

## **True Marks of Saving Faith**

Romans 3:27-28

45-32B

There's a third mark that doesn't prove or disprove saving faith and that is religious involvement, religious involvement. God in the Old Testament just continually condemns Israel for being religiously involved and totally lacking a vital relationship with God. And this was the error of the Pharisees, and you're familiar with this. There are all kinds of people who are involved in religious activity. But let me just give you an illustration that. We could select many, but Matthew chapter 25, and I think you remember this parable. Ten virgins took their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise and five were foolish. And the ones who were foolish didn't take any oil for their lamps, and the wise did. And you remember the story. The bridegroom tarried and they all slumbered and slept. At midnight the cry was made, the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him. The virgins rose, trimmed their lamps. The foolish said, we don't have any oil, the lamps are gone out. The wise say, we don't have enough to give you or we won't have any for ourselves. And they missed the whole thing. And the implication is given in verse 13, "You better be ready when the Son of Man comes."

Now, what interested me about this parable is the similarities. Up to the point of oil, everything else is a similarity. These are virgins. Why do you think the Lord used virgins? What does a virgin speak of? Purity, chastity, virtue; these are virtuous people, religious people, and they are involved properly. They are doing what religious virgins should do. They're trimming their lamp. They're attending to the religious environment and activity. They've got it all going. The only thing they haven't got is the stuff on the inside that makes it real. But that is the only difference. And you wouldn't have been able to pick the fools from the wise in that group of ten until you got to the point where they said, hey, we don't have any oil. Religious involvement doesn't prove anything. You can be in a church all your life and be lost.

Fourth, another mark that doesn't prove whether you have saving faith is active ministry. Now one of the most active prophets in the Old Testament was Balaam and he didn't serve God, he served the highest bidder. And then there was Judas, oh Judas, a public preacher of the gospel of the kingdom and never was there a son of hell more so than that man.

Matthew 7, "Lord, Lord, we have done many wonderful works in Your name; we have cast out demons in Your name." It's us. He says, "Depart from me (What?) I never knew you." Now you see, visible morality, intellectual knowledge, religious involvement, active ministry, they don't prove anything one way or another.

Now, I'm going to get a little more penetrating. Fifth, conviction of sin doesn't prove anything either. You want to know something? Mental hospitals all over this nation are filled with people who are convicted of their sin. They just haven't ever gotten any deliverance from it. They're just literally beaten into insanity by guilt. Felix in the book of Acts trembled under the preaching of Paul but he never left his idols. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment, John

16, but they don't all respond. You know what happened when Jesus convicted the Pharisees of sin? They didn't confess their sin. They became infuriated, didn't they? And sought to kill Him. And the same thing happens in the book of Revelation when the Lord begins to pour out judgment on sin and they become aware that God is judging them for their sin. Instead of repenting, in the book of Revelation, they blaspheme the God of heaven.

There are some people who even respond to the conviction of sin. They feel bad about their sin. And so, they confess their sin, they abandon their sin, they amend their ways. You know, people do reform, don't they? You know, there are guys that are dead-drunk alcoholics and drug addicts and criminals who get rehabilitated. They decide to turn over a new leaf and God isn't even involved in it. They just kind of reform, you see. So a person could be convicted of their sin, they could sense their sinfulness and have guilt and still not necessarily exercise saving faith. They could say, "I believe in Jesus, I believe in all of that and I'm convicted about my sin." But that doesn't necessarily mean that they have truly come to Jesus Christ.

Let me give you another one. This might surprise you. Another thing that doesn't prove anything about whether you have saving faith or not is assurance. You say, "Now wait a minute, you mean that a person could be sure he was saved and be lost?" That's right. That's exactly right. You want to know something? This world is full of people like that, isn't it? If they didn't believe that, do you think they'd stay in the false religion they're in? They think they're okay. I mean, it's like I said earlier, there are all kinds of people saying, "Hey, hey, I'm a good guy, I'm okay, God wouldn't do anything to me." I mean, the whole world is full of legalists who believe that. Gardner Spring wrote: "If to be strongly persuaded that we are Christians would make us Christians, there would be no such thing as being deceived by false hopes and delusive presumption." You see, there would be no way to be deceived at all if men couldn't think they were saved when they weren't, right? And so people go around, "I'm good, I'll be all right. I'll be fine. I'm not worried." And they are lost. They just think they're saved.

Let me give you a seventh that doesn't prove anything. And this comes to my mind because so many times in a baptismal service this comes up. I call this the time of decision, the time of decision. People will come to be baptized and they will very often say, "Well, I received the Lord when I was whatever, 15, or I received the Lord ten years ago, but nothing ever happened in my life for the next ten years." You want to know something? Nothing probably happened ten years ago either because you don't get transformed by the Son of God, translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son and have nothing happen. By their fruit you're going to see them. They have to manifest fruit: Some thirty-fold, some more, some hundredfold, thirty, sixty, a hundred, but some manifestation. Just because you can remember a moment when you walked down an aisle, went into a prayer room, signed a card, raised your hand, doesn't mean anything as to whether the decision was valid or not.

So, I just gave you a list of non-proofs. Good test. Look at your life. You ask yourself the question: Is my faith real saving faith? You look at yourself and you say, "Well, I'm a pretty moral person you know, I know the Bible, I'm involved in the church, I have a ministry, I feel bad about my sin, I feel like I'm okay with God, I can remember the moment." Those things don't prove anything one way or another 'cause all kinds of people think those things are true about themselves and they are deceived, self-deceived. That's why they arrive in Matthew 7 and say, "Lord, Lord, it's us." And the shock of all shocks, "I don't know you." What a shock. Okay.

A man may be unacc...un ...really just completely committed to moral department, maybe well

instructed in the doctrines of the Bible, form of religion manifest. He may have a ministry and proceed in that ministry with marvelous giftedness. He may even have been a subject of conviction in his heart. He may even believe himself to be converted and regenerated, and still be lost. We've got to go a step further.

Here are the positive tests, and I'm going to give them to you pretty quick. Number one, love for God, love for God. That's the first one.

Do you know what? I'll give you... You want to know the basic definition of an unsaved person? From Romans chapter 8 verse 7, I think it is? Just listen to this. The carnal mind, (I'll give it to you in the MacArthur translation.) the carnal mind, the fleshly mind, King James says, is at enmity against God. It says this, really, the carnal mind hates God. That is really a classic definition of an unregenerate person. They resist God, they hate God. The regenerated mind (What?) loves God. God says, here's how to fulfill My law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength."

I believe when a person is really exercising saving faith, there is in his heart a great love for God. And now we're moving on the inside. His delight is in the law of God and in His law does he meditate day and night. As the heart pants after the water brook, so his heart pants after God. His delight is in the excellency of God. His first and highest affection, the first rising out of his renewed soul is that God should be honored and glorified. God is his chief happiness. And there's a great, great distinguishing element there. Most people live in this world consumed by their own happiness. And there are many people who say they're Christians and they are still consumed by their own happiness. They don't pass the first test.

Jesus put it very simply in Matthew 10:37: "He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." If God is not your highest affection, check yourself. Is that your greatest love? Is that your supreme delight? Do you long from the deepest part of your heart to love God, to bask in the warmth of the relationship to Him? To draw nigh unto Him? That's the mark of saving faith, of a regenerated heart.

In Psalm 73:25, I think it's expressed by Asaph in that Psalm. Listen to what it says, I love this. "Whom have I on...in heaven but Thee?" And listen to this, "And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Now that's marvelous. There is none on earth that I desire beside Thee. And then Psalm 42, I quoted it earlier. "As the deer pants after the water brook, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." Then listen to verse 2, "My soul thirsteth for God for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?" And this is such a longing. He says my tears have been my food. The heart craves God. The heart adores God. That's...that's the stuff that marks true saving faith. If you've really been redeemed, you love God. He's your highest desire. Your deepest longing is to be in His presence, to fulfill His glory.

Now let me say this. There'll be times when we fail to do that, won't there? And I use a phrase that I use very often. None the less, that will still be the direction of our life if not the perfection of it. It'll be the direction if not the perfection. And when I fail to love God as I ought and to seek Him as my highest good and to pour out my affection and to be jealous for His holy name and to live for His glory; that in itself breaks my heart.

Now, let's look at the second, and we'll go on to complete our list. The second positive test for saving

faith is repentance from sin, repentance from sin. I believe that really, this is a very basic, almost flip side to the first principle. If you love God, you hate what? Sin, and the two are obviously connected. If you love God, you hate sin. And I think that's very basic. That which calls out of us the love for God calls out of us the hate for sin. In Proverbs 28:13 it says: "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Mercy comes to those who confess and forsake their sins.

David had that attitude, didn't he? He cried out in Psalm 51, after the terrible sin that he had committed, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness. According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, cleanse me from my sin. I acknowledge my transgression. My sin is ever before me. Against Thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." In other words, he realized, in his great love for God, how terrible was his sin against God.

Now you can tell a Christian, you can tell a person with saving faith; they hate sin. Even while they may be doing it they hate it. Like Romans 7 again, where Paul says, "I do what I don't want to do and I don't do what I want to do." Even though our humanness draws us into sin, we hate that thing. And you may have to admit that you're not hating it while you're getting into it but you sure do hate it a lot when you've done with it. And so, a believer is marked by love for God and hatred toward sin. I think that's basic definition for the Christian's life.

Now in 2 Corinthians 7, just to push the point a little bit, he says in verse 9, does Paul, "I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance." In other words, you turned from the sin. "For you were made sorry after a godly manner." Now lots of people are sorry about their sin. Agreed? They're sorry about it, makes them feel bad, reaps bad fruits, brings bad consequences. A lot of people who don't know God are sorry about their sin. But they don't sorrow unto repentance. That is, they're not so sorry they stop doing it, they turn from it. But godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, you see? So salvation comes to those whose sorrow is a sorrow unto repentance. That is, I'm not just sorry about it, I'm so sorry about it I want to turn from it, I want to be delivered from it. That is the kind of sorrow that is attached to salvation.

A proper love for God, then, results in a hatred of sin, grief over sin. True penitents are born of God. In 1 John, John gives us a test. He puts it this way. "If we are believers," chapter 1, "we will be those who will confess our sins, but a non-believer denies his sin." And you can see it so clearly in 1 John 1. Let me read you verses 8 to 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." In other words, forgiveness belongs to sin-confessors. You understand that? It does not belong to sin-deniers. "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us." A true forgiven person, a saved person, one exercising saving faith, is one who turns from sin. So ask yourself the question, do I hate sin? Is sin a bitter and evil thing? Am I convicted deep within my heart when I see it in my life? Do I hate it not only because it is ruinous to my soul, but because it is so offensive to my God? Which gives you the most anxiety? Your sins or your misfortunes in life? That's a good test. The one born of God is overwrought with his sin.

Someone wrote, "When God touches a life, He breaks the heart. Where He pours out the spirit of grace, there are not a few transient sighs that agitate the breast, there are heart-rending pangs of sorrow." End quote. And so, the true believer is marked by a hatred and repentance from sin.

Third test and we could really expand all of these, but we're sort of summarizing. The third one is genuine humility, genuine humility. And this is linked with the last one, isn't it? Where there is a sense of the love of God there will be a sense of the hate of sin. And where sin is hated, there will be humility, because as you look at your life and see your sin, you are humbled. And so we see in the beatitudes, don't we, that one who comes to enter the kingdom comes mourning, comes begging in spirit, comes hungering and thirsting, comes seeking mercy. Do you remember the prodigal? The illustration of salvation: The son runs away to riotous living, spends all he has and then comes back and his father receives him. That's a picture of salvation. Do you know what the son said? And I think this is so much a part of true saving faith. The son said this, Luke 15:21: "Father, I am not worthy to be called (What?) your son." That's humility, that's humility. And that is the mark of saving faith. It doesn't offer itself to God as if it were something very valuable. It doesn't offer itself to God with the idea, well, here I am, God, aren't You going to be blessed to get me? It is a broken spirit. It is a contrite heart that the Lord seeks.

And so, there is humility. The Bible says the Lord gives grace to the what? Humble. And the Lord rejects the proud. There is humility in saving faith. "If any man come after Me," Matthew 16:24, "let him first deny himself." That's humility. Look at your life. Do you see love for God? Even though you fail, do you sense that great love, that delight in Him? Do you see hatred for sin? And a desire to turn from it? And do you find in your heart no good thing and are you humbled because of your sin in the presence of God whom you love?

Let me give you a fourth test that I believe marks saving faith: devotion to God's glory, devotion to God's glory. I believe that true saving faith is marked by the desire to glorify God above everything else. And there's a certain sense in which you have as a life focus the setting aside of your own glory and your own attainment and your own designs and your own will and your own comfort and your own enterprise for the seeking of that which brings honor to God. The person who is truly experiencing salvation is one who is consummately committed to God's glory. Hear the testimony of Paul. He says, "My earnest expectation and my hope is this, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness as always Christ shall be magnified in my body whether it be by life or by death." That's it. I believe one who is truly exercising saving faith will have his life marked by a desire for the glory of God.

Now I know this. I know this is not going to be always true all the time in our life. But as I've said so many times before, if this is not the perfection of our life, it is at least the direction of it. We, like Paul, can say, I have not already attained, but I'm running on this track seeking God's glory. Look at it the other way. A person who seeks only his own glory, his own will, his own aggrandizement, his own reputation, could not be one who was exercising saving faith and had been redeemed because self had not yet died. One who has been saved and transformed will have as his direction the glory of God.

Now, these are general patterns, much like John gives us in 1 John. And we know there are exceptions. That's why we need a high priest who intercedes, right?

A fifth test: And this is very essential, continual prayer, continual prayer. One of the marks of a Christian is this. Galatians, very important word, chapter 4 and verse 6, and hear it, very simple: "Because you are sons," all right, now we know who we're talking about, Christians, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying (What?) Abba, Father." What is it that marks a Christian? A heart that cries to whom? To God. A heart that seeks communion. Now I would admit to

you at the very beginning that I don't pray as much as I should. But none of us perhaps has the sense of having arrived in our prayer life. But I can also say to you that my heart longs to commune with God. When anything comes into my life that is a problem, my first response is to take it to God. When I face any task that I know is significant, my first response is to depend on Him. And I believe that a true Christian, one marked by saving faith, will be one who expresses his heart in communion with God. Job, in chapter 27 verse 10, demands that a hypocrite be evaluated. And this is what he says: "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" And that was Job's test for saving faith. If you want to find out about a hypocrite, find out if he calls on God all the time. If he doesn't, then he's a hypocrite.

Jonathan Edwards, that great preacher, had a sermon and here was its title: "Hypocrites Are Deficient in the Duty of Prayer." It's exactly what Job was saying. True believers commune with God. Test yourself. Do you love God? Do you hate sin? Do you find your heart broken in humility? Are you devoted to God's glory? And do you find yourself drawn into communion with Him continually? Those are the tests.

Number six, and I have nine just so you'll know where we're going. Number six: selfless love, selfless love. I believe also that saving faith that is redeeming faith that is true Christianity is marked by love for each other. First John says this, "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness. He that loves his brother abides in the light." In other words, the light is that of redemption. The truly redeemed love their brothers. Listen, ask yourself the question: Do you love the fellowship of believers? Now I don't mean are you absolutely out of your mind for every other Christian emotionally, but are you enriched and thrilled and enthralled and rejoicing and caring for the fellowship of those of like precious faith? 1 John 3:14 it says: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." Isn't that simple? You know, it's one test that I can pass. If I have my choice between being with the people of the world and being with the people of the Lord it's not much of a choice. It's not much of a choice. I have no desire to be with them, none. I love to be with God's people. I love to fellowship. And then in the fourth chapter of 1 John the seventh verse, it says: "Let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God, and he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." If you have had true saving faith and been genuinely redeemed, you're going to love the brethren.

Number seven, I believe that another test of saving faith is separation from the world, separation from the world. When we were saved, we were delivered out of the world in a very real sense. First John 5:5, verse 4 starts: "Whatever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." True faith, believing in Jesus as Son of God, results in overcoming the world. On the other hand, "If any man," 1 John 2 says, verse 15 to 17, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is (What?) not in him." What do you love? What do you love? You love the world? Or do you separate yourself from the world? James put it, chapter 4 verse 4, "Friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." The true test is separation from the world. And again I say, there are times when we drift back, but the pursuit of our life is away from the world. You see, 1 Corinthians 2:12 puts it this way. When we're saved we have not received the spirit of the world, but we have received the Spirit which is of God, and so our hearts are drawn away to Him.

Number eight, spiritual growth. I believe that saving faith that has truly regenerated will demonstrate itself in growth. If we learned anything from the parables of our Lord, particularly the parable of the

soils, if we learned anything from the parable of the soils, we learned that you can tell true faith by its what? Fruit, by its fruit, by its product. It grows, it develops. That's the mark of life. You see, life reproduces life and spiritual life reproduces spiritual life. In the parable of growth that the Lord gives in Mark 4, He said that: "And the kingdom of God is like a man who throws seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how, for the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself. First the blade, then the ear, after the full grain in the ear, and when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in his sickle because the harvest is come."

You plant seed and it grows. And Peter says that there's an incorruptible seed planted in the heart and it's going to grow. Paul's great word to the churches was literally in all dimensions replete with the concept of the life of God producing fruit and results and growth. We are all growing, he said in the Ephesian letter, to the fullness of the stature of Christ. First John 2 says you start out as little babes and become spiritual young men and you mature to being spiritual fathers. Philippians 1 says that he which hath begun a good work in you will what? Continue to perform it till the day of Jesus Christ. You need to grow. And of course, growth is the sign of true spiritual life.

And then lastly, number nine, I believe that saving faith is marked by obedient living, obedient living, obedient living. And again we go back to the beloved John, 1 John 2:3, "And by this we do know that we know Him if we keep His (What?) commandments. He that says I know Him and keepeth not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whosoever keeps His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected and by this we know that we are in Him." You know you're saved when you live the life of obedience. In Ephesians 2:10 it says we've been created unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. And so, the overwhelming habit of our life is not disobedience, the overwhelming habit is obedience. And there will be disobedience along the way, but as we grow that disobedience will become a decreasing factor. I believe with all my heart that if a person has exercised true saving faith, he has a great desire to live a life of obedience. You show me someone who doesn't and I have every right to ask the question that is that saving faith, no matter what they claim.

Now listen, the next time you come across somebody and you want to know whether they're a Christian, or the next time you want to examine your own heart, here's what you're looking for:

Do I love God above all else?

Do I hate sin and desire to turn from it?

Am I genuinely aware of my nothingness and my feebleness and in true humility do I come to the God of mercy, unworthy to be called His son?

Am I devoted above all things to the expression of God's glory?

Am I drawn continually into sweet communion with Him?

Am I selfless and given to loving others?

Do I find myself longing to be utterly separated from the world?

Can I look at my life and see spiritual growth?

And is the deep hunger of my heart to obey, even in those times of disobedience?

That's how you mark a Christian, real saving faith.

Now, listen very carefully. When you've done that, you can go back to the first list. And these things may be true about a true Christian. When you've done all that, I believe you will have a visible, genuine morality. I believe you will have a proper knowledge of the Word of God. You will be involved in the activities of the church. You will have a ministry. You will sense guilt over sin. You will have assurance, and that time of decision will have meaning to you. But those things can't stand alone. And so, we must examine ourselves to see whether we be in the faith. That is the issue: Are we in the faith? Do we have the marks of saving faith? Let's bow in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for saving us, saving us from hell, saving us from eternal death, saving us from our sins. Thank You for saving us by Your grace. Thank You that You saved us not because of us but in spite of us, when there was nothing in us worth saving, no good thing in our flesh. By Your grace and mercy You redeemed us. I think, Father, of the poet who said:

When I stand before Thy throne,

Dressed in beauty not my own;

When I see Thee as Thou art,

Love Thee with unsinning heart;

Then, Lord, shall I fully know,

Not till then, how much I owe.

Thank You that You saved us, and washed us in the blood of Jesus Christ and that You gave us the clear word that in salvation God is to be glorified. And how sequential it is that if the cross of Jesus Christ was to reveal the righteousness of God and to exalt the grace of God, then the truly redeemed person would certainly live to the glory of God and find his highest desire, to love God. We pray that every person here would examine his own heart and if anyone is holding to those marks that don't prove anything, that they would turn to a deep examination of whether or not they really love You. Thank You that You loved us first. Those of us who know You, Father, we do love You. But we feel like Peter because we fail, and we need sometimes the Lord to say, "Do you love Me more than these?" And we, like Peter, have to appeal to Your omniscience and say, "Lord, You know everything, You know we love You." And sometimes our only appeal, Lord, is to omniscience because from our acts You couldn't tell we loved You. Help us through those times. Thank You that You see everything. You see past our failings. You see to the deep heart of love that's really there even though the flesh gets in the way. I thank You that after Peter had affirmed three times that You knew everything and You knew he loved You that You said to him, "Feed My sheep, feed My sheep,

feed My lambs." That You used him in spite of the failure because the direction of his heart, if not the perfection, was to love You. May we be those who love You, for in so loving we have fulfilled the whole law, which apart from Your redeeming grace we could never fulfill. Prepare our hearts, Lord, for the rest of what You want to teach us out of this great passage. and we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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