

Romans: The Good News of God

Reliable Evidences of Saving Faith

Romans 3:27-28

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Reliable Evidences of Saving Faith

Scripture

In our study of Romans we have observed that Paul has emphatically insisted that we come into a right relationship with God only by his grace and not through our own effort.

We deserve God's wrath. We deserve God's condemnation. We deserve God's sentence of hell.

But, God extends grace towards us, and we are then justified by faith. And instead of going to hell we are bound for heaven.

When we get to heaven we will give thanks to God for his grace towards us. We will express only gratitude for the gift of eternal life that has been given to us. As Stuart Briscoe says, "Gratitude, not boasting, is the language of the redeemed."¹

That is Paul's message in our text for today. Let's read Romans 3:27-28:

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3:27-28)

Introduction

"It ought to be possible to live a Christian life without being a Christian," laments Roy Hattersley, a columnist for the *U.K. Guardian*. An outspoken atheist, Hattersley came to this conclusion after watching Christian churches lead several other faith-based organizations in the relief effort after Hurricane Katrina.

"Notable by their absence," he says, were "teams from rationalist societies, free thinkers' clubs, and atheists' associations—

¹ D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 29, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 29 : Romans*, Formerly The Communicator's Commentary, The Preacher's Commentary series (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 94.

the sort of people who scoff at Christianity’s intellectual absurdity.”

According to Hattersley, it is an unavoidable conclusion that Christians “are the people most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others.”

Hattersley also notes that this pattern of behavior goes beyond disaster relief:

Civilized people do not believe that drug addiction and male prostitution offend against divine ordinance. But those who do are the men and women most willing to change the fetid bandages, replace the sodden sleeping bags, and—probably most difficult of all—argue, without a trace of impatience, that the time has come for some serious medical treatment.

“The only possible conclusion,” says Hattersley, “is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that, while they do not condition the attitude of all believers, influence enough of them to make [Christians] morally superior to atheists like me.”²

Hattersley acknowledges that saving faith produces a changed life.

Review

Last week, we considered some of the things that neither prove nor disprove true faith. Although these evidences will be manifest to some degree or another in true Christians, they can also be evidenced, sometimes to a high degree in non-Christians. Therefore, I suggested seven unreliable evidences of saving faith.

First, visible morality is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

Second, intellectual knowledge of God’s truth is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

Third, religious involvement is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

² Roy Hattersley, “Faith Does Breed Charity,” www.Guardian.co.uk (9-12-05).

Fourth, active ministry in Christ's name is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

Fifth, even conviction of sin is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

Sixth, assurance of salvation is not necessarily proof of saving faith.

And seventh, the experience of a past "decision" for Christ does not necessarily prove saving faith.

Lesson

Today, I want you to see that there *are*, however, some reliable evidences of saving faith. God does not leave his children in uncertainty about their relationship to him. So, what are some evidences of saving faith?³

I. Love for God

The first reliable evidence of saving faith is love for God.

Paul says that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7). The unsaved person cannot love God and, in fact, has no desire to love him.

The true child of God, however, despite his often failing his heavenly Father, will have a life characterized by delight in God and his Word (Psalm 1:2). "As a deer pants for flowing streams," so his soul pants and thirsts for God (Psalm 42:1-2).

Jesus declared, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).

The true believer will proclaim with Asaph of God, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25).

Peter declares, "Therefore, to you who believe, He is pre-

³ Material for this message taken from John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996, c1991, c1994), 220-226.

cious” (1 Peter 2:7, *NKJV*).

Love for God will be the direction of the true Christian’s life. The true Christian will love God’s Word and the things of God, and will delight in learning more about God.

When I first met Eileen, it was love at first sight for me. (It took her a bit longer!) As we talked, I thought to myself, “This is the most wonderful person I have ever met!” And I wanted to spend as much time as I could with her so that I could get to know her better.

I remember when I was first converted. I immediately had a deep hunger for the Word of God. I read the Bible. I read Christian books. I attended worship services regularly on the Lord’s Day and was active in a mid-week Bible Study. I was eager to learn more about this God who loved me and gave his Son to die for me. I did all these things so that I could spend time with God and get to know him better.

And so ask yourself: Do you love God? Do you love reading his Word? Do you love to worship him? Do you love to learn more about him—through his Word, through Christian books, through Sunday school, through Bible Study?

II. Repentance from Sin and the Hatred of Sin

A second reliable evidence of saving faith is repentance from sin and the hatred of sin that always accompanies true contrition.

This second mark of saving faith is the reverse side of the first. The person who genuinely loves God will have a built-in hatred of sin.

It is impossible to love two things that are contradictory to one another. “No one can serve two masters,” Jesus declared categorically, “for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24). To love the holy and righteous God is, almost by definition, to have a deep abhorrence of sin.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,” the

writer of Proverbs declares, “but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). This verse links the two inseparable parts of true repentance: the confession *and* the forsaking of sin.

When confronted by Nathan concerning his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, David’s repentance was genuine, as reflected in Psalm 51. “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions,” he prayed. “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (vv.1-4).

The true Christian often hates sin even while he is doing it and *always* after he has done it, because it is completely contrary to his new nature in Christ. Even though a Christian’s humanness sometimes draws him into sin and, like Paul, he does the very thing he knows he ought not to do (Romans 7:16), he will have no peace of conscience until he repents of it.

True repentance is more than simple sorrow for sin. Judas became bitterly sorry for his sin of betraying Jesus, to the extreme of committing suicide; but he did not repent of his betrayal or ask Jesus’ forgiveness. Paul commended the Corinthian believers for being “grieved. . . because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief” (2 Corinthians 7:9). True repentance always involves *godly* grief or sorrow, grief that one has disobeyed and offended his Lord.

No Christian becomes completely sinless until he meets the Lord. “If we say we have no sin,” the Apostle John says, “we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

If a person’s sin does not bother him and increasingly put him under conviction about it, that person’s salvation is question-

able. The test for true repentance is not simply grief for the way sin harms oneself (as it always does), but grief for the sin's offense against the holy Lord, which above all else leads a Christian to implore God's forgiveness.

III. Genuine Humility

A third reliable evidence of true faith is genuine humility.

A person cannot be saved as long as he trusts in and exalts himself. As pastor Steve Brown has said, "It is very hard to glorify God and yourself at the same time." In fact, I would say that it is impossible.

Salvation begins by confessing one's poverty of spirit (Matthew 5:3) and the willingness to deny self and take up the cross of Christ (Matthew 16:24). Like the prodigal son, the true Christian who sins will eventually come "to his senses," his spiritual senses, that convict him of sin. He will then, again like the prodigal, go to his heavenly Father and humbly confess his sin and his unworthiness of forgiveness, while pleading for it on the basis of his Father's grace (see Luke 15:17-21).

Humility is a trait that is characteristic in the Christian's life. D. L. Moody was one of the best-known Christian evangelists who ever lived. He could hold a crowd in the palm of his hand, won thousands of converts to the faith, and established several religious institutions. Yet he never displayed the pompous air of self-importance that so many famous evangelists did in that era. He was a tolerant, understanding man who rarely criticized others. One of his famous sayings was, "Right now I'm having so much trouble with D. L. Moody that I don't have time to find fault with the other fellow." That's humility.

IV. Devotion to God's Glory

A fourth reliable evidence of true faith is devotion to God's glory.

This is closely related to the love of God and repentance of sin.

The true Christian will say with Paul, “As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

As already noted, although that desire will not be seen in perfection in the true Christian’s life, it will always be evidenced in the direction of his life.

Listen to how the great Reformer, Martin Luther, describes faith, particularly in relationship to the glory of God:

Faith is a living, well-founded confidence in the grace of God, so perfectly certain that it would die a thousand times rather than surrender its conviction. Such confidence and personal knowledge of divine grace makes its possessor joyful, bold, and full of warm affection toward God and all created things—all of which the Holy Spirit works in faith. Hence, such a man becomes without constraint willing and eager to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer all manner of ills, all in order to please and glorify God, who has shown toward him such grace.

V. Prayer

A fifth reliable evidence of true faith is prayer.

“And because you are sons,” Paul told the Galatians, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6). The heart of a genuine Christian cannot help calling out to God, who is his heavenly Father and whose own Spirit is within him to generate that yearning.

As you may know, I became a Christian when I was nineteen years old. Prior to my conversion, while still in High School, I used to spend up to 18 hours a weekend playing cricket during the summer. At that time I had very little interest in the things of God. Then I got converted. About five years later, I remember attending an hour-long prayer meeting on Sunday afternoon for our church’s

missionaries just before the evening service. As we were praying, it suddenly struck me that if someone had told me five years earlier that a day would come when I would not only spend an hour in prayer but would not want to be anywhere else at that time, I would have thought him crazy. But God had not only worked faith into my heart but had also sent the Spirit of his Son into my heart as well, so that I took great delight in crying out, “Abba, Father.” I now wanted to spend time in prayer with my heavenly Father.

Some time ago, in response to my appeal for prayer requests, one church member sent me this request: “Please pray for me to strengthen my prayer life. I find myself always having an excuse of being too busy or too tired to find time to pray.”

Every genuine Christian will freely admit that he does not pray as often or as earnestly and persistently as he should. But in his innermost being, communion with his heavenly Father will be the desire of his heart.

VI. Love for Other People, Especially Christians

A sixth mark of saving faith is selfless love, not only for God, as in the first mark, but also for other people, and especially for fellow Christians.

The Apostle John says, “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling” (1 John 2:9-10).

Later in his letter, John says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14). The person who does not sincerely care for the welfare of true Christians is himself *not* a true Christian, but still remains spiritually dead.

Again in that letter John says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

VII. Spiritual Growth

A seventh mark of saving faith is spiritual growth.

The central truth of the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-23) is that true Christians will always grow spiritually to varying degrees, because by faith we have genuinely received the seed of the gospel.

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,” Jesus said on another occasion, “He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear” (Mark 4:26-28).

Like the farmer and his crops, the Christian does not understand *how* he grows spiritually, but he knows that because he has spiritual life within him, he *will* grow (see also Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:6).

VIII. Obedient Living

The eighth and final mark of saving faith is obedient living.

“And by this we know that we have come to know [Christ],” John says, “if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him” (1 John 2:3-5; cf. 3:10).

Although no one is saved *by* his good works, those who are truly saved *will* produce good works, because “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Conclusion

In his grace God gives faith to us. And this faith is either spu-

rious or genuine. Paul warns all of us who profess faith in these words: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test” (2 Corinthians 13:5-6).

Genuine faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel (see *WSC Q/A 86*).

Reliable evidences of saving faith include love for God, repentance from sin, genuine humility, devotion to God’s glory, prayer, selfless love for other people (especially Christians), spiritual growth, and obedient living.

I trust that you see these evidences in your life. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord, we are so prone to deceive ourselves about the most important issue of coming into a right relationship with you.

There are people who are outwardly moral, have intellectual knowledge of your truth and the gospel, are involved in the life of the church, are active in ministry, have conviction of sin, have assurance of salvation, and have even made a “decision” for Christ, but may not yet be true Christians.

O God, enable each one of us to have faith in Jesus Christ alone, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

O God, may that faith result in love for you, repentance from sin, genuine humility, devotion to your glory, prayer, selfless love for other people (especially Christians), spiritual growth, and obedient living.

And all of this we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.