

The True Nature of Belief

Mark 4:3-8

3 “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred” ([Mark 4:3-8](#)).^[1]

Introduction

Board of Directors for Mega-Church Corp Force Jesus Christ to Step Down as Head of Their Organization

Lake Forest, CA - The Board of Directors for Mega-Church Corp announced today that they were forcing the resignation of Jesus Christ as the head of their organization. The reasons cited for Jesus' abrupt departure from Mega-Church Corp included Jesus' increasing lack of understanding of the unique needs of 21st Century consumers as well as marketing data that clearly showed that Jesus' old school message of ["repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name"](#) was just not resonating with today's tech savvy religious customers.

Rick Warren, Chairman of the Board, for Mega-Church Corp in an email sent to the media said, "This was a tough decision to have to make. Jesus has been the head of our organization since its inception. But, Jesus' insistence on sound doctrine and a core message that conjures up visions of sin, hell, God's wrath and Jesus' scandalous bloody death on the cross between two common thieves just isn't relevant anymore." Said Warren, "Despite our insistence at previous board meetings that Jesus get his head out of the First Century and update His messaging to meet the felt needs of today's religious seekers, Jesus stubbornly refused to take our council and sage business advice. Ultimately, we had to think about the future of our

organization and it was clear that we just wouldn't meet our growth targets if we continued to use a 2000 year old message.”

Bill Hybels, Senior Member of the Board of Directors for Mega-Church Corp, commenting on Jesus' forced resignation said, “This decision was long overdue. Truth be told, we don't need Jesus to grow Mega Church Corp. Now that Jesus is no longer at the helm we expect our growth to sky rocket.

Joel Osteen, Junior Board Member for Mega-Church Corp, sounded relieved. Said Osteen, “With Jesus out of the way, we can finally give religious consumers exactly what they want to hear.”

Wall Street received the news of Jesus' forced resignation favorably, and Mega Church Corp's stock price shot up nearly \$7 a share (\$6.66) in late afternoon trading.

Disclaimer (this article above is satire to prove a very sad reality in the modern day consumer driven mega church.)

Paul Washer states
in “The Gospel Call and True Conversion

One of the greatest crimes committed by this present Christian generation is its neglect of the gospel, and it is from this neglect that all our other maladies spring forth. The lost world is not so much gospel hardened as it is gospel ignorant because many of those who proclaim the gospel are also ignorant of its most basic truths. The essential themes that make up the very core of the gospel—the justice of God, the radical depravity of man, the blood atonement, the nature of true conversion, and the biblical basis of assurance—are absent from too many pulpits. Churches reduce the gospel message to a few creedal statements, teach that conversion is a mere human decision, and pronounce assurance of salvation over anyone who prays the sinner’s prayer.

The result of this gospel reductionism has been far-reaching. First, it further hardens the hearts of the unconverted. Few modern-day “converts” ever make their way into the fellowship of the church, and those who do often fall away or have lives marked by habitual carnality. Untold millions walk our streets and sit in our pews unchanged by the true gospel of Jesus Christ,

and yet they are convinced of their salvation because one time in their life they raised a hand at an evangelistic campaign or repeated a prayer. This false sense of security creates a great barrier that often insulates such individuals from ever hearing the true gospel.

Paul Washer

There are many who believe they are saved and thoroughly Christian because they once prayed a prayer and asked Jesus to come into their hearts. However, they did not continue on in the faith. They never came out of the world, or if they did, they quickly returned. They possess no practical reality of the fear of the Lord. There is no fragrance of divine grace in their lives. They show no outward evidence of inward transformation. There is not even a hint of the divine discipline that God provides to all His children.²⁵ Yet they stand assured of their salvation because of one decision in their past and their belief that their prayer was truly sincere. No matter how popular such a belief may be, it has no biblical grounds.

We deal five minutes with a person and their conversion and then we spend the next fifty years trying to disciple a goat into a sheep. I'm not saying this because I'm angry. I'm saying this because countless people are being deceived. ~Paul Washer

The problem is not liberal politicians, its evangelical preachers. ~Paul Washer

Seven conditions that do not prove or disprove genuine saving faith.

1. Visible Morality

There are some people who just seem to be good people. They can be religious, moral, honest, and forthright [trustworthy] in their dealings with people. They may seem to be grateful, loving, kind and tenderhearted toward others. They have visible virtues and an external morality. The Pharisees of Jesus day rested on visible morality for their hope and yet some of Christ's harshest words were directed at them for this very thing.

Many who possess visible morality know nothing of sincere love for God. Whatever good works they appear to possess, they know nothing of serving the true God and living for His glory. Whatever the person does or leaves undone does not involve God. They're honest in their dealings with everyone-but God. They won't rob anyone-but God. They're thankful and loyal to everyone-but God. They speak contemptuously and reproachfully of no one-but God. They have good relationships with everyone-but God. They are like the rich young ruler who said, "All these things [conditions] have I kept, what do I lack?" Their focus is on visible morality, but

that visible morality doesn't necessarily mean salvation. Jesus told one of the Pharisees "you must be born again" ([John 3:6](#)), not "you must put on an external morality." People can "clean up their act" by reformation rather than regeneration-so reformation in itself is not a mark of saving faith.

2. Intellectual Knowledge

Another condition that can be misleading is intellectual knowledge. People can possess an intellectual understanding and knowledge of the truth and yet not be saved. While the knowledge of the truth is necessary for salvation, and visible morality is a fruit of salvation, neither of these conditions by themselves translate into true saving faith. People can know all about God, all about Jesus, who He was, that He came into the world, that He died on the cross, that He rose again, that He's coming again, and even many details about the life of Christ-and still turn their backs on Him.

That's what the writer of Hebrews was warning against in [Hebrews 6:4-6](#). There were people in the church who knew all about God and understood gospel truths. They even had a measure of experience with gospel truth. They'd seen the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in people's lives-and yet knowing all of that, they stood in grave danger of turning away and rejecting Christ.

In Hebrews 10 the writer warns this kind of man that he is treading underfoot the blood of Christ by not believing what he knows to be true. There are many people who know the Scriptures but are on their way to hell! A man cannot be saved without the knowledge of the truth, but possessing that knowledge alone does not save.

3. Religious Involvement

Religious involvement is not necessarily a proof of true faith. According to Paul there are people who possess an outward form (a mere external appearance) of godliness but who have denied the power of it. They have an empty form of religion. Jesus illustrated this when He told of the virgins in Matthew 25. They waited and waited and waited for the coming of the bridegroom,

who is Christ. And even though they waited a long time, when He came they didn't go in. They had everything together except the oil in their lamps. That which was most necessary was missing. The oil is probably emblematic of the new life; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They weren't regenerate. They had religious involvement but were not regenerate. A person can be visibly moral, know the truth, be religiously involved, and yet not possess genuine saving faith.

4. Active Ministry

It is possible to have an active and even a public ministry, and yet not possess genuine saving faith. Balaam was a prophet who turned out to be false ([Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#)). Saul of Tarsus (later becoming the apostle Paul) thought he was serving God by killing Christians. Judas was a public preacher and one of the twelve disciples of Christ-but he was an apostate. In [Matthew 7:22-23](#) Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Those whom Jesus spoke of had been involved in active and public ministry-but Jesus said he never knew them. Sobering words indeed.

5. Conviction of Sin

By itself, even conviction of sin is not a proof of salvation. Our world is filled with guilt-ridden people. Many even feel badly about their sin. Felix trembled under conviction at the preaching of the apostle Paul, but he never left his idols or turned to God ([Acts 24:24-6](#)). The Holy Spirit works to convict men of sin, righteousness, and of judgment, but many do not respond in true repentance. Some may confess their sins and even abandon the sins they feel guilty about. They say, "I don't like living this way. I want to change." They may amend their ways and yet fall short of genuine saving faith. That's external reformation, not internal regeneration. No degree of conviction of sin is conclusive evidence of saving faith. Even the demons are convicted of their sins-that's why they tremble-but they are not saved.

6. The Feeling of Assurance

Feeling like you are saved is no guarantee you are indeed saved. Someone may say, "Well, I must be a Christian because I feel that I am. I think I am one." But that is faulty reasoning. If thinking one is a Christian is what makes one a Christian, then no one could be deceived. And then, by definition, it would not be possible to be a deceived non-Christian, and that doesn't square with the whole point of Satan's deception. He wants people who are not truly saved to think they are. Satan has deceived multiplied millions of religious people into thinking they are saved even though they are not. They may say to themselves, "God won't condemn me. I feel good about myself. I have assurance. I'm ok." But that doesn't necessarily mean a thing.

7. A Time of Decision

So often people say things like: "Well, I know I'm a Christian, because I remember when I signed the card," or "I remember when I prayed a prayer," or "I remember when I walked the aisle" or "went forward in church." A person may remember exactly when it happened and where they were when "it" happened, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Our salvation is not verified by a past moment. Many people have prayed prayers, gone forward in church services, signed cards, gone into prayer rooms, been baptized, and joined churches without ever experiencing genuine saving faith.

These are seven common conditions or tests that don't necessarily prove or disprove the existence of saving faith. What then are the marks of genuine saving faith? Are there some reliable tests from the Word of God that enable us to know for certain whether one's faith is real? Thankfully there are at least nine biblical criteria for examining the genuineness of saving faith.

Lesson:

The Nature of True Saving Faith

It was one of the most celebrated times in the Jewish calendar. It was the Passover(See [Exodus 12:1-13](#)). Jews would all gather together in Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. Now on one of these occasions Jesus appears on the scene. And what does he do? Miraculous signs. The beloved disciple states very clearly the purpose of these miraculous signs was so that people may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God([John 20:30-31](#)). People saw these miraculous signs, John writes, that Jesus did at the Passover Feast and many believed in His name([John 2:23](#)). What was Jesus' response?

“But Jesus on His part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.”

[John 2:24-25](#)

It ought to shock you that the verse does not begin with the term “therefore” or “so”. That would signify there was something positive in Jesus' response, such as, “So Jesus on His part entrusted Himself to them”. But that is not what it says. Instead, the verse begins with a contrasting term, namely “but”. Why did Jesus not entrust Himself to them? The text of Scripture is clear. Because of Christ's omniscience. He is all-knowing. Specifically it mentions twice that Christ “knew” what was in man. Christ knew that this was not saving faith, but superficial faith. As the God-Man He knew that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick”([Jeremiah 17:9](#)).

This kind of spurious faith was throughout Christ's ministry. On another occasion the crowds were asking Jesus to show them a sign so that they may see and believe ([John 6:30](#)). Earlier Jesus exposed their false motives for coming to Him ([John 6:26](#)). It was these same people who later on were proven to be apostate ([John 6:66](#)).

Furthermore, James says that even the demons believe and that belief is orthodox ([James 2:19](#)), yet it is not saving faith. So what is the nature of true saving faith? Let's look at 6 elements that will help us not jump to immediate conclusions that whoever says that they believe in Jesus or that has grown up believing in Jesus is automatically saved.

1) Saving faith is a commitment.

Systematic theology recognizes three elements of genuine faith, notitia, assensus and fiducia.

Notitia is a recognition and understanding of the truth that Christ saves. **Assensus** is the settled confidence and affirmation that Christ's salvation is applicable to one's soul. And **fiduciariness** the personal commitment to and appropriation of Christ as the only hope for eternal salvation.

Note that faith is not just mental assent as many would have you falsely think. Just give mental acquiescence and you are saved. NO! Though faith is an acknowledgement of the historical facts of the Gospel (i.e. Jesus died on a real tree), it goes beyond that. It is a personal commitment.

Jas 2:19

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

Jn 8:30–32

30 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Lk 14:25–33

25 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,

26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*—

29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him,

30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

“We cannot be said to believe that which we distrust too much to commit ourselves to it.”

B.B. Warfield

“Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment.”

John MacArthur(Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles, p. 45)

2) Saving faith is a gift of God.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,”

Eph. 2:8 

What is an antecedent?

The antecedent is the noun closest in proximity that a pronoun refers to. In this case, the antecedent to the pronouns “this” and “it” is “faith”. Of course the whole of salvation is all of God, but here Paul is specifically stressing that faith is not our own doing because faith itself is the gift of God.

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,”

Phil. 1:29 




The term granted comes from the same Greek word from which we get the term grace. Here Paul is saying that faith to believe in Him is granted by the grace of God.

3) Saving faith is a command to be obeyed in response to the Gospel.









While in jail, Paul and Silas were praising God. Then God sent an earthquake to release them from prison. In fear the Phillipian jailer fell down before them.

“And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Acts 16:30-31 

Their answer to his question was a command, believe. Jesus said that if you do not believe you stand condemned already(**John 3:18** ) and you will die in your sins(**John 8:24** ). After all, without faith it is impossible to please God(**Hebrews 11:6** 



4) Saving faith has Christ as its object.

The references to Christ as the only object of faith are so many that I suppose the world would not contain them all(See **John 21:25** ; **John 3:16** ; **John 8:24** ; **John 20:31** ; **Acts 16:31** ; **Acts 20:21** ; **Romans 3:22** , **26** ). Saving faith must be in the person and work of Christ.

You must believe in His person, who He is, namely...

...the only Savior(**Acts 4:12** 

...Lord(**Romans 10:9a** 

...Man – the incarnation, His humanity(**1 John 4:2-3** ; cf. **1 John 1:1-3** 

...God – His Deity(1 John 5:20^L)

You must believe in His work, what He has done, namely...

...His substitutionary atonement(John 10:11^L, 15^L; Romans 5:8^L; Ephesians 5:25^L; Titus 2:14^L)

...His resurrection(Romans 10:9b^L; Acts 2:24-29^L; Acts 13:30-37^L)

5) Saving faith is manifested by the fruit of good works.

We call men to repent and believe. And if they repent and believe, truly in that moment they are saved in that moment. But the evidence is more than just the sincerity of a prayer. It is a continuation of the working of God in their life through sanctification. ~Paul Washer

It is absurd to think that a man can believe in Christ, with his heart, and it not have a radical affect on the rest of his life. ~Paul Washer

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10^L

Note that we are not saved by works(Ephesians 2:9^L), but we are saved unto works(Ephesians 2:10^L).

We are His workmanship. We are created in Christ for good works. And it is these good works which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in.

(James 2:14-26^L),

14

What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” And he was called the friend of God.

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

- 25** Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?
- 26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Good works are the natural consequence of faith so much so that Jesus

“gave himself for us...to purify for Himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”([Titus 2:14](#)). We are saved by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone!

6) Saving faith perseveres through trials.

This is [Hebrews 11](#). The Hall of Faith. This cloud of witnesses that is listed here is for our endurance([Hebrews 12:1](#)) because they persisted in the face of trials...by faith... by faith... by faith. Trials are God’s ordinary means that He uses to test the genuineness and authenticity of faith([1 Peter 1:6-7](#)). True saving faith is persevering faith!

- 6** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,
- 7** that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,
- 8** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
- 9** receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

