

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH Part III 10. TESTS

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Transcript

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Part III

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Unto those who never savingly "came to Christ," He will yet say "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." The contemplation of those awful words ought to almost freeze the very blood in our veins, searching our consciences and awing our hearts. But, alas, it is much to be feared that Satan will blunt their piercing force unto many of our readers, by assuring them that they have already come to Christ, and telling them they are fools to doubt it for a moment. But, O dear friend, seeing that there is no less than your immortal soul at stake, that whether you spend eternity in Heaven with the blessed or in Hell with the cursed, hinges on whether or no you really and truly "come to Christ," will not you read the paragraphs which follow with double care. 1. How many rest on their sound doctrinal views of Christ. They believe firmly in His Deity, His holy humanity, His perfect life, His vicarious death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to God's right hand, His present intercession on high, and His second advent. So too did many of those to whom James addressed his epistle, but he reminded them that the "demons also believe and tremble" (2:19). O my reader, saving faith in Christ is very much more than assenting to the teachings of Scripture concerning Him; it is the giving up of the soul unto Him to be saved, to renounce all else, to yield fully unto Him. 2. How many mistake the absence of doubts for a proof they have savingly come to Christ. They take for granted that for which they have no clear evidence. But, reader, a man possesses not Christ by faith as he does money in a strongbox or title-deeds of land which are preserved by his lawyer, and which he never looks at once in a year. No, Christ is as "bread" which a man feeds upon, chews, digests, which his stomach works upon continually, and by which he is nourished and strengthened: John 6:53. The empty professor feeds upon a good opinion of himself, rather than upon Christ. 3. How many mistake the stirring of the emotions for the Spirit's quickening of the affections. If people weep under the preaching of the word, superficial observers are greatly encouraged, and if they go forward to the "mourners' bench" and sob and wail over their sins, this is regarded as a sure sign that God has savingly convicted them. But a supernatural work of Divine grace goes much deeper than that. Tears are but on the surface, and are a matter of temperamental constitution—even in nature, some of those who feel things the most give the least outward sign of it. It is the weeping of the heart which God requires; it is a godly sorrow for sin which breaks its reigning power over the soul that evidences regeneration. 4. How many mistake a fear of the wrath to come for an hatred of sin. No one wants to go to Hell. If the

intellect be convinced of its reality, and the unspeakable awfulness of its torments are in a measure believed, then there may be great uneasiness of mind, fear of conscience, and anguish of heart, over the prospect of suffering its eternal burnings. Those fears may last a considerable time, yea, their effects may never completely wear off. The subject of them may come under the ministry of a faithful servant of God, hear him describe the deep ploughing of the Spirit's work, and conclude that he has been the subject of them, yet have none of that love for Christ which manifests itself in a life, all the details of which seek to honour and glorify Him. 5. How many mistake a false peace for a true one. Let a person who has had awakened within him a natural dread of the lake of fire, whose own conscience has made him wretched, and the preaching he has heard terrify him yet more, then is he not (like a drowning man) ready to clutch at a straw. Let one of the false prophets of the day tell him that all he has to do is believe John 3:16 and salvation is his, and how eagerly will he—though unchanged in heart— drink in such "smooth things." Assured that nothing more is required than to firmly believe that God loves him and that Christ died for him, and his burden is gone: peace now fills him. Yes, and nineteen times out of twenty, that "peace" is nothing but Satan's opiate, drugging his conscience and chloroforming him into Hell. "There is no (true, spiritual) peace, saith my God, to the wicked," and unless the heart has been purified no man will see God (Matt. 5:8). 6. How many mistake self-confidence for spiritual assurance. It is natural for each of us to think well and hope well of ourselves, and to imagine with Haman, "I am the man whom the King delighteth to honour." Perhaps the reader is ready to say, That is certainly not true of me: so far from having a high esteem, I regard myself as a worthless, sinful creature. Yes, and so deceitful is the human heart, and so ready is Satan to turn everything to his own advantage, these very lowly thoughts of self may be feasted on, and rested on to assure the heart that all is well with you. The apostate king Saul began by having a lowly estimate of himself (1 Sam. 9:21). 7. How many make a promise the sole ground of their faith, and look no further than the letter of it. Thus the Jews were deceived by the letter of the law, for they never saw the spiritual meaning of Moses' ministry. In like manner, multitudes are deceived by the letter of such promises as Acts 16:31; Romans 10:13, etc., and look not to Christ in them: they see that He is the jewel in the casket, but rest upon the superscription without, and never lay hold of the Treasure within. But unless the person of Christ be apprehended, unless there be a real surrendering to His Lordship, unless He be Himself received into the heart, then believing the letter of the promises will avail nothing. The above paragraphs have been written in the hope that God may be pleased to arouse some empty professors out of their false security. But lest any of Christ's little ones be stumbled, we close with an excerpt from John Bunyan's Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ: "How shall we know that such men are coming to Christ? Answer: do they cry out at sin, being burdened with it, as an exceedingly bitter thing? Do they fly from it, as from the face of a deadly serpent? Do they cry out of the insufficiency of their own righteousness, as to justification in the sight of God? Do they cry out after the Lord Jesus to save them? Do they see more worth and merit in one drop of Christ's blood to save them, than in all the sins of the world to damn them? Are they tender of sinning against Jesus Christ? Do they favour Christ in this world, and do they leave all the world for His sake? And are they willing (God helping them) to run hazards for His name, for the love they bear to Him? Are His saints precious to them? If these things be so, these men are coming to Christ."

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