the truth is the Scripture. But who prayerfully studies Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sufficiently to discover that which they don't even know exists? How many limit their entire biblical education to the 20 to 30 minutes weekly

sermon they hear? Perhaps they choose also to hear “evangelists preaching the Word on the radio or T.V. and, therefore, consider themselves biblically educated and in need of nothing more in the way of what is required to be adequately knowledgeable Christians. But remember, this is the end times period about which Scripture speaks more than of any other time in history! This is the time of the lukewarm church of which Jesus speaks no good! It is the time of most rampant apostasy, of ignorance, of false teachers and false prophets. It is the time when Jesus has been cast out of the church, just as we see Him cast out of the schools, out of government, out of the media, and to the extent possible, through regulatorial edicts, out of our lives. Jesus Himself says in Revelation 3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me.” What a sad and terrible indictment of our age! Our dear Lord and Savior, the Creator of the universe, still as humble as when He walked the earth, is relegated, through the rebellious nature of man, to stand outside of what is supposed to be His church, knocking and asking to be let in! Notice, however, that now He is not speaking to the church, He has condemned it! He is speaking to a remnant of potential possessors, pleading that He might save individual souls from eternal suffering, and to deliver them to eternal life and companionship with Him! If these passages do not portray to you exactly the times in which we live, and do not, at the same time bring tears along with a sense of guilt and wanting to love and obey our most wonderful Lord and Savior, I wonder then if the full meaning of these precious verses are fully understood.

In verse 19, Jesus prefaces His knocking at the door by declaring that “as many as I love, I rebuke, and chasten, be zealous therefore and repent.” Dear God, this is your whole message summarized in five precious words! If only the whole of the visible church could but apprehend these words in their full meaning all professors would become possessors! **BE ZEALOUS THEREFORE AND REPENT!!!** Be zealous, not lukewarm! Oh how the world hates the zealot, especially when he has zeal for Jesus and the Gospel. Lukewarm is the order of the day, sayeth Satan! But God says repent! How often does one ever hear this unfashionable, frightening, inconvenient, and distasteful word, repent, uttered from the pulpit or anywhere else, let alone spoken zealously in its true spiritual

context? Between hardly ever and never! That might tend to heat up the spirit and take away the “lukewarmness”! Satan will seek to prevent this at all costs!

Why is there such a “lukewarmness” that our Lord and Savior will not tolerate any part of this modern day church, but says that He will “spew it out of my mouth”? There are many reasons that have been put forth over the years. But for the purpose of this essay, we’ll elaborate on but one, which should be sufficient.

First, back again to the Barna poll. In order to make the poll meaningful, Barna had to initially establish what he calls the Biblical World view by which those being polled were to respond. He defined this in terms, which all Biblical Christians could call the essence of what the Christian faith is all about. His criteria were as follows:

- A. Absolute moral truth exists.
- B. That such truth is defined in the Bible.
- C. That there must be firm belief in six specific religious views which are as follows:
 - 1. That Jesus Christ lived a sinless life;
 - 2. That God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe, and that He still rules today;
 - 3. That salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned;
 - 4. That Satan is real;
 - 5. That a Christian has a responsibility to share the faith in Christ with other people;
 - 6. That the Bible is accurate in all its teaching.

As noted previously, it was a random poll of those who claimed to be born-again Christians, that is professors of the faith. Of the total, only 9 percent were willing to agree with the Christian World view as herein above defined. Does that make the 91 percent who did not agree, not born-again Christians? Not necessarily, for once again, only God can judge the heart. But it certainly suggests that there are a great many who, out of ignorance, are falsely believing they are possessors of a saving faith. However,

what appears to be most relevant to the question as to why there is such a small acceptance of this Biblical World View, why this “lukewarmness” of belief in this particular church age, may be found in a parallel poll. Barna also polled 601 pastors nationwide representing a random cross section of Protestant churches. From this he reports that only half of the pastors believed in the biblical worldview! As Barna pointed out, “You can’t give people what you don’t have.” This obviously shows up in the people who attend the churches, which have non-believing or not fully believing pastors. Another interesting finding was that 55 percent of the pastors who did not have the biblical worldview were seminary trained, while the 45 percent who did have the biblical worldview did not attend a seminary. Satan is a master at infiltrating institutions and the Christian seminaries seem to be no exception.

But the disease is even much worse than that! Many of the churches manned by pastors, who have a biblical worldview, tend to preach only the part of the Gospel truths, which are pleasant and pleasing to hear, avoiding those parts, which are not. In the best of churches, Jesus as Savior is preached. Believe and you are saved is preached, believing that His shed blood washes away our sins is preached, and describing the many pleasant attributes of Christian living is preached. But what about His Lordship? What about a contrite humble heart? What about conviction, confession, and genuine repentance? What about real commitment of one’s life to Jesus, by doing that which is right, not as the world views it, but as it is in God’s eyes, even though it may be inconvenient, difficult, and require much self discipline and personal denial? Are these essentials of a qualifying faith, the mark of a true possessor, ever subjects of today’s sermons? Not that you would notice! And what about some structured and mandatory study of Scripture or some evidence of Scriptural literacy as a condition of membership, or at least for its office holders? Not on your life!!! Why would a pastor dare, even if he thought it appropriate, suggest such a thing? Such an edict today, in this “lukewarm” Laodicean church age would either empty the church or quickly put the pastor out to pasture! Who would dare to set a course that would raise the temperature, increase Scriptural literacy, preach the whole Gospel and replace apathy with zeal? Silly question! All of these

conditions and more were considered minimal requirements in preaching in the Philadelphia church, which prevailed from about 1600 to 1900 A.D.

In the Philadelphian church age, the primary goal of the church was to bring souls to Christ, not to lure them into false complacency or to provide parishioners with amusements, entertainment and gushy Gospels. These were the days reflective of Whitehall, Wesley, Spurgeon and others who preached several times a day in churches and halls filled with thousands and often tens of thousands who were well versed in Scripture and yet were eager to hear the more learned pastors preach the whole, unvarnished Word of God. In our “lukewarm” church age, the order of the day is to fill the pews by whatever means is expedient. “Let’s get them and we’ll deal with their salvation later,” seems to be the motto. This may well begin as a sincere and laudable strategy for bringing in the “under churchd” and somewhere along the way a soul may actually be saved. But evidence seems to indicate that for the most part, only that which brings them in, keeps them in. Thus it is usually the “lite”, not too long, no sweat Gospel, along with perhaps modern music, comforts and entertainment facilities, which bring them and keep them in. But if lite turns to heavy, and entertainment is replaced by calls for serious worship and Scriptural study, as it must for these who are to become possessors of a saving faith, how many souls can be saved? Will it be more than in a smaller no frills church, which “tells it all” and “tells it like it is”, a church, which preaches the whole Word of God? I really don’t know! But what I do know is that there will be many many more unpossessing professors resulting from the Christian lite, seeker-friendly churches than there will be from fundamental, strong, biblically-based churches! And that is one of the great tragedies of this age. Those large seeker-friendly churches “graduate” professors by the droves. They have been fed spiritual “doughnuts”, a taste good substance with absolutely no “redeeming” nutritional benefits! They feel full, but all they have ingested were empty calories. They feel they have possession, but all they have is a satiated appetite, absent any spiritual nutrition, because they have eaten little if any of God’s whole food Gospel, nor have they drunk from the true spiritually nutritious living water. More than likely, they don’t even know what these are. Yet, they have become professors! And who can persuade them otherwise, once they believe they

possess! For most, it will be Jesus when they come before Him and He says, “I never knew you, depart from Me.” (Matthew 7:23)

By the way, this metaphor, regarding spiritual food, the need for it, and where to get it, occurs many times in the Bible. Jesus Himself said, as recorded in Matthew 4:14 “...man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Note the every! Where do you find that idea? Jeremiah said in chapter 15 verse 16 “..thy words were found and I did eat them, and they were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.” It sounds like Scripture is terrific food for the heart! It even tastes good, because David found God’s word “sweeter than honey,” as he tells us in Psalm 19:10. At the last supper when Jesus told the disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood it is evident that He was speaking not of actual physical flesh and blood, but rather the spiritual food of His Word. From the Gospel of John chapter 1:1, we know that Jesus is the Word, the Word that was made flesh, and so it’s the Word we study and eat for spiritual nutrients. Scripture is like a vast menu of spiritual food, but not from which we can pick and choose only what we want. We must eat the whole word, every thing on the menus, if we are to be properly nourished. It’s the perfect food, a precisely balanced diet, through which it is possible to live forever. If you claim to be a Christian and have not a hunger, a desire and a taste for the Word of God, and find that some parts taste so bad you cannot bring yourself to eat them, then perhaps something is wrong, and you better examine your heart and see if you really do belong to God.

Is there even the very remote chance that you may be one of the non-possessing professors? I beg you to meditate long and seriously on that matter and consider all of the above scriptural references before you seek an answer. Examine your faith, and your life, adjust as needed your behavior, so as to get acquainted with our Lord, and pray that you will never hear those terrible words of Matthew 7:23, but instead, that you will hear, “Well done my good and faithful servant.” May God bless you and I thank you for persevering to the end of what must have seemed to some, to have been an endless verbal beating.

P.S.

After struggling through almost 16 pages, trying to articulate a message that lies so heavy on my heart, I was blessed and rightly humbled as I read the following. This is the closing paragraph of one of Charles Spurgeon's many extraordinary sermons. Here, this great herald of God's Word has succinctly and masterfully summarized much of my message, as well as his own. It was delivered sometime in the mid-1800's when he was yet a young pastor, preaching several times a day to thousands of eager seekers, speaking to standing-room-only audiences. His was a time within the age of the "Church of Philadelphia," when the majority of the population knew the Scripture and when the preaching of the Whole Word of God was in vogue, both strong and undiluted. This sermon was titled "Thus saith the Lord," a phrase, which occurs about 500 times in Scripture. It was, of course, focused on the literal word of God regarding various matters, and how important it is to abide by them. This was one of his milder sermons, yet, right-on in terms of what I have been trying to express regarding the difference between possession and mere profession.

Now, to close, let me say to you, my hearers, have any of you a hope in Heaven which will not stand the test of "Thus saith the Lord?" What are you resting upon? Are you resting upon something which you felt when excited at a prayer-meeting or under a sermon? Remember, you will not have that excitement to bear you up in death, and the religion of excitement will not suffice in the Day of Judgment. Are you building upon your own works? Are you depending upon your own feelings? Do you rely upon the sacraments? Are you placing your trust upon the word of man? If so, remember that when God shakes all things he will shake these false foundations; but Oh! To build upon the Word of my Lord and Master; trust your soul to Jesus. Hating sin and clinging to the great sin-bearer you shall find in him a rock a refuge which can never fail you; but I do conjure you, as the Lord liveth, search and try yourselves by the Word of God. No doubt there are many among us who are not built upon the Rock of Ages, and we may, many of us be deceived, by a mere name to live. Do, then, since the test-day must come – since

you must be weighed in the balances – weigh yourselves now, my hearers; and let none of us go down to the chambers of destruction believing ourselves to be heirs of heaven, being all the while enemies to the Most High God. May the Lord exalt his own Word, and give us a sure inheritance in the blessings which it brings. Amen.