

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 93

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Topic: True Faith Vs. False Faith

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Can a person who truly thinks they are a Christian and perhaps is even in the ministry end up hearing God say "Depart from Me, I never knew you?" What are some of the signs of a true Christian? And how can true and false faith be distinguished? In the final section of Sermon On The Mount (Matthew 7:12-27) Jesus spends some time discussing the nature of true Christianity and how it can be distinguished from false faith:

Matthew 7:12 *Therefore all things, whatever you desire that men should do to you, do even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

The Golden Rule tells us that what the Christian wants done for them – they are also to do for others. This is the Law and the Prophets. The Golden Rule is the whole cloth, all the commandments tightly woven into one ethical principle. It is what God wants from us, because when we act like this we reflect the image of God and glorify His Name. So we see that the first and truest sign of a Christian is loving action based on deep empathy.

If the Christian wants respect, they are to respect others, if the Christian wants mercy, they are to be merciful to others. Since no one wants to be treated rudely, dishonestly, deceitfully or with discourtesy the Christian is to never be rude, dishonest, deceitful or discourteous to others. The true Christian feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick and cares for orphans and widows in their distress as they are able (James 1:27) - because that is what they would want done for them if they were in the same circumstances. If our saving faith is genuine, it will result in love, not just in word and tongue - but in deed and truth (1 John 3:16-18).

Please note that I am not advocating salvation by works. Salvation is by grace through faith yet if it is real and genuine it will result in good works done from a renewed nature (Ephesians 2: 8-10). In 1 John the four tests of faith are: belief in Christ accompanied by correct doctrine, love, a righteous lifestyle and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then immediately continues:

(13) Go in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in through it. (14) Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The narrow gate is faith in Christ and obedience to His commandments. The person who follows the Golden Rule of verse 12 is entering via the narrow gate. They are disciplining their life so that it follows the path that Christ wants them to follow. The narrow gate is the holy life of love and righteousness while the broad road to destruction is the selfish and worldly life that rejoices in wickedness. Jesus says quite plainly that there are 'few' that find the narrow gate. Many people have a form of religion but few discipline their lives unto righteousness, love and godliness and live unstained by the world.

Simply saying you are a Christian does not mean that you are a Christian any more than saying you are a hamburger makes you a hamburger. Many people say they are Christians but are not on the 'narrow path' at all. Their lifestyle, morals and attitudes are just the same as those of the world. When George Barna measures statistics about Christians he uses 'those who call themselves Christians' as the identifier – and the results are very discouraging. Those who just call themselves believers are just the same as everyone else!! Just thinking you are a Christian changes nothing.

But when the same things (e.g. divorce rates) are measured by actual Christian behaviors instead - then things change! Couples who discipline their lives according to the gospel (regularly attend church together, regularly pray together and regularly read the bible together) have a much better lifestyle and much less dysfunction than the population in general. The obedient believers are noticeably different in all aspects.

Those who actually and intentionally build their lives upon the rock of Christ are strong! There is a vast difference between those who just casually think that they are Christians and those who go about obeying Christ's commandments in a deliberate fashion. Being saved by faith is not the same as being saved by religious self-delusion! True faith truly believes the gospel and lives out a Sermon On The Mount gospel lifestyle.

Jesus continues teaching about the difference between true believers and false believers by using the example of deceptive false prophets:

(15) Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (16) You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (17) Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits, nor can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.

The false believer has a greedy and ravenous appetite, an inner life that only seeks to accumulate. Their hope is entirely in this world. Elsewhere in the NT we find out that the false prophet also seduces, flatters and destroys. On the other hand the righteous person has their hope in Christ and is wise and good and edifies, blesses and speaks truthfully.

The true Christian brings forth good fruit. Primarily these are the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control along with righteousness, holiness and godly wisdom. If these things are in our life we are producing good fruit. When people come to us they are refreshed and find a blessing. Fruit is not necessarily 'ministry results' because that would give an unfair advantage to those in ministry. There are gifts of mercy, teaching, pastoring, administration and helps

among others. Whatever gift we have it should be exercised in love and produce joy and peace. Then we can know we are producing good fruit.

The bad fruit folk have the opposite effect. A person comes expecting figs and just gets thorns, another comes expecting juicy grapes and gets brambles instead. The person who produces bad fruit is rude and unloving, egotistical and pompous, unmerciful and greedy. You feel 'stabbed' by them rather than blessed by them and you never want to run into them again – any more than you would want to run into a thorn bush again!

Jesus continues with another major principle of discernment:

(21) Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven.

Calling Jesus Lord is insufficient. That is like an unrepentant thief calling the judge "Your Honor" and expecting that to be sufficient to get away with his crime! Even the Devil will call Jesus Lord one day (Philippians 2:9-11)! It is not our lips but our life that counts.

The true Christian goes out and does God's will and obeys His commandments. They 'walk the talk'. The true Christian seeks to live a righteous, holy and obedient life in reverence and awe (1 Timothy 2:2, Hebrews 12:28). The true Christian actually 'does the will of My Father in heaven'. And if they do sin, they confess their sin, seek grace and forgiveness and get back to the task of living in the light and being obedient to God's will (1 John 1:5-10).

Jesus continues by telling us that there will be many self-deluded people, who genuinely believe they are Christians, and who even believe they have a powerful and spiritual ministry – yet they will be cast out of Heaven on Judgment Day:

(22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

Even though they believed they had a ministry of prophecy, deliverance and miracles, they were not saved! For they ignored Christ's commandments while preaching His Name! They worked lawlessness! Perhaps they flattered and stole and took big offerings from widows, the poor and the lonely. Perhaps they were immoral. Whatever they did, they chose the broad road. They did not discipline themselves to go through the narrow gate. They refused humility, and chose arrogance (we can tell that from their response to God). They became proud and fell into the condemnation (judgment) of the Devil (1 Timothy 3:6); and how was the Devil judged – by being cast out of heaven into the Pit!

Genuine Christianity is an obedient lifestyle that makes the person more and more into the image of God so that God recognizes Christ in them and "knows them". Those who have nothing of Christ in their character are unrecognizable by God. He does not and has never, known them!

Jesus finishes His discourse in Matthew 7 by telling us how we can have a strong and stable and genuine Christian life:

(24) Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. (25) And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on a rock. (26) And everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them shall be compared to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. (27) And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on that house. And it fell, and great was its fall.

The person who consciously and deliberately lives out Christ's commandments by obeying the Golden Rule, who loves their neighbor as themselves, who is kind and good and patient and gracious and who abides in righteousness; this person will be "built upon the Rock".

These are those who receive the word of Christ and obey it with a good heart and produce fruit, thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. These are those who are better than the world, who turn the other cheek, who love their enemies and who pray for those who persecute them. These genuine Christians are full of kindness toward the weak and mercy toward the struggling. They abide in Christ and show forth the character of Christ in their lifestyle. They are built upon the Rock and are sure. They are the true wheat and are taken into God's storehouse. While the disobedient ones are built upon the sand and are swept away. The disobedient ones are the tares and the chaff and they are gathered, burned up and destroyed.

Blessings,

[John Edmiston](#)

Chairman/ CEO Cybermissions
Pastor – Eternity Christian Fellowship
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<http://www.cybermissions.org>
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