

What Genuine Faith Looks Like

Let's start this potentially challenging topic with a direct statement to consider...

Saving Faith is accompanied by a certain righteousness, because it is the very nature of God that lives inside the true believer.

I know we've heard this concept before, but today will be a slightly different perspective, a slightly different angle into the prism.

We know the Lord wants us to recognize those who are false brethren. He wants us to keep an eye out for the wolf in sheep's clothing, and be discerning. **Mat 7:15**

And it is easier than we might think.

If certain divinely good things are missing in the life of one who claims to be a believer, we should be on the alert, and looking to even discuss salvation with them, in love. **Eph 4:15a**

Speaking of sheep, Jesus said that His sheep will not only hear His voice, but they will also follow Him. Joh 10:27

Following Him, at least to some degree, is an indication of a changed heart towards Christ, of a converted heart that has turned to Him for eternal life.

And it is that person who receives the promise of security in **Joh 10:28-29**.

If someone does not follow Jesus at all in their lives, they might not be one of His sheep, but a goat, **Mat 25:32-33**, or worse a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The Bible is surprisingly simple.

As we continue to read through its books, we see a consistent message that is almost overly simple.

And in that simplicity, we catch a glimpse of the brilliant wisdom of our God and Creator.

The genuine believer in Christ, the one who believes in his heart that the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead for his salvation, will habitually do what is right in life, because God is righteous, and those who believe in Him will do what is righteous.

We'll see this later in the whole of **1John**.

This doesn't mean sinlessness or perfection. We know from Paul in **Romans 7** that the believer will still struggle at times, doing what he doesn't want to do, and vice versa.

Yet Paul's overall desire as a believer was to do the right thing.

“Doing what is right” means a saved person will have some type of righteousness in their lives, including love as we will see.

Our flesh, which includes self-righteousness, likes to complicate the Bible, even putting hard lines in the sand where they aren't meant to be.

As Jesus simply said; "you will know them by their fruits".

Mat 7:13-23 *"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

*15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So **every** good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.*

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

(why doesn't Jesus say whoever believes will enter? because doing the Father's will is the characteristic of the genuine faith)

22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (practicing lawlessness is a sign of false brethren, also in **1Jo 3**)

Our Lord's words are sometimes not easy to understand. But if we stay on the side of simple we can gather His main message, and we don't need to complicate it.

We need to let the Spirit speak to us, and listen to how He convicts us in our souls, taking the **context** of the passage into account.

We often want to assume loved ones in our lives are saved, because they said at some point they believed in Christ.

Well, I can personally tell you I have people in my own family that say they believe in Christ, but it seems like another Jesus **upon further discussion.**

They disagree with His words, having been deceived by religion and/or the world's system.

Some don't even think He's God in the flesh (Lord), but they say they believe in Him! Sound like "another Jesus" to me. **2Co 11:4**

It's not for us to judge them, but we are called to discern false brethren, as the Lord just said.

If a so-called believer is living a LIFESTYLE against God's commands, are we sure they were saved in the first place? Did they have genuine faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

As we will see, what the Bible says leads us to say "probably not".

I know at times I don't want to think about or consider that someone I love might not be saved.

But lifestyle reveals where the heart is, or where it's not, as we see throughout the scriptures.

For example, one way we recognize genuine believers is because they have a healthy fear/respect of God.

Let's look at our first example of how we are called to watch for false believers/messengers...

Rev 2:1-2 *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

Why is it we don't want to call out others who don't live a life after God?

Why aren't we willing to question the salvation of others if we see multiple signs of unbelief in their lifestyle?

We think we are attacking salvation by faith alone in Christ; but are we?!

I'm not talking about being spiritual policemen and judging others. And we should never get legalistic.

This is an issue of saving faith.

How about just being honest, with self and others?

The Word is blunt and honest about recognizing false believers, which includes those who say they believe but live a different way, even in an anti-Christ way.

Salvation is a gift received by grace through faith, and not by works (Joh 3:16, 5:24, Eph 2:8-9, Rom 5:15-17), and yet good works are a clear and certain sign of sincere faith in Christ (Eph 2:10, 1Pe 1:7); that someone truly did turn to Christ from the heart. This is the evidence of their "new nature". 2Co 5:17

A lifestyle with some degree of righteousness and love and obedience are all said to be signs of genuine faith, and as we will see this is the same throughout the whole Bible.

So, if those things aren't present in someone's life and they're totally living for themselves, that person who says they are a believer may not be.

As we see from the apostle John, people will be with us for a time, but then will leave the faith, and so they were "*not really of us.*" **1Jo 2:19**

Who are we to judge? We are not!

The point is we shouldn't have the wool pulled over our eyes, either. We should be discerning and be on guard for false believers that might pull our Christian family members away, as wolves devour sheep.

We can't be naïve, but must be wise as serpents, and yet as meek as doves.

Matt 10:14 *Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*

And we shouldn't fall into the trap of believing what we WANT to believe about someone, because it's more comforting to our own soul!

In fact, that's another form of partiality, if we willingly turn a blind eye to the signs of a false believer, just because we like them.

And in this case, **their eternal life is on the line.**

Let's see a sample of passages which we have visited recently, which discuss works of righteousness and love and obedience being the **evidence for true faith**, and a lack of those good works and righteousness being evidence of false faith.

Maybe this is why we are told to "*work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*", **Phil 2:12...**

... as the Spirit's been giving us, there are many who might say they believe but they don't; at least not the biblical way.

And it starts by looking in the mirror, and then at others also.

Deut 7:7-11 *"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation **with those who love Him and keep His commandments**; 10 but repays those*

who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. 11
"Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.

Now isn't God faithful to all believers? Yes He is, even when they need discipline from their loving Father.

But notice here the Lord is faithful to those who love Him and keep His commands, and hates those who hate Him.

What can we take from that?

Keeping His commands is a sign of genuine faith in the Lord.

We see the same thought pattern in the New Testament.

Acts 10:34-35 *Opening his mouth, Peter said:*

*"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation **the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.***

Why does Peter say that God welcomes those who fear Him and does what is right? Aren't all believers in Christ welcomed by God? YES!!

Is Peter illustrating that there is no difference between a genuine believer and one that does what is right? That they are synonymous? In fact, undeniably connected?

(this doesn't mean anyone who does what is "right" is a believer, there are many atheists that live good lives. This means that a genuine believer will be manifested in doing what is right, including a healthy fear of God, and if he does not, he may not be a genuine believer.)

Pretty simple, isn't it? It seems to be the plain way the scriptures speak about, and describe, believers.

Again, this doesn't change salvation at all. Jesus said "*whoever believes in Him will never perish, and has eternal life*"! **John 3:16**

But as we see in **Romans 10**, a person believes with the heart.

And genuine saving faith results in a changed heart, by the grace and power of God, and therefore a changed lifestyle of some kind.

In Acts 10, Peter is just calling out the evidence of saving faith.

"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit." **Mat 7:18**

Where else does Peter call out evidence of saving faith?

1 Peter 1:6-7 *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various*

trials, 7 so that **the proof of your faith**, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ

That's the NAS version. Here's the NIV:

1 Peter 1:6-7 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — **may be proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Let's turn to **1John**, and remember the title of our message: "What Genuine Faith Looks Like".

1 John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but **the one who does the will of God lives forever.***

I thought every believer lives forever. Is this a contradiction?

I thought we were saved by grace through faith! **Eph 2:8-9**

We are!

Or is it just a simple statement of truth: the one who does the will of God lives forever.

A simple true statement; the genuine believer will do the will of God!

Why is this inescapable?

The believer's heart is changed, he is a new creature, and he can't help but do the will of God in his life.

So, if someone is not doing the will of God at all in their lives, and we have to be careful because we don't know the entire lives of others, but they might not be a genuine believer.

They might not be saved because their faith was spurious, and the evidence reveals it.

And we are NOT talking about a works program. We're saying that the whole of the Bible tells us that doing the will of God is a natural result of saving faith. It's inescapable because of the new creature inside of the believer, who is Christ Himself. Col 1:27

Good works are a RESULT of genuine saving faith, not the cause of it. We are NOT to put the cart before the horse.

I'm just pointing out how seamlessly the Bible speaks about good works revealed in the lives of genuine believers.

Faith must come first, then the fruit comes. We cannot produce divine good fruit without the power of faith pulling us.

Faith in Christ gives us HIS power, and the ‘natural’ result of faith in Him is good fruit in our lives. So says the Word of God!

Remember this point from our series on “The Wonderful Results of Saving Faith, pt.4”?

Visible Results of Saving Faith: Characteristics such as fear of God, obedience, and love are products of true saving faith. It is seamless; from the same piece of cloth; it is the very fabric of faith.

Those divine good things are the proof of your faith, or the evidence of its genuineness.

1 John 2:18-19 *Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

Now we aren't to go on a witch-hunt here. This doesn't mean because someone left our local church that they aren't a true believer. If they left the faith as a whole, then they may not be saved. That's what the scriptures reveal to us throughout.

1 John 2:28-29 *Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. (here we see again, practicing righteousness is a sign of one who is born again)*

1 John 3:4-10 *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (the new nature cannot sin, and when we sin it is our old nature, as in Rom 7)*

*10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are **obvious**: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (bad fruit comes forth as evidence against them)*

Does that mean a person is saved because he practices righteousness and loves his brother? No, of course not!!

But it reveals to us the believer is a changed person, and these things are “obvious” signs, of one who has believed in his heart that God raised him from the dead. **Rom 10:9**

How does one know he is saved??

How do we know we had genuine saving faith?

Another evidence is the love of God in those who believe.

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.*

Love is the greatest evidence. The genuine believer will have some degree of love for his brothers.

Look again at 1Jo 3:7-8.

1 John 3:7-8 *Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; & the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.*

Barnes on 1Jo 3:7-8: “The man who does righteousness, or leads an upright life, is a righteous man, and no other one is. No

matter how any one may claim that he is justified by faith; no matter how he may conform to the external duties and rites of religion; no matter how zealous he may be for orthodoxy, or for the order of the church; no matter what visions and raptures he may have, or of what peace and joy in his soul he may boast; no matter how little he may fear death, or hope for heaven- unless he is in fact a righteous man, in the proper sense of the term, he cannot be a child of God.”

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Now, don't put the cart before the horse in your soul.

I don't think that what Mr. Barnes is saying.

Here's the point: **If Christ made you righteous at the moment of salvation, as in 2Co 5:21, then some fruit of His righteousness will come forth in your life.**

If this is you, and you are a new man, then you are compelled by the Spirit in you to live in that righteousness, at least to some degree, because that's who you are.

You, believer, have the life and power of God in you right now, and it is convicting to the point of practicing righteousness.

As a child of God, as a true believer, you have been given the power to love the unlovely. You are a supernatural creature, a new spiritual species. You have been changed at your core,

and have the Spirit of God inside of you. And righteous fruit in your life is proof of that genuine faith. 1Pe 1:7

That's what the righteous do; act in righteousness. They habitually do the right thing, according to the Word of God.

1 John 3:7-8 *Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; & the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.*

A lifestyle of uninterrupted, premeditated sin is a sign of unbelief. Notice it says one who “practices sin”. This lifestyle is a sign of a person belonging to the devil, according to the apostle John. 1Jo 3:8

This doesn't mean that true believers never sin. Of course they do and will, as they still have the old nature in their body influencing them also. See **Romans 7**

And when we do sin, we unfortunately side with Satan at that moment, in disobedience.

Barnes: “That all who commit sin, even true believers, so far as they are imperfect, in this respect resemble Satan, and are under his influence, since sin, just so far as it exists at all, makes us resemble him.”

For example, do you remember when Jesus said to Peter **“get behind me Satan”!**? **Mat 16:23, Mar 8:33**

Was Peter an unbeliever? Not as far as we can see. But he had adopted the wrong mindset at the time, and the Lord called him Satan because he was thinking like Satan. He put man's interests ahead of God's.

But again, **lifestyle** is being called out in **1Jo 3** as a sign of genuine faith.

1 Jo 3:10 *“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are **obvious**: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”*

Here is a test of true character. Not a true test of character, but a test of the TRUE character of an individual. 1Jo 3:10

In other words, this is a test of genuine faith, if one is born again or not, a new creature in Christ or not.

Otherwise, Jesus would say *“I never knew you”*.

Mat 7:23 *“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’*

What does the unbeliever do? PRACTICE lawlessness.

And what is lawlessness?

1Jo 3:4 *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*

1Jo 3:6 *No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins (habitually) has seen Him or knows Him.*

Notice how Jesus' and John's terms are matching. What is lawlessness? Sin. And the lawless person doesn't "know" Him, and Jesus will say I never "knew" you.

Let's just keep reading in context about the life of the genuine believer, and see further what it looks like.

1 John 3:11-24 *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. (sign of unbel Cain vs. bel Abel)*

13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (a genuine believer cannot have hatred in his heart. This is why if someone hates, or is a murderer, he must turn to Christ from the heart and be born again)

16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes

*his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 **We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him** 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.*

23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Now we are warned about false brethren; those who say they are with Christ, but are not.

We enter the realm of deception, and even people in self deception who believe they are saved but are fooling themselves.

1 John 4:1-6 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the*

*Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; (see **Rom 10:9-10**)*

3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. 4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 5:12 *He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*

We see signs that accompany saving faith; that accompany the one who has received the Son of God, Joh 1:12. If one who doesn't have these signs in their life, they are NOT called to get on a works program and make these signs happen; but instead they are called to EXAMINE THEIR FAITH, 2Co 13:5.

Genuine faith will result in these signs.

Only genuine faith in Christ leads to a new man, a supernaturally-given new nature, and THAT is what results in the good works we have seen in the life of the true believer.

Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith.

We should never become too comfortable; we should never think we have it all figured out. And we don't want to give a false sense of security to false brethren who say one thing and do another.

If you see a lack of righteousness or a lack of love in the lives of others who claim to believe in Christ, you don't want to enable them to continue in their life of self deception, do you???

In love, be willing to call a spade a spade. You may just save someone's life by helping them examine their faith.

A good illustration of the changed heart of a true believer is the tax collector was Zaccheus.

We've got to understand; tax collectors in biblical times were scum. They were greedy, and they were considered traitors.

There were certain Jews who became tax collectors for the Romans, to collect tax from their own people, for an oppressive foreign government.

Not only that, but the tax collectors could decide how much they would collect. If they collected more than the Romans required they could keep the extra.

He was a flagrant public sinner, but the very kind Jesus came to save.

Luke 19:1-10 *He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. 3 Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. 7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Notice Zaccheus's faith, and the resulting change in his heart.

First, in vs. 8, he called Jesus LORD. Here is a sign of the humility of genuine faith.

Second, after robbing the poor for many years, he volunteered to give half his possessions to the poor, and pay back 4 times as much to any person he defrauded. (he might have become poor himself after he did that, but HE DIDN'T CARE)

He loved the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He realized how much he was saved from and was now forever grateful. His heart was transformed by God.

The taker had become a giver. The extortioner had become a philanthropist.

But it wasn't so much that his heart had changed towards people. It was changed towards God first.

And now he WANTED to obey God, doing what was just and right.

The "obedience of faith": There is something in the heart of every newborn believer; a desire to obey Him, knowing He is Lord, and that his Lord has saved him.

Note: salvation did **not** come to Zaccheus **because** he gave his money away, but because he became a true son of Abraham, a genuine believer with the faith of Abraham, as seen in **Heb 11**.

And notice what Jesus said about him in vs. 9, *“And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”*

He was saved by faith, not by works, as Abraham was in **Genesis 15**.

And **the result** of his genuine faith was good works.

This harmonizes perfectly with Eph 2:8-10.

Eph 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Christ came to seek and save that which was lost.

And as we see in Zaccheus’s conversion, there was a necessary result of God’s saving work; it was a transformed person.

**When a soul is redeemed, Christ gives a new heart. (Eze 36:26)
And this is reflected by a new set of desires in the true believer: to obey God, to please Him, and to reflect His righteousness.**

If some type of change like this does not occur in a so-called new believer, then there is no reason to think genuine salvation has taken place.

However, if there is evidence such as in the life of Zaccheus, evidence of faith that desires to obey, then that is the sign of a true son of Abraham.

Heb 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

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