Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Examine Yourself
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5
Code: P03

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Are you a Christian? Many people who claim to be point to some event in the past to substantiate their claim. But inviting Jesus to come into your life in the past is not proof that you are genuinely saved. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul says to the Corinthian church, " *Examine* yourselves, whether you are in the faith; *prove* yourselves (emphasis added)." He wouldn't have said that if some event in the past were obviously the answer. The Bible never verifies anyone's salvation by the past but by the present. If there is no evidence of salvation in your life now, you need to face the fact that you may not be a Christian. You need to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. How does one do that? Jesus shows us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

The Distinguishing Mark of a Christian

Before Jesus was born, the religious leaders of Israel had already decided what it meant to live righteously. They had developed a system contrary to Scripture based on self- righteousness generated by doing good works. When Jesus entered the world, He shattered their religious system by upholding the standard revealed in God's Word. He revealed how a citizen of His Kingdom really lives.

If you want to know if you're a Christian, compare your life with the standard Christ presents in the Sermon on the Mount. One word summarizes His standard: righteousness. Examine the lives of many professing Christians, and you'll find no such righteousness. Someone once told me about a woman who said she was a Christian but was living with a man who was not her husband. First Corinthians 6:9 says that those characterized by sexual immorality ("fornicators") "shall not inherit the kingdom of God ." That woman was living in a state of unrighteousness. But righteousness characterizes true conversion.

Matthew 5:20, the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount, says, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The scribes and Pharisees went to the Temple regularly, paid tithes, fasted, and prayed constantly. But Christ wasn't impressed with their religious performance. He said no one would enter His Kingdom whose righteousness didn't exceed theirs. Righteousness—living by God's standards—is what sets a person apart as God's child.

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Second Timothy 2:19 says, "The Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Titus 1:16 says that some people "profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." A person's profession of Christ means nothing apart from obedience and holiness. Some people believe you can come to Jesus Christ without a consequent change in life-style. But God expects a transformation. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Being righteous doesn't mean you never sin; it means you confess your sin to the Lord, repent of it, and despise it. First John 2:3 says, "By this we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." In John 14:15 Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." First John 2:9 says, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." First John 3:9 says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

The Bible makes it clear that those who are genuinely saved are righteous and holy. They still sin, but with decreasing frequency. A true believer hates his sin (cf., Rom. 7:15-25) and repents of it, hungering and thirsting for what is right. He obeys God, loves his brother, and hates the evil world system. No one can be a Christian and continue living the way he did before he knew Christ. Making a decision years ago, going to an inquiry room, walking an aisle, or reading a tract on how to accept Christ is not a biblical criterion for salvation—the issue is what your life is like right now. If sin and unrighteousness characterize your life, there is a possibility you are a disobedient Christian—but there is a greater possibility you are not a Christian at all.

The Proper Entrance into Christ's Kingdom

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The Greek text indicates that the Kingdom belongs only to those who are poor in spirit. Only those who admit their spiritual bankruptcy and sinfulness can enter the Kingdom. Being "poor in spirit" speaks of being poverty stricken in one's spirit. Verse 4 shows the result of that inner poverty: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Only those who are broken and mournful over their sin ever receive salvation. Meekness, produced by the crushing weight of one's sin, also characterizes a person entering the Kingdom (v. 5). When a person is poor in spirit, mournful about his sin, and meek, then he will hunger and thirst after righteousness, and he will be filled (v. 6).

If you didn't come to Jesus Christ shattered over your sinfulness, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, you are not a Christian. Some people come to Christ as if they are doing Him some great favor. Sometimes Christians reflect that same attitude by hoping some famous person will be

saved because of his potential influence. But whoever wants to come to Jesus must come on His terms: mourning over his sin, and desiring righteousness. When someone comes on those terms, the Lord makes him merciful (v. 7), pure in heart (v. 8), and a peacemaker (v. 9). Then because of what he is, people will persecute him (v. 10), revile him, and say false things about him (v. 11). But he will rejoice, because he's a citizen of the Kingdom (v. 12).

Vital Signs of a Christian

A Distinct Testimony

In Matthew 5:13-14 Christ referred to believers as "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." A Christian's life- style will be easily distinguishable from the world's. Just as salt preserves decaying meat, Christians are a preservative in the midst of a decaying civilization. One reason the prophesied Great Tribulation of the end times will be so terrible is the preserving effect of the church will be gone. Christ compares His disciples to a light set on a hill and salt that has retained its saltiness. Is it evident to those around you that your life is different, or do you do the same things they do? If your life didn't change when you were supposedly saved, then you aren't really a Christian.

An Obedient Life

A child of God is characterized by obedience. In Matthew 5:17-19 our Lord said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Christ's point is this: if you are truly saved, you will be obedient. You will have an overwhelming desire to submit to God's Word. Paul hungered to obey God's Word, even though sin was always tugging at him (Rom. 7:15-25).

Matthew 5:21-32 maintains that if you have really been converted, you will think differently. Apparently the Israelites controlled their outward behavior but not their thoughts. The Lord said to them, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment" (vv. 21-22). A believer doesn't even desire to hurt anyone—let alone kill—because he has a different heart. In Ezekiel 36:26 God promises that when you become redeemed, He "will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and ... will give you an heart of flesh."

In Matthew 5:27-28 Christ says that a Christian is not to commit adultery or even entertain adulterous thoughts. Someone who claims to be a Christian and continues to be immoral, practicing such things as adultery or homosexuality, will never inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Until you

are broken over your sinfulness and crawl into Christ's Kingdom hungering for righteousness, you will never know what true redemption is.

In Matthew 5:33-37 Christ discusses perjury and keeping one's oaths. He emphasized that true conversion produces pure and truthful speech, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). In Matthew 5:38-47 He adds that a citizen of His Kingdom doesn't retaliate but is kind. He loves his neighbor (v. 43), and even his enemies (v. 44). The goal is for believers to be like God (v. 48).

No one is a Christian because he went forward at a meeting and signed a card, or because a counselor said he was. In fact, a counselor should never assure someone he is saved after that person verbally commits his life to Christ. No counselor can be sure of that. It is the Holy Spirit's job to grant assurance to a believer. He grants it by an inward testimony (Rom. 8:16) and an outward demonstration.

James 2:17 says that "faith, if it hath not works, is dead." An unfortunate legacy of modern evangelism is that one's assurance of salvation is attached to a decision. Biblically, however, assurance has nothing to do with the past; it's related to what your life is like right now. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). Evidence of salvation is always present in a true believer.

Sincere Worship

A believer demonstrates the right kind of worship (Matt. 6:1- 18). His worship of God is genuine, in contrast to that of the Pharisees, whose only concern was attracting attention to their spirituality. A Christian gives of his resources because He loves God, not because he craves public recognition (6:1-4). His prayers aren't hypocritical but a sincere expression of his heart (6:5-15). Also he doesn't need for others to know that he's fasting (6:16-18).

A Biblical Perspective of Money and Materialism

According to Matthew 6:19-24 the citizens of Christ's Kingdom don't love money: they do not lay up for themselves "treasures upon earth" (v. 19). They refuse to serve money because they know it's impossible to serve both it and God (v. 24). If you have committed your life to acquiring wealth, you are not a servant of God. If you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God (James 4:4). If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you (1 John 2:15). Matthew 6:25-34 adds that Christians are not to be preoccupied with the necessities of life. They know God takes care of those things vv. 31-32).

An Uncritical Love of Others

Matthew 7:1-12 emphasizes that genuine believers have good relationships. They don't constantly misjudge other people and act pious toward them while ignoring their own problems. Christians are known for loving others (cf., John 13:35).

Perhaps after this survey of what Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount, you are wondering how anyone could ever live like that. If you're thinking it's impossible to do all those things, that's the very response the Lord wants. After confronting a rich young ruler with his materialism, Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you that a rich man shall with difficulty enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God " (Matt. 19:23-24). It's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle! That's exactly what the Lord wanted people to conclude. Verses 25-26 say, "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who, then, can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." No man has the resources within himself to live up to God's standards. That's why we have to cast ourselves on the mercy of God. The rich young ruler in Matthew 19 wasn't willing to do that. He wanted to enter the Kingdom but on his terms. However, that's like trying to put a camel through the eye of a needle. The only way into the Kingdom is by becoming broken in spirit, mournful, and eager for a righteousness that you can't attain and don't deserve.

Most people don't want to meet those conditions. They want to do things their way. They resemble a man with four pieces of luggage—worldliness, sin, Satan, and self—trying to get through the turnstile into the Kingdom. They want in so they can have happiness and stay out of hell, but they want in on their terms. However, the Lord said, "Enter in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in that way" (Matt. 7:13). Many people enter through the wide gate because they can take their baggage of good works and self-righteousness with them. Verse 14 continues, "Narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The Greek word translated "hard" literally means "compressed." You have to strip yourself of everything to go through the narrow gate.

A Deceptive Illusion of Eternal Life

Notice that the broad way leading to destruction is not marked as the way to hell—it's marked as the way to heaven! People get on the broad road because it doesn't require a change of life-style. You simply have to say you made a decision, were baptized, went forward at a meeting, or signed a card. The sad thing is that many people are on that road. But the way that leads to life is restrictive, and very few find it.

If you still cling to your worldliness and self-righteousness, you're on the wrong road. You may think you're headed to heaven and that your good works will get you in. But someday you will discover what John Bunyan described in *The Pilgrim's Progress* : that there is an entrance to hell from the portals of heaven. In fact Christ warned people to beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15-20) because they sell tickets to the broad way; they'll tell you you can get to heaven without changing anything.

In Matthew 7:21-22 Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Many people won't discover until it's too late that they were on the wrong road.

Christ concluded the Sermon on the Mount by illustrating the destinations of the broad and narrow roads. In Matthew 7:24-25 He speaks of a wise man who builds his house on a solid foundation. Verse 25 says, "The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock." That man came to God on His terms—he built his house on the rock, which is obedience. Therefore his house stood. Christ continues, "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand" (v. 26). The foolish man built a beautiful house; his religion looked good. He is one of those who prophesied, cast out demons, and did wonderful works (v. 22) but never came to God on His terms. Verse 27 says, "The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

What a disaster it would be to come before Christ on Judgment Day and discover you are sentenced to hell because you didn't come to Him His way! Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. As Peter said, "Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Peter 1:10 ; *New American Standard Bible*).

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