

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

The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian, Part 3

Scripture: Philippians 3:3

Code: 50-29

Shall we open our Bibles together to Philippians chapter 3 as this morning we continue in the examination of the opening three verses of this great chapter. We've entitled this section, "The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian." And that is such a very very important subject.

Christianity has always been centered around the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has always been centered around the message of salvation. The heart and soul of the New Testament is the gospel of grace, the gospel which saves men from sin, death and hell, which makes them children of God and heirs of heaven. That is our message. And, of course, the saving gospel message which we proclaim is based on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that therefore is the ringing theme of the New Testament. You look in to the gospels and what is the gospel record? It is the record of Jesus Christ, the one who came and who lived and who died and who rose again and that record is given to us, says John in the fourth gospel, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that in believing we might have life through His name.

When you come to the book of Acts, what do you have? You have the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. And in its proclamation is the extension of the church starting in Jerusalem and extending to Samaria and extending to the uttermost parts of the world. Then when you come to the epistles, what is the theme of the epistles? Whether it's Paul or whether it's James or whether it's Peter or whether it's John or whether it's Jude, every writer is extolling the virtues of the gospel, elucidating the elements of the gospel, enriching our understanding of the gospel that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. When you come to the book of Revelation, again you have the focus on the culmination of the gospel in the exalted Christ taking His place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You have in the book of Revelation further expansion of the elements of the gospel as we see the Lamb of God in a new setting before the throne of God, as we see the Savior gathered with the redeemed in glory yet to come.

So from the gospels through the book of Acts through the epistles and out in to Revelation to the conclusion of the New Testament, the theme is always the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the heart and soul of New Testament teaching. And that is precisely why that as over the years we teach through primarily the New Testament, we are constantly intersecting on the significance and the meaning of the gospel. We are not surprised then that it is a constant theme in this ongoing exposition of God's revelation.

But having said all of that, I want to note for you that there is a corollary theme as well. There is another thread that runs through the whole of the New Testament and that has to do with this fact, that salvation must be assessed as to its reality. The message is salvation but following close on the heels of that is a very constant occupation of the New Testament writers by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with the matter of who is a real believer and who might be deceived. It starts all the way back with John the Baptist. When John the Baptist confronts the religious leadership of Jerusalem, those who have come down from the temple mount to assess what John is doing, those who claim to know God and be the people of God, yea the favorites of God, he says to them, "Let me see the fruit of your life." To find out whether your motives are right and whether there is genuine repentance, show me the fruit that is fit for repentance. Again calling in to question the fact that someone who believes they are right with God might not be. There was a genuineness questioned then that was posed by John the Baptist.

It isn't much further into the first gospel of Matthew that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is given in which in chapter 7 He says, "There will come a day when many people will say, Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in Your name and we've done many wonderful works in Your name and we've cast out demons in Your name. And He will say, Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." Again, Jesus Himself pointing to the fact that there are people who think they know Him, think they serve Him, think they represent Him but are deceived.

You come in to the thirteenth chapter of Matthew and He gives parables. And in those parables you find there are some people who appear to have a legitimate response to the gospel, but they wither away and die. There are some people who appear to have a legitimate response to the gospel, but they love the world and the things of the world too much to yield their lives to Christ in a genuine way and they fall away. You have the very clear description that where God sows wheat, the enemy comes and sows tares; where God plants the true, the enemy puts the false.

You come in to the book of Acts and you aren't very far into the book of Acts before you meet a man who claims to be a believer in Jesus Christ...and we shall see him in a few moments this morning...but who in fact is not a true believer in Jesus Christ. He is deceived and would be a deceiver. We're not surprised at such a man for we have already encountered Judas.

You come in to the epistles and you find that it is of great concern to the writers of the epistles that there be an understanding of the genuine reality of salvation. So the Apostle Paul, for example, takes on those who say they know God but do not really know God. He writes about them in Romans. He writes about them in Galatians. And then you find that John the Apostle is eminently concerned about who is a real Christian and who is not. In fact, the epistle of 1 John is a series of tests. Those who are true Christians, he says in chapter 1, don't deny sin, they acknowledge it. Those who are true Christians, he says in chapter 2, walk the way Jesus walked, love their brothers, obey the Word, hate

the world. In chapter 3 he says true Christians do not continue over and over again to practice sin. In chapter 4 he says true Christians are characterized by their love for God and their love for one another. And then in chapter 5 he gives the thesis for his epistle. Verse 13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." This is an assurance epistle. It is designed for those who believe to know they have eternal life. In other words, to provide tests by which you can measure your salvation. By the way, the gospel of John also has a thesis in chapter 20 verse 31, "These things are written in order that you might believe." So the gospel of John is written to unbelievers in order that they might believe. The epistle of John is written to believers in order that they might know that their faith is real.

And so, you see then these two themes in the Scripture...the gospel and the reality of salvation running right along behind it. You come, for example, to the epistle of James and James offers test of genuine faith. The first one is perseverance in trials in chapter 1. And then he discusses the matter of blame in temptation. A true believer accepts the responsibility for his own sin, false ones would tend to blame God, very much like John chapter 1 denying sin. In this case, denying one as the source of temptation. James discusses the fact that true believers have a proper response to the Word of God. He discusses the fact that true believers are impartial in their love, they're righteous in their behavior, James chapter 2. Their tongue will manifest their heart, chapter 3. In chapter 4 James discusses the fact that true Christians don't love the world, they're at enmity with the world. Their whole involvement with the system will reveal where they are spiritually.

And so, whether you're talking about James or John or Paul or even Peter who also is concerned to elicit a genuine faith, or whether you're talking about Jude who is very concerned about the false among the true who are polluting the church, or whether you're talking about the book of Revelation where you have a church that has a name that it lives but in reality is dead, and where you have people who say they're Christians but Christ will spew them out of His mouth, all through the New Testament you have this concurrent duality...the gospel and the measure of true salvation. And those two things run along from the beginning to the end of the New Testament.

It is thus then our lot in studying the New Testament to constantly be coming face to face with this issue. Not only the issue of the gospel, but the issue of who is a true believer. That, by the way, is the precise issue in Philippians chapter 3. It is the exact issue to which the Apostle Paul is addressing his attention. In verse 2 he speaks of the false circumcision, the religious Judaizing Jews and he says they are dogs, they are evil workers and they are the mutilation. And we went in to that last time. He contrasts in verse 3 the true circumcision, the real believers who are marked as those who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Again we can see very clearly that the Apostle Paul is concerned about spiritual reality.

Back in chapter 1 verse 28 the whole matter of true salvation is brought up as he mentions the opponents and speaks of their destruction but the salvation of the true believers. Here he elucidates a

little more on that same subject in verses 2 and 3.

Now all of that to say this, it is over and over and over again the lot of a Bible student in the New Testament to have to come to grips with this issue which obviously in my mind says this...God is eminently concerned that the lost become saved and He is equally concerned that no one be deceived about the reality of their spiritual condition. Because there are many who believe that their in a right relationship with God when in fact they're not...they're not. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 you have sort of a summation of all of this. Paul writes, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith...examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test." Imagine, he is saying...can you really recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? Can you put yourself to the test and come to that assurance? You must...you must test yourself, you must examine yourself. How do you do that? Well as I said, starting with John the Baptist, fruits of repentance, all the way out to Revelation where you have the characteristics of a church that lives and the characteristic of a church that says it lives but doesn't live, you have this long and continually repeated list of marks and characteristics and qualities by which we can assess our spiritual condition.

It is not enough to just preach the gospel in its simplicity and majesty and beauty and assume that everyone's response to that is sufficient, or right, or God-ordained. We must examine. And so, the New Testament is loaded with the tests for a true Christian.

Now would you please note just by way of brief review, the Apostle Paul was preaching the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, plus or minus nothing. He was preaching Christ crucified and faith in Christ as the means by which the gift of grace was received. He was preaching the gospel of grace, no works at all whatsoever involved. And as he moved around and preached that and established churches, he was being followed by some Jews. And these Jews were of a mind to believe that yes Christ and His death and resurrection is important, but God will not accept you, even though you believe in Christ, and even though you believe He died and rose again, God will not accept you unless you are circumcised...and if you're a woman you believe in the right of circumcision, which can only be done to man. But you must affirm physical circumcision, surgical circumcision because that's the mark of God's people. Secondly, you must keep all the ceremonies and laws of Moses.

So, Paul would establish a church. Into town would come these Jews. They would be accepted because they would affirm Christ. They would affirm the gospel. And then they would say...However, that's not enough, you have to be circumcised and you have to keep the law of Moses. It reached such a pinnacle that it became the major concern of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 as we saw last week. Major issue. So you had people on the one side who were saying salvation is by grace and works. God does His part in Christ, you do your part by being circumcised and keeping Mosaic law. And on the other hand, you had those who said salvation is by grace through faith plus and minus nothing...no works at all, no circumcision, no ceremonies, no necessity to please God by your own

merit, your own effort. So you had those two views.

Paul takes the view of the Judaizers and he identifies it in verse 2. He calls them dogs, evil workers and the mutilation. Very clear terms. They are dogs. Why? Unclean outcasts. They are evil workers. Why? Because they think they're doing good, they're working good but the fact is they're working evil, because they're attempting to please God by their own self- effort. And he calls them the mutilation because they do not have a true cleansing which circumcision symbolized, all they have is a physical surgery that's nothing more than a mutilation. He really lets them have it. They are not real, they are not genuine. They are dogs, outcasts. They are workers of evil, not good. Everything they do is filthy rags, they cannot attain to God by their own effort and they are nothing more than outwardly mutilated group rather than an inwardly cleansed group.

But on the other hand, he comes then in verse 3 to the true circumcision. Now remember, circumcision was always an outward symbol of an inward reality. And it symbolized the need for a cleansed life and a cleansed heart. And we went over that a couple of weeks ago. And so he is saying we are the true circumcision, not the physical but the spiritually cleansed. We have been spiritually made clean. And how do we know the true circumcision? Three things characterize them. Three things...they worship in the Spirit of God, they glory in Christ Jesus and they put no confidence in the flesh. Those are absolutely monumental things. In fact, it's almost as if you could take the New Testament list of all of the tests for true salvation and make them in to a mountain range and these three would sort of rise above as the pinnacles. Paul under the genius and the amazing economy of words that is available only to the infinite mind of the Holy Spirit has reduced the whole thing to three statements. Here are the tests, the distinctive tests of true Christianity. And you will notice that they do not speak of what you do, they do not speak of function, they speak of attitude. Worship by the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Those are the things that are the distinctive qualities of true Christianity.

Now I'm not in any hurry to get through this. This I've told you in the past is, I think, my favorite description of a Christian. It's the description of a Christian that I like the best because it's the most comprehensive of any short sort of pithy definition. But before we look at these three characteristics, would you indulge me for just a moment?

When I was back in college and I was learning forensics and I was learning debate and I was learning speech and oratory and rhetoric and all of that, they used to tell us that the best way to make your point sometimes is to come at it from the negative. And so may I do that for you this morning? May I come at this whole thing from a negative before we get in to the particulars of the positive?

You say, "What do you mean?" This is what I mean. I want to give to you some characteristics that do not verify your salvation. All right? Some characteristics that do not verify the reality of your salvation. You can't look at these. These are not appropriate tests. And I think you will be surprised.

Number one...I'll give you five of them...number one, the first inappropriate non-proof of salvation is a past conversion or...I'll say it this way...a past supposed conversion event...a past supposed conversion event. You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean that some people think they're Christians because of some event in the past. They prayed with the Sunday-school teacher. They prayed with their mother. They prayed with their father. They went forward in a church service. They signed a card. They were at a youth meeting and a guy spoke at camp and they went down and they prayed a prayer. Or they knelt by their bed. Some point in the past...well, you know, I was over there, I was in northern California one time in a church in so-and-so and I prayed the prayer. Okay?

No past event of a supposed conversion is a verifier of true salvation. Let me tell you what I mean now, listen very carefully. It is no proof...it is no proof that a person is not a Christian because they cannot remember when they were converted. Did you understand that? It is no proof that a person is not a Christian because they cannot remember when they were converted. How many of you do not know when you were converted as to time and place and date? Put your hand up. Amazing, they don't have an event. There was no event. There was no moment in which in their own mind they knew the time and the place and the event. Now I would daresay that those people in large numbers were raised in Christian families. And they came through a process of believing. And they do not know that moment in time when they went from not believing to believing because they never did not believe. And so they can't nail down that event.

Or, some of you people may have lived in a pagan situation, you may have been raised in an unsaved family, and maybe at some point you began to be exposed to the gospel and you were more and more exposed to it and you realized one day that you had committed your life to Christ but you can't necessarily identify the moment in time because the Lord was taking you through a process of opening your heart to an understanding of the Word of God. Listen, I say it again, it is no proof that a person is not a Christian because they don't have an event, because they can't identify a moment.

I can't. There was never a moment when I didn't believe. I can't nail down THE event in my life. And even if there was an event it wouldn't necessarily mean that I was a Christian. So let me say it that way. Nor is it any proof that a person is a Christian because they had an event. You have to have both of those. Just because you walked an aisle, prayed a prayer, signed a card, went to camp, did whatever, that in itself is not a proof.

Let me give you a classic illustration. Turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 8 verse 9. Now, by the way, let me say this while you're turning to Acts 8, there are conversions that do occur at an event. That's not what I'm saying. But that's not the proof of the conversion. Look at chapter 8 verse 9, "There was a certain man named Simon...must have been a Jew since that is a Jewish name...he formerly was practicing magic in the city. He was in Samaria. And astonishing the people of Samaria claiming to be someone great." Now magic would be probably some demon activity. He may have been...he may

have been a clever deceiver but I think he was involved in some Satanic activity that his magic was demonic. "And everybody from the smallest to the greatest," verse 10, "were giving attention to him saying, This man is what is called the great power of God." That's typical of the world. They've got it exactly backwards, right? They think he's of God, he's actually of Satan. But he had some tremendous Satanic demonic power.

"And they were...verse 11...giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts." Now when Philip arrives, now you've got a true man of God, now the man of Satan is going to be exposed. So you've got a true man of God and the comparison is going to be clear. "So they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." Philip was having this tremendous tremendous response. Now watch verse 13. "And even Simon himself...what?...believed." He had an event. Some time some place Philip preaching, Philip preached, he responded. I don't know how the format worked but he had his event. "And he was baptized."

So Simon could look back and say, "I remember the day Philip preached and I remember the day I heard the message and I remember the day I prayed the prayer and I remember the day I was baptized." Right? He had his event. That was his event. And not only that, he continued on with Philip. He followed him. "Philip was continuing to preach and not only that he was doing signs and great miracles and Simon was observing those and he was constantly amazed." You say, "Why was he amazed?" Because the power of God is infinitely greater than the power of Simon or the power of Satan. And what he was seeing was not the blunted depraved wonders of a vile being, Satan and his demons, but the pure unadulterated majestic power of the living God flowing through Philip. And the level of achievement was way beyond anything Simon had ever experienced or accomplished.

Now, go down to verse 18. "The Apostles lay hands on these people that believe and they received the Holy Spirit. And Simon," verse 18, "saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. He offered them money and he said, Give me this authority or power as well so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." I want that. Man, can I get rich with that. That's the greatest trick I've ever seen. Why? Well, what happened was the Apostles were laying hands on these new believers and I am convinced without any equivocation that they began to speak in languages. Just like they did on the day of Pentecost because that was the whole point...to associate them with the same church that was born on Pentecost. These were half-breed Samaritans and they were one with the Jews in Christ. And so when they began to do this miraculous speaking of languages and this phenomenon occurred there and it may have even been a phenomenon like Acts 2. We don't know. With the Spirit descending in that kind of manner. It doesn't say that but there was enough there to convince Simon that this was some kind of power. And so he said, "I'll pay anything for that power. I'll pay anything for that power." Now it becomes apparent to us that the reason Simon had an event was because he wanted to be able to do bigger tricks. Right? He wanted the magic. The motive was wrong.

Now look what happens. Peter is a very confrontive guy. "Peter looks at him...verse 20...and says, May your silver perish with you." Now what does that tell you? Where was Simon headed? What does perish imply? Hell. Your money perish with you. Follow this, "Because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have no part or portion in this matter. Your heart is not right before God. Repent of the wickedness, pray the Lord, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you, for I see you are in the gall of bitterness, you are in the bondage of iniquity." Now there's a spiritual characterization of Simon. You want to know what he was like? Here's his spiritual condition. He was going to perish. He thought he could buy the gift of God with money. He had no part and no portion in the true coming of the Holy Spirit. His heart was not right before God. He was wicked and needed to repent. The intent of his heart was wicked and needed to be forgiven. He was in the gall of bitterness and he was a slave of iniquity. Now you tell me, was he a Christian? No way. Did he have an event? Yes. The event in isolation from the life proves nothing. That is why I say it is no proof that a man is not a Christian because he can't point to an event, nor is it a proof that a man is a Christian because he had an event. And yet I tell you, the church is filled with people who are banking salvation on a past event...particularly do parents find themselves saying..."Well, I know my son or daughter is living an undisciplined life, a godless life, rejecting the Lord, rejecting the church but I remember when they received Christ at the age of so-and-so." That event doesn't mean anything...unless it was a real change. And if there was a real change, then you don't need to look at the event because you can see the change. And what do you look for? Do they worship God? Do they glory in Christ Jesus? Do they reject the flesh? See. You don't look at the event. A moment of believing whatever kind of believing it was didn't save Simon.

Let me give you a second non-proof. Living by a moral code, living by a moral code. People, say, "Ah, So-and-so must be a good Christian, very very moral person." Listen, many people are moral...many people. Many people live by high standards of honesty, charity, kindness, morality, ethics...many people. Look at the Mormons. Very ethical on the surface...very moral, very charitable, very kind, very honest ostensibly. That's what they propagate. A lot of people like that. There are a lot of unsaved people in liberal churches who are very compassionate, very ethical. They are set to live according to the Ten Commandments. Many of them trying to live according to the Sermon on the Mount. Live out the quote/unquote "golden rule." Many ethical people living by a moral code. That in itself does not verify salvation because you can subscribe yourself to a moral code for a multiplicity of reasons. Right? Fear, some people live by a moral code because they're afraid of God. They're afraid of God. Some people live by a moral code because they want to please their parents. And it's very important that their parents be pleased because they're under their parents. In other words, mentally they feel the bondage of parental pressure to live by a certain code. There are some people who live by a moral code because they believe that if they do, that will get them to heaven. Or they believe if they do God will reward them somehow in this life by making them rich...or famous or successful. There are some people who live by a moral code just to avoid a dirty conscience and guilt. I mean, there could be a lot of reasons for that.

But that is not synonymous with salvation because there are so many reasons why people could live and do live by a moral code. Let me give you an illustration of that. Go back to Matthew chapter 19 and here you meet a very familiar personality in Matthew chapter 19 and verse 16. Here comes a rich young ruler as we know him and he says in verse 16, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" Now the guy confesses I don't have eternal life, I don't have any hope for the future, I'm worried about dying. I don't know where I'm going. He was not secure. He was afraid of the future. "I want eternal life."

Now mark it in your mind...he knew he didn't have eternal life. The point is this, he hadn't attained what he wanted. He hadn't yet attained what he wanted. How had he been trying to attain it? Well, Jesus brings that out because Jesus says to him, "If you want to enter into the life," in verse 17, "keep the commandments." In other words, if you want to do it the way you're trying to do it, then just keep the commandments. He says, "Which ones? Jesus said, You shall not commit 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. And the young man said to Him, All these things I have kept, what am I still lacking?" Is that amazing? What he is saying is this, I never murdered anybody, I never committed adultery with anybody, I never stole from anyone, I have not purposely borne false witness against someone, I have done my best to honor my father and my mother and I have tried to love my neighbor as myself...I've done all those things.

Mark it in your mind. He had done all those things at least to the level that he assessed them which would not be a true level. He hadn't truly done them, but his deceitful heart would lie to him about what he had done. But he thought he had kept it all. That was his goal...keep the Ten Commandments, keep the Ten Commandments. So here he's got a life of keeping the Ten Commandments. He comes to Jesus and says, "All this keeping of the Ten Commandments and I'm telling you I don't have...what?...eternal life." Because eternal life is not the product of that. Sure he hadn't kept them in their fullness. Jesus said, "That when I said you shall not commit murder, I meant you shouldn't hate either." That's behind the murder. "And when I said you shouldn't commit adultery, I meant that you shouldn't even look on a woman to lust after her or you've committed it in your heart." No, he hadn't fully kept those things. But on the surface he had done his best to keep them all. But he knew he still didn't have eternal life. The point is this, you can live by the highest ethical code, the one given in Exodus 20, the very Ten Commandments of God and still not have eternal life because the one does not necessarily mean the other. A moral life didn't save him. And yet he was trying to live a moral life in order to get eternal life. So a past event doesn't assure your salvation and neither does living by a moral code because you could do that for a lot of reasons...a lot of people do.

Thirdly, another, I think, misconception, another element of this negative approach, what does not verify salvation, is knowledge of the truth...knowledge of the truth. We used to call it head knowledge. Have you ever heard that phrase? Head knowledge instead of heart knowledge. There are a lot of

people who know the facts about Christ. They know the facts about God. They know God is God. They know God is three in one. They know Christ is the Son of God. They know Christ is deity. They know Christ came into the world and did miracles. They know Christ died on a cross. They know that He died a substitutionary death. They know He rose again the third day, that He offers salvation by grace. And they know all of that in their head, but that's not synonymous with salvation. It's not what you know. In fact, the Pharisees and the scribes like the other Jews that I've just mentioned, like Simon who was looking at an event, like the rich young ruler who was looking at a moral ethical standard, other Jews knew all about Christ from His birth on. They knew everything about Him. They knew all of His miracles were legitimate. There was no way they ever argued against them. They never denied them. Do you realize that? Do you realize that throughout the whole miraculous ministry of Jesus Christ no one ever denied any of His miracles? They couldn't deny them, they were undeniable, absolutely undeniable. So they knew it in their minds. They knew everything He did. That's why He says in Matthew 12, "You can't be saved, you've committed an unpardonable sin." Why? "You've seen it all, you've heard it all, you've experienced it all, and you won't believe. You have it all in your mind."

It's the same thing in Hebrews 6. You've been enlightened, you've tasted the heavenly gift, you've tasted the powers of the age to come, but you won't believe, you won't receive. It is not enough to have a head knowledge. Faith without works is...what? Dead. And James 2:19, "The devils believe but they tremble." They're not saved. You can believe it's all true.

I had a friend through the years and for as long as I've known him, and it's probably 25 years, he says, "I believe, I believe, I believe it all. But I'm not going to commit my life to it until I'm through enjoying the things that I want to enjoy." Head knowledge doesn't mean anything. Because someone talks about Christ, talks about God...knowledge isn't the means of salvation, head knowledge. The Jews had all of that. Many people have that. The classic illustration is a man among the Twelve...what's his name? Judas...what more information could that man have had in his head? He had it all. He had it all. Three years under the tutelage of the living Son of God, he knew it all. He saw it all. He felt it all. He experienced it all. And he never ever was saved. He went to his own place when he committed suicide.

Fourthly, this is another non-proof of salvation, let's call it religious activity...religious activity, going to church, being baptized, taking communion, or whatever, lighting candles, praying beads, doing religious pilgrimages, doing certain prayers, staying on your knees, marching here, marching there, whatever it is. Many many people go through complex religious motions thinking that all of that religious activity equates to salvation. I think the perfect parallel to this is in Matthew 25. You remember you have the ten virgins, waiting for the wedding. And when the bridegroom came and went into the chamber to join the bride for all of the wonderful festivities, five of the virgins went in and five had to stay out because five had failed to put...what?...oil in their lamps. That's a very graphic picture of Israel, of the unpreparedness of Israel. And yet it's amazing that they were prepared up to a

point. I mean, they were...they were from a visual viewpoint no different than the other five virgins in their wedding garb, with the lamp in hand, in the right place at the right time. In somewhat similar character, ten virgins assumes characterization is somewhat the same. But the missing factor was some had an internal quality that others didn't have. That's basically what Jesus is saying there. They had oil. Well oil, some say, is the Holy Spirit, some say is salvation, what I take it as is simply the salvation, the right to enter the Kingdom which includes the Holy Spirit. Some had all the dress and all the garb and they were there in the right place at the right time but without the reality. It was external and it was not...what?...internal. So many like that. So they were left out of the Kingdom. Israel was religious but shut out.

Many people today, religious but shut out. There are some churches where there is reality and some churches where there's form and no reality. There are a lot of people who have a very religious life, very religious. It's a form of religion without reality. So religious activity isn't the issue.

Fifthly, and finally, service in the name of Christ isn't a proof of salvation...service in the name of Christ isn't a proof of salvation. Matthew chapter 7, "Many will say to Me, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, have we not done many wonderful works? Have we not cast out demons in Your name? And I will say, Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." Saying you represent Christ is not enough. I'll tell you, there are a lot of people who say they represent Jesus Christ, but when their life gets exposed, you ask the question...do they? Just because you say you do doesn't mean you do. Just because you preach Christ doesn't mean you really know Christ. There have been a lot of people, false people, preaching a true message, right? A lot. Many many people doing things for God. I hear about it all the time. Another expose this week of some guy with a big time preacher, well known to everybody with a 20-year- adulterous affair ongoing, horrible kind of stuff, on and on the expose went, page after page after page after page of the dissolute life. And you say, "But he preached Christ...he preached Christ." Yeah, well that does not in itself verify his spiritual condition.

So, when you look for the verification of a person's spiritual condition, where do you look? Well, Simon had an event but he wasn't saved. And the rich man had a high high moral ethical code which he lived by, but he wasn't saved. And the Pharisees and the scribes and Judas saw everything that Christ did, heard what he said, particularly Judas, and he wasn't saved. And there were people in the church certainly at Sardis in Revelation that were doing their religious duty and serving Christ and thinking they were alive, but they were dead. And there were people in the church at Laodicea who were doing the same kind of stuff and Christ spit them out of His mouth. No, there have been lots of people praying and fasting, giving money, going through religious motions who will never enter the Kingdom because, you see, you can have a past spiritual event, you can live a moral ethical life because of peer pressure or because of some motive to gain favor or to avoid judgment, you can know the gospel in your mind, you can even believe that it's true, you can be dutiful in your religious ceremonies, you can go to church, get baptized, take communion and you can even render service to

Christ, preaching, teaching, if need be, and still not be a true Christian.

Does that surprise you? Because, you see, any of those things can be counterfeit. You can have a counterfeit event. You can have a totally wrong motive for your moral life. You can know something to be true in your mind and never commit your heart to it. And you can carry out external religious service all you want and your heart cannot be necessarily right with God.

You say, "Well, what marks a true Christian?" Look at it. Three things...the true circumcision worship in the Spirit of God. Listen, the first thing is an overflowing heart of worship. So if you want to look at your life, don't look...do I attend a service? Have I been baptized? Ask yourself, does my heart long to glorify the Lord? Do I love to praise Him and worship Him? Is it my heart's desire to serve Him? We're going to look in detail at these three things next time, I'm only going to give you a general brush this morning. But the question you want to ask is what is my attitude toward God? Because if I'm a Christian the Spirit is in me and if the Spirit is in me, then He is prompting me to worship. And so I'll have a heart of adoration and a heart of praise and a heart that longs to serve God from the inside out. So I have to look at my heart. And so when the Scripture says "examine yourselves," it starts there in the heart. Oh yes, there will be a moral code by which you live. And there may have been a real event, there was for all of us a time when we were saved, even though we don't know it. And we do have to know the facts. And service will be a part of our life but all of that will flow from the inside because we worship God prompted by the Spirit. It's worship on a supernatural level, it's not human, it's spiritual, it's energized by the Holy Spirit.

So, you ask yourself then, "Do I love to praise God? Do I love to talk with Him? Do I love to learn about Him in His Word? Do I want to serve Him? Oh sure, sin gets in the way and interrupts that and confuses my mind sometimes but isn't there something deep within me that longs to praise and worship and love God, to read His Word, to know more about Him, to serve Him with all my heart?" You see, that's the evidence coming from the inside.

And the second thing he says, "And glory in Christ Jesus." That...that verb in the Greek, "to glory," *kauchaomai* basically means to boast but it has the idea of a rejoicing exultant, almost a hilarious kind of boasting. And what it's saying here is that if you're a true Christian all your boasting, all your rejoicing is going to be in Christ because all the credit belongs to Him. So you haven't done anything to earn it.

So how do you tell a true Christian? A true Christian gives all the credit to Christ, they rejoice in Christ. They're so thankful for Christ. Christ has done it all. Whereas the false religionists wants you and God and everybody else to appreciate what he has done. The true Christian wants everyone else to appreciate what Christ has done.

Then finally, not only is the true believer characterized by worship, by rejoicing in Christ, but thirdly by humility...humility. That's the...that is the basic attitude of a genuine believer..."He puts no confidence in the flesh." Very humble by the fallen condition of his human flesh. He doesn't trust it. He doesn't trust in it. He began in the Spirit and he will continue in the Spirit. He knows that all the good that comes to him and through him is by the power of God, he has no confidence in his flesh to please God. He knows it can't. So there's a humility there. There is not a pushing of one's merit, of one's achievement, but there's humility.

How do you identify a true Christian? Look for one who worships from the heart that's prompted by the Spirit. Look for one whose glory and joy and boast is all Christ. Look for one who when viewing himself is humble. Therein are the distinctive qualities of a true Christian. And more detail about them in our next study next Lord's day. Let's pray.

We say thank You, Father, thank You for Your work in Christ which has made us the true circumcision, who are inwardly cleansed and thus are the true worshipers whom the Father seeks to worship, are those who rejoice only in Christ, only in Christ. And like Paul find all their glory in the cross and those who are humbled. We know James says that You give grace to those who are humble. Father, help us to look in to our own hearts this morning and ask these questions...do I have a desire to worship God prompted by His Spirit? Do I find myself ever rejoicing in what Christ has done for me? And when I look at myself am I humbled in seeing the sinfulness and the fallenness of my own flesh? Therein are the distinctive marks of a true Christian. And then, Lord, if those things are a part of our lives we can look back and say, "Yes, that event was real, and yes, I want to live by a moral standard out of love and gratitude and obedience to the one who saved me, and yes my knowledge has gone from my head to my heart and I know Christ not as a fact but as a friend, and yes I long to worship and serve not to earn anything but to give glory and to render to God what is due Him."

Father, help no one to trust in these five things isolated from these three things, but help us to know that as we examine our hearts to see whether we're in the faith we must look for a worshiping attitude, a rejoicing in Christ, and humility in our own weakness. Reveal to each person here, O God, their spiritual condition. For those who are genuine, may Your Spirit fill their hearts with assurance, may they be overwhelmed with confidence, may they know the joy of the Lord, may they know the assurance that they belong to You. And, O God, for those who in such an examination find themselves inadequate, who don't really worship out of the heart, who don't really glory only in Christ Jesus, who are not humbled, O God, save them today, save them. May they pass from death to life, save them, reach down into the depth and darkness of their sin and depravity and bring them into Your light and Your cleansing, Your Kingdom. Save them, Lord, save them. And we'll give You all the praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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