



Home : Sermons : July 15, 2007

Confidence and Rest in the Grace of God

July 15th, 2007

2 Corinthians 13:5-6 - ⁵ Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. ⁶ But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.[NKJV]

Introduction

The topic of the assurance of our salvation has been considered throughout the history of man. Abraham was deemed by God to be righteous because he did not rely solely on what he saw with his eyes (too old to have children) but instead he took God at His word and believed that God would be true to His promises—Abraham and Sarah were to have a son (Romans 4). Our eyes are not always trustworthy sources of confidence even though they are often considered irrefutable (“I saw it with my *own eyes*” we say).

We also see in Matthew 7:21-23 that there are those who think that God has deemed them to be righteous but instead He says that He has *never* known them. It appears that this *knowing* is the type that is unto salvation and it is not that He knew them at one time and now He has forgotten them, He *never* knew them. These were people who thought they were Christians (that is, the Elect of God) but instead they had deceived themselves. So, is it possible to know where we stand with God? Paul seems to think so. He commands that we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith.

What Would Such an Exam Look Like?

If we are going to follow the command of Paul to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, we need to know what to look for. To know what a counterfeit is, we need to know what the attributes are of the genuine original. This is not to say that we should ignore counterfeiters. Usually, hypocrisy or heresies will need to *slip* in and attack at some critical point, but they do so with such great subtlety that no one ever notices until the subtlety becomes overt. Today we will consider what six of the distinguishing characteristics of Christians are.

As a word of caution, when we examine ourselves we are not talking about mere introspection. Instead, we are looking at ourselves in a Spiritual mirror, the Word of God, and comparing what we see in our lives with the Word. Even then when we see ourselves rightly in the Word, we know that it is God who brings about growth and sanctification. Therefore, faith would lead to believing God’s promises and seeking Him to accomplish the good works that He has prepared for us.

1) Love of the Brethren

1 John 3:13-15

The first mark of a true Christian is love of the brethren. We must notice very carefully that the verse does not say that we have passed death to life because we love the brethren—it says that we know that we have passed death to life because we love the brethren. What this means is that one of the assurances of our salvation is the manner in which we love the brethren. But if our lives are not characterized by love, then we lose the assurance. This kind of love is not a means to salvation; it is a means to the assurance of our salvation.

John 13:34-35

Here Jesus teaches that this same love is a testimony of our salvation to the rest of the world. If our lives are not characterized by love, then Jesus teaches that the world has the right to conclude that we are not Christians. But if our lives are filled with this kind of love, the world will have the assurance that we are Christians.

We must understand love as defined by the Bible. This kind of love is primarily treating others lawfully with joy in our hearts. It is not primarily the warm, affectionate feelings centered on some common purpose or experience. This love is driven first by obedience to the law of God and the emotions will follow.

2) Obedience to God

1 John 2:3

Here we have a similar structure to the previous verse we considered. The keeping of God's commands is not the means of salvation; it is the assurance that our salvation is real. If true Christians are walking in rebellion to God's commands then they have rocked their assurance of salvation, but yet remain saved. It is when we are walking in the light, in fellowship with Him and with each other, that we rest in God's grace and we see these assurances in our lives.

Romans 8:13-14

The sons of God are those who are led by the Spirit, not by the flesh. The kind of leading that the Spirit does in this context is in putting to death the deeds of the body. It is by the Holy Spirit that we subdue the sinful tendencies of our bodies whereas before we were saved and given the Holy Spirit, we had no ability to subdue the flesh and the flesh ruled us. If the Spirit of God is present in your life, then there will be changes, growth, and sanctification.

3) God Disciplines Those Whom He Loves

Hebrews 12:4-11

Lest we think that true Christians are without sin, we see how God deals with His

children when they disobey His commands. A mark of a true Christian is that God does not discipline the neighbor's children; He disciplines His own children because He is a good Father. The lack of God's discipline indicates that we are not true children and instead are illegitimate.

Notice that God's love for His children drives Him to discipline them and sometimes that discipline may be very severe. This is because effective discipline is painful and yet within this there is the great promise of peaceable fruit and righteousness for those who are so trained.

When we sin, God deals His discipline to us until the fruit abounds. If we continue in sin and we see no discipline, then either we are true Christians who are miserable and hardening ourselves or we are simply not Christians. This truly should be a profound and somewhat strange assurance to us but we are told to receive these words as an encouragement (exhortation) and know that the severe hand of God upon us means that He loves us and that we are true sons.

4) Understanding Spiritual Things

1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14

To the unbelieving mind, to the carnal mind or to the mind of "natural man" the message of the gospel is foolishness. The natural man does not understand spiritual things nor can he because he does not have the Holy Spirit residing within him and he continues to walk in darkness. But to those who have been made alive by the Spirit, they come to understand grace, forgiveness, sin, repentance and kindness. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, true Christians are enabled to understand and believe both the Word of God and the world around us.

5) Adherence to Biblical Doctrinal Truths

Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15

There are an unlimited number of truths in the Christian faith and even a lifetime would not be time enough to learn. However, while these doctrines may be equally *true*, they are not all equally *important*. There are certain doctrines that are at the heart of Christianity and must be believed by faith—the Lordship of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead.

6) The Living Presence of the Holy Spirit

1 John 4:13; Romans 5:5

Further assurance of true salvation is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by faith in God and love for the brethren. Notice also in the Romans verse that God has "poured out" Himself into our hearts through His Spirit. This wording teaches that God is not stingy in giving us Himself; He gives us His Spirit in fullness and abundance which gives the true Christian hope.

Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6-7

When God gives His Spirit to believers it always brings about change. The Spirit of God not only leads us in putting to death the deeds of the flesh but it is by this Spirit that we understand our adoption as true children of God. As His true children, we may call him Father and He has prepared for us a share in His eternal inheritance.

2 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also our guarantee that although we may die, one day we will be raised from the dead just as He was. It is this confidence that we can rest in now even while we may endure hardships, trials or suffering.

All of Grace and Election

2 Peter 1:5

Because our salvation rests in the election of God we look to Him to accomplish all of these things in the lives of true Christians. As all of these attributes are made manifest in our life, the truth of our election becomes even more evident. We should be turning to Him and asking Him to cause us to bear this good fruit so that He may receive the glory in everything.

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