

When Is It Enough?

If you have read any more than a few of my commentaries, then you might consider skipping this one, because there is nothing new here, only a different twist on what I have written about many times during the past few years. It all has to do with those who call themselves born-again Christians, but who never received that saving grace. These are those who have been exposed to the Word of God and to the truth of Jesus' work on the cross. However, for any number of possible reasons, these truths have not advanced beyond the mind so as to enter the heart. They have not found their way into the very fabric of one's being as they must, in order to trigger God's grace of redemption. If the truth is really there, then we can also know that the Holy Spirit is there 24-7. It is through His indwelling that we are assured that the saving faith is also there and can never be lost.

Just as other times in the past, as I have written similar commentaries, I am directed to the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:4-15, and the powerful lesson that it provides. We find that only the fourth category of people is those who are saved. The first three categories represent those who heard the Word, but for various reasons failed to achieve salvation. The first seems easy to dismiss because Satan never gave the seeds of faith a chance to germinate. However, the next two categories are the subjects of concern here, as in many of my earlier musings. It is here where we can put a context to the title question. Notice the description of the 2nd category of people. Luke 8:13 tells us: *"They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away."*

Look carefully at this phrase, *"...for a while believed..."* That is they actually believed! This is the same word #4100 in Strong's Concordance "pisteuao" that is used in describing the belief of the faithful born-again, eternally saved followers of Christ Jesus! Were one to ignore the many assurances in Scripture to the contrary, one could easily conclude from this, that salvation can be lost! However, it's obvious that here it was not a saving belief even though it appeared to be at the time. Those who believed for a while,

were those who believed in their heads but not in their hearts. Head belief can appear to be a saving belief. It can have all of the trappings of a heart belief. This belief (faith) must either progress to the heart as a permanent dynamic fixture, or remain in the head as a vain faith. "... *receive the word with joy;...*" What more evidence would a pastor or anyone else who had introduced them to the Word need to witness in order to conclude that here was a redeemed soul? From the perspective of this parable the answer is simply, TIME. But how much time? That is the subject question, "when is it enough?" How long a time was this joy and presumed belief able to last without roots, the lack of which would reveal its falseness? This exposes the dangers, and the almost total ineffectiveness of "quick prayerism that so many" evangelicals happily announced as having resulted in salvation.

Can the masquerading vain faith continue on indefinitely in a biblically ignorant complacent soul, even after the joy fades as it must? Yes, and I believe that there are millions of such souls walking the streets and filling church pews nearly everywhere. Can such a "belief" through a morphosis, augmented by Scriptural ignorance, presumption and complacency continue in the mind for many years, if not seriously disturbed? I believe it can. It's not at all uncommon to find someone who professes to have been born-again years ago, but now admits that he hasn't cracked a Bible or gone to church for most of those years. Belief in the head can be real and convincing to that person. However, only when it reaches the heart where the love of Jesus replaces the love of self and sin, can the belief become a saving faith. How tragic and frightening is that phrase "for a while?" How many of us "believers" are in that "for a while" category? How long is "for a while", and how long after that is it enough? While the answer is blatantly obvious, if we study the Scripture, many fail to understand or appreciate it.

Given the careful order in which these "sower" categories are listed, I suspect that number three may have been a little closer to a true faith than that described in the second one. However "close" is never enough. This category is described thusly, "*14 And that which fell among the thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are*

choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”

I think that a similar transient “belief” is implicit in the term “go forth”. They pursued a form of belief, or faith that perhaps lasted a little longer before worldly cares reduce it to a presumption of faith, a more subtle fading away or cooling down of a belief / faith that never became a saving faith. When we read here of the “choking” because of “care and riches and pleasures” isn’t it closely reminiscent of Jesus’ description of the lukewarm church of Laodicea, which He spewed from His mouth? At the end of this verse we read that these people did not bring “fruit to perfection.”

Again, this verse seems to express a slower degeneration of the non-saving faith from the initial head belief. Notice that it doesn’t say that they did not bear fruit. It says that they failed to bring it to perfection! That distinction seems to make a world of difference. (Perfection from the Greek word *telephosoreo* meaning being a bearer to completion, maturity ie: to ripen fruit) Just as joy proved to be so deceptive in the previous category, here deceit and failure are related to the imperfection of the fruit. We all as Christians look for “fruit” in others as evidence of salvation. Because of this little gem, it seems that “fruit” isn’t enough. It must be “to perfection.” Are any of us capable of such discernment? Again, when is it enough? Isn’t spiritual perfection also a time-dependant process that is achieved only after the time of physical death? Might we therefore consider the time of death as being the only time “when it is enough?”

I feel that we’re getting neck deep here into an awful dilemma as we dissect and digest this message regarding the two categories of unsaved souls. It is evident that this parable speaks strongly against ones ability to easily discern the status of one’s eternal security. Clearly, it is much more difficult than we may have believed. When it comes to looking for some comforting evidence of salvation in others, might we not be badly deceived by seeing those who “receive the word with joy”, unless we hang around long enough to see a sustaining joy? But when is it enough? Then there are those in this third category who actually may bear fruit, but not to perfection. Presumably the ability to discern the right quality of “fruit” is as tenuous as it is to discern a genuine belief. How long is enough to determine whether ones fruit is likely to ever come to “perfection?” Of course, with God,

all things are possible, even exceptions to immutable rules and laws. It goes without saying that He knows true saving faith as opposed to false faith. The issue here is, how can we be certain?

While we are disturbingly addressing this question and the described evidences regarding a saving faith in others, we must not neglect applying all of this to ourselves. To neglect to conduct a serious and comprehensive examination of ourselves regarding these matters can have horrifying consequences. If we see evidence of such problems, they can be mitigated, if the examination is immediate while there is yet time and sincere willingness to seek, to pray, to repent, to commit to Jesus, and to better learn and apply God's Word. Scripture tells us that "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee....*" (Hosea 4:6) That is not worldly knowledge, it is biblical knowledge! You believe in God, great! But James reminds us that Satan and the demons do also. You have a Bible, great! Is it but a display item on your coffee table, or do you study it daily? Do you read it first to see what it says, then read it to see what it means, and then again to see how it applies to your life? Isn't it evident that all three manners of reading are essential? Scripture is God's revelation of Himself, His entire plan from creation to eternity, as well as how one can become eligible to be with God in His eternal kingdom. It also makes clear what happens to those who through rejection or inexcusable ignorance perish, that is are "rejected" and forever condemned to damnation.

I've asked the title question several times now, but have not ventured any answer. Only God can answer it because the answer is found only in the heart where only God can see. While the truly saved soul has had a heart replacement, the nature of the old heart, which was deceitful above all things, remains in and with us as our sin nature. It can and does deceive all of us to varying degrees. Does that mean we cannot ever know whether or not we are truly saved? Absolutely not! However, we must not take it for granted or presume that we are saved, based on a few simple scriptural verses that today are so often taken out of context of the whole Word of God, and become the sole basis of the

presumption that one is saved. I fear that much of this “belief” is the false belief mentioned in the parable.

Once again, and finally, the question, when is it enough? This begs to be answered by another question. When is what enough? That brings us to the fundamental question every would-be-saved-soul needs to ask, when is there enough evidence to warrant an assurance of salvation?

The answer is found in the working of the Holy Spirit in us as He continues the post-justification sanctifying process. Every saved soul is engaged in this process from the moment he or she is justified until the moment of death. Where there is no sanctification, there is no salvation. Evidence of that process is many fold. It is a continuing inner joy and humble gratitude for having been saved; it is a growing sensitivity and hatred of sins, especially those sins we have much loved; it is a growing interest and hunger to know God’s Word; it is an ever-increasing desire to be obedient to His Word; it is an increasing love of Jesus and of our brethren; it is the eager and dedicated worship, and serious heart-felt prayer; it is many more things all of which point toward Jesus and a desire to be like Him.

When is it enough? It is never enough. It must continue to the end. But when is it enough to establish the fact of salvation? It is enough when there is sufficient evidence that this sanctification process is really progressing, because only a saved soul undergoes such a process. If you have this evidence, relax, go back to sin if you want, forget the whole thing, because your salvation is secure in that once you have it you can’t lose it no matter what you do. Are you CRAZY, you say; I can not do that! That is right. You can’t, because once God begins this work in you He will continue to the end! This work of the Holy Spirit facilitates that “I can’t” in you, because any such backsliding becomes too painful to continue for any length of time.

Let’s face it, if you are really saved, you’ve been set up. Your conscience is being so sharply honed that every sin you yield to become so painful that it quickly brings you to

your knees in prayer for forgiveness. You're hooked and can't get away even if you wanted to. What a great feeling this is!

P.S.

Those who may have read Jesus' explanation of the parable in Matthew 13 may be confused by the above. Matthews's version of what Jesus said is somewhat different in its reciting of the two issues that I have focused on. Describing the second category, Matthew's version of Jesus' explanation does not say that they "believed", but merely received with joy and were later "offended" (scandalized, enticed to sin, apostasy, etc.) In the third category, Luke's version of what of what Jesus said is "and bring no fruit to perfection" Matthews's version says, "...*he becometh unfruitful*...." Of course, the essence of the message in the same. Even here it seems easy to reconcile the difference, if we can assume that "...*he became unfruitful*..." means that he at first was, and then no longer was, as the "become" seems to imply. Would this message have been worded this way if he never had been fruitful?

There are a few other instances of such slight variations in the words spoken by Jesus where they are reported in more than one of the Gospels. Were they all identically phrased, one would need to conclude that they all come from but one witness and were therefore merely copied by the others. Variations such as this attest to the fact that each witness is recording what he remembered hearing, independent of what others focused on. While Luke wasn't personally present to hear Jesus, there seems to be evidence to believe that Peter was the actual witness and that much of Luke's recorded was given to him by Peter. At any rate, Luke was a very careful examiner of facts before he wrote of them, as he attests too (Luke 1:1-4). In comparing the two versions, it seems to me that Luke has reported the message in slightly more detail as compared with the summary type of recording by Matthew. Again, the differences seem small in terms of this commentary. However they are very much worthy of deep extended study. This can be found in the commentary called: "*Commentary of the Difference Between The Kingdom of God and The Kingdom of Heaven*". We should note also that Scripture gives several

examples of how unsaved teachers were able to bare ripe fruit, that is lead people to salvation.