

RT Kendall: How to Know You Are Truly Saved

Some teach that you cannot claim to be a Christian until you prove it by your perseverance. If you turn out well, good; this shows you were truly born again. But if you don't turn out well, this shows you were not truly saved after all.

For years, the English Puritans had been my heroes. But that was before I examined them very carefully. These men had in common the belief that a person must be "prepared" for grace before he or she could be truly saved. Such preparation to me smacked of salvation by works.

This widespread teaching is called "lordship salvation." Sadly, those who teach this do not say it means affirming that Jesus is God, which (in my opinion) is what Paul actually means by *lordship salvation*. They say you cannot claim to have Jesus as your Savior until you first receive Him as Lord. Agreed.

But what does it mean to acknowledge Him as Lord? Does it mean you must obey all His commands before you can be sure you are saved? There are those who virtually put sanctification before salvation as proof you are really saved!

I do not accept this kind of teaching. That is precisely what I was set free from. If I am told I cannot be sure I am saved unless I am always manifesting holiness—good works—that is bondage. I would be looking inside myself day and night to see if I am still saved, checking my spiritual pulse every day, asking, "Am I in, or am I out?"

Puritan teaching encouraged endless and unfulfilled introspection. Whereas the teaching of salvation by true faith set people free, the Puritans raised the question "How do you know you have true faith?" And people were back to square one.

The result was that virtually no one knew for sure that he or she had true faith. People were told to look for proofs of faith—loving God’s Word; loving the Sabbath; showing “universal obedience,” as in keeping *all* of the Ten Commandments; loving God’s ministers and turning away from every known sin. People were afraid they had not come up to the standard whereby one could say they had true faith by turning from every known sin. And the liberty that came with Reformation teaching turned into a new bondage.

The gospel is the Good News that by transferring my trust in good works to what Jesus did on the cross, I will go to heaven and not to hell. I call that Good News. But when I am told I have to add good works to my faith in order to know I have true faith, the “good news” becomes heavy news. Sad news. No joy. No assurance. That is the way I was brought up; it is not what I believe today.

The gospel is frequently misunderstood. One of the main reasons it is misunderstood is because it seems too good to be true—that we are saved by another person’s work. That someone *else* paid our debt. That someone purchased our home in heaven by His own blood. Our natural instinct often tells us that there must be more to it than that. “Where’s the catch?” we ask. Yet if the gospel you hear does not seem too good to be true, you probably have not heard it yet.

The gospel is the good news that you will go to heaven when you die—and not to hell—by transferring your trust in your good works to what Jesus Christ the Son of God did for you on the cross.

Once we reach people and persuade them to hear us, is it the true gospel they hear? That is the question. {eo}

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