

## How Can We Know If Our Faith Is Real?

- Genuine faith – What is the role of Faith? Works? Savior? Lord?
- **Eph. 2:8-9**, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- Parable of the Soils – Jesus explains what genuine saving faith means
- **Matt. 13:23**, As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.
- We are to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith
- **2 Cor. 13:5**, Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

### **The Character of Genuine Saving Faith<sup>1</sup>**

- Salvation is a free gift from God
- Accept Christ as Savior, or as Lord as well?
- Many accepted Christ as Savior, but nothing changed in their lives
- The gospel of John seems to say “only believe” and you will be saved
- Only believe? Even Satan and demons believe in Christ and shudder
- The woman at the well and Nicodemus are used as examples, but ...
- **John 4**, Jesus talks to woman at the well about her sin
- The woman believes and testifies of Him – leading many Samaritans to faith
- Jesus talks about believers giving up all and bearing their cross and following Him
- Jesus is called Lord 747 times in the NT
- **Matt. 19:16-26**, Jesus answers the rich young ruler’s question – what must I do to have eternal life? Keep the commandments
- Does making a decision for Christ save you?
- How do you answer the question – why should God accept you in heaven?
- Is it enough to just believe that Jesus died for your sins?
- Accept Christ as Savior now and make Him Lord later on?
- **2 Tim. 2:12-13**, if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful--for he cannot deny himself.
- We are to be strong in grace, to endure, to be faithful, not to deny Him
- See also **Matt. 10:33**; **Luke 12:9**
- Perseverance gives evidence of genuine faith
- Salvation is forever, but only if it’s real
- What about people who made a decision but lived a life in denial?

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the list in an Appendix of The MacArthur Study Bible

- **Mark 8:34**, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."
- The branches that bear fruit are genuine believers
- **John 15:1-2**, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."
- The Bible provides a clear understanding of genuine saving faith - true faith produces good fruit. In His metaphor of the vine and branches and in His parable of the soils and the seed, the Lord Jesus taught that, while unbelievers are unfruitful, those who are saved would bear fruit. In the parable of the soils and the seed, three of four soils produced fruitless plants, vivid pictures of receptions of God's Word that never resulted in salvation.
- In contrast, fruit-bearing plants thrive in the good soil that pictures a redeemed heart. Jesus said, "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (**Matt. 13:23**).
- All believers are fruitful, even though not equally fruitful.
- In the parable of the sower, the Bible also describes what good fruit looks like. The lists (below) describe the characteristics of genuine saving faith, serving as a guide for spiritual fruit inspection (**2 Cor. 13:5**).
- To give you assurance of the reality of your faith, we look at three different lists and read some of the accompanying Scripture passages

## 1. Evidences That Neither Prove Nor Disprove One's Faith:

- The following characteristics are not conclusive evidence of real faith

### 1.1 Visible Morality:

- The rich young ruler appears to be very moral
- **Matt. 19:16-21**, And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."
- ... but the price was too high for this rich young man
- There must be a turning from sin and a willingness to submit
- The scribes and Pharisees appear to be very moral
- **Matt. 23:27**, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."

- Good morals alone is not evidence of genuine saving faith

## 1.2 Intellectual Knowledge:

- Men is conscious of God's existence, power, and divine nature
- They had head knowledge but didn't give God the glory (man's chief end)
- **Rom. 1:21**, For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
- Because the Jews possessed the law they were confident that they were spiritually superior teachers – but they were hypocrites
- **Rom. 2:17ff**, But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?
- Head knowledge without change of the heart is not genuine saving faith

## 1.3 Religious Involvement

- The importance of being ready always for Christ's return
- **Matt. 25:1-10**, Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ... And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.
- The five foolish virgins had their lamps but no oil – involved but not ready
- False appearance of involvement is not genuine saving faith

## 1.4 Active Ministry

- You may be active in a ministry but be barren in your faith
- The faith that says but does not do is really unbelief
- **Matt. 7:21-24**, Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
- Their works appeared spectacular but were not authentic
- Genuine faith produces good works
- Active in ministry with the wrong heart attitude is not genuine saving faith

## 1.5 Conviction of Sin

- Paul gave his defense of the faith before Felix

- **Acts. 24:25**, And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."
- Felix's moment of conviction had passed and he foolishly passed up his opportunity to repent; he knew he was living in sin; not ready to repent
- Conviction without repentance is not genuine saving faith

## 1.6 Assurance

- Jesus points out the false assurance of the scribes and Pharisees
- **Matt. 23**, Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you--but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ... and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ...
- To "sit in Moses' seat" was to have the highest authority to instruct people in the law. The scribes and Pharisees had gone beyond any legitimate authority and were adding human tradition to the Word of God. For that Jesus condemned them.
- False assurance (e.g. enough good works) is not genuine saving faith

## 1.7 Time of Decision

- Parable of the soils – the apostates fall away
- **Luke 8:11-15**, Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.
- True believers make a genuine decision and persevere in the faith
- Making a decision for Christ without bearing fruit is not genuine saving faith

## 2. The Fruits/Proofs of Authentic/True Christianity:

- The following are characteristics of genuine saving faith

### 2.1 Love For God:

- Yearning for God in the midst of distresses
- **Ps. 42:1ff**, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you

in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

- The believer shows a genuine love and desire for God and the things of God
- **Ps. 73:25**, Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
- The lawyer asks Jesus – what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
- **Luke 10:27**, And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."
- We cannot please God in the flesh
- **Rom. 8:7**, For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.
- Love for God is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.2 Repentance From Sin:

- King David asks for forgiveness for his transgressions
- **Ps. 32:5**, I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.
- Mercy will be given to him who confesses his sins
- **Prov. 28:13**, Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
- Parable of the Lost Sheep – joy over the repentance of a believer
- **Luke 15:7**, Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
- Jesus sums up the gospel at the end of the gospel of Luke
- **Luke 24:46-47**, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."
- Paul hates to sin but sees sin in himself – sin controls his flesh
- **Rom. 7:14ff**, For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ... Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
- Paul's sorrow lead to repentance – his sorrow is genuine
- **2 Cor. 7:10**, For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.
- False teachers have disregarded and denied sin
- **1 John 1:8-10**, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- There is no salvation apart from repentance
- Continual confession of sin indicates genuine salvation
- Repentance from sin is evidence of genuine saving faith

### 2.3 Genuine Humility:

- King David's prayer of repentance
- **Ps. 51:17**, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- Sermon on the Mount – believers are to show humility
- **Matt. 5:1-12**, Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."
- The demands of the Law are humanly impossible
- Sinners depend on divine grace for salvation
- We are to humbly recognize utter spiritual bankruptcy apart from God
- We are to humble ourselves as believers
- **James 4:6, 9ff**, But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."; **v. 10**, Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
- Genuine humility is evidence of genuine saving faith

### 2.4 Devotion to God's Glory:

- We are to give all glory and praise to God (man's chief purpose/end)
- Israel is reminded to remember God's work for Israel, Abraham -> Joshua
- **Ps. 105:3**, Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!
- Give glory to His name, not to us – God does not share His glory with anyone
- **Ps. 115:1**, Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!
- God is with all who belong to Him and give Him glory
- **Is. 43:7**, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.
- God has refined Israel for His glory
- God fulfilled prophecies as a sign so that Israel might give God the glory
- **Is. 48:10ff**, Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.
- God is a jealous God
- Christian liberty is to be conducted to God's honor/glory
- **1 Cor. 10:31**, So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- All that we do should be devoted to God's glory
- This devotion to God is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.5 Continual Prayer:

- We should not be discouraged but pray always
- God answers prayer, maybe not when or what we desire, but he does answer
- **Luke 18:1**, And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.
- Paul was a true prayer warrior – he asked for prayer for the saints & himself
- **Eph. 6:18ff**, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
- We are also to put on the full armor of God, **v10ff**
- Gratitude to God should accompany all true prayer
- Worry indicates a lack of trust in God's wisdom and power
- **Phil. 4:6ff**, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- Supplication indicates a need – need of salvation in this case
- We are to have compassion for the lost (all men, not just the elect)
- **1 Tim. 2:1-4**, First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- Demonstrate mutual honesty, openness and sharing of needs
- **James 5:16-18**, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.
- Continual prayer is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.6 Selfless Love

- Professing Christians characterized by hate show that they were never born again – lack of love prove claims of salvation to be false
- **1 John 2:9ff**, Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
- Becoming a Christian is a turning from hate to love, experiencing new birth
- **1 John 3:14**, We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.
- We are to make sure that love is an habitual practice
- **1 John 4:7ff**, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was

made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

- The characteristic habit of love is exhibited by those who are truly reborn
- Selfless love is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.7 Separation From the World

- We are **in** the world but not **of** the world
- The earth is not my eternal home, I'm just passing through
- The natural man cannot receive the Spirit of God
- **1 Cor. 2:12**, Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.
- James warns those who are outwardly associated with the church but having a real love for the things of this world
- **James 4:4ff**, You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?
- John warns believers not to "love the world"
- The true believer loves God and fellow Christians
- **1 John 2:15-17**, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
- Our faith has overcome the world
- **1 John 5:5**, Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
- Separation (in, but not of) from the world is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.8 Spiritual Growth

- Parable of the soils – seed fell 1) by wayside, 2) on rock, 3) among thorns, and 4) on good ground. Only seed on good ground bore fruit
- **Luke 8:15**, And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.
- Jesus is the true vine; apostate Christians who never really believed are taken away in judgment;
- God removes things from a believer's life that would hinder fruit bearing
- **John 15:1-6**, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that

does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

- The church's purpose is to equip the saints, to encourage spiritual growth
- **Eph. 4:12-16**, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
- Spiritual growth is manifested in the knowledge and the fullness of Christ, in unity, and in speaking the truth in love
- Spiritual growth is evidence of genuine saving faith

## 2.9 Obedient Living

- We live the life of a believer through obedient living
- Jesus warns – the faith that says but does not do is really unbelief
- **Matt. 7:21**, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
- True believers obey Jesus' commands
- **John 15:14ff**, You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ... These things I command you, so that you will love one another.
- We are commanded to love one another
- The Apostle Paul admonishes Gentile believers to be obedient to the faith
- **Rom. 16:26**, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith
- True salvation produces obedience to Christ
- We are to love one another, to meet others at their point of need
- **1 Pet. 1:2, 22**, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. ... Having purified

your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

- Obedience to God's commands is the external visible proof of salvation
- **1 John 2:3-5**, And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
- Obedient living is evidence of genuine saving faith

### **3. The Conduct Of The Gospel:**

- As believers, what then should we do with the gospel?

#### **3.1 Proclaim It:**

- Jesus preached, taught and healed – proclaiming the gospel message
- **Matt. 4:23**, And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

#### **3.2 Defend It:**

- Jude was compelled by circumstances to defend the gospel
- **Jude 3**, Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

#### **3.3 Demonstrate It:**

- We are to have integrity, to live consistent with what we believe and teach
- **Phil. 1:27**, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

#### **3.4 Share It:**

- We are partners in the gospel and need to share it with others
- **Phil. 1:5**, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

#### **3.5 Suffer For It:**

- We may be called to suffer for the gospel and not be ashamed of it
- **2 Tim. 1:8**, Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

### **3.6 Don't Hinder It:**

- Paul preached the gospel because God had set him apart for service
- **1 Cor. 9:16**, For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

### **3.7 Do Not Be Ashamed:**

- Paul had been imprisoned, chased out, smuggled out, laughed at, regarded as a fool, and stoned, yet he persevered and was not ashamed of the gospel
- **Rom. 1:16**, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

### **3.8 Preach It:**

- Paul did not preach from personal pride, but from divine compulsion
- **1 Cor. 9:16**, For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

### **3.9 Be Empowered:**

- The credibility of the gospel message of redemption was established by the character of the lives of the preachers – they were empowered
- **1 Th. 1:5**, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

### **3.10 Guard It:**

- We are to guard the gospel and make sure that the gospel is not distorted
- **Gal. 1:6-8**, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.
- This list describes the believer's desire in the conduct of the gospel

## **4. Genuine Saving Faith**

- There are evidences that neither prove nor disprove one's faith
- That first list is necessary but not sufficient
- The first list is not a definitive list
- The second list demonstrates the fruit or proof of authentic/true Christianity and of one's genuine saving faith
- This second list provides a guide for spiritual fruit inspection
- If the first list is true of a person, but the second list is false for that person, there is cause to question the validity of one's profession of faith
- If the second list is true, then the first list will also be true
- Let us then conduct ourselves as those who believe and live the gospel