

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS WARNED

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EVANGELISTIC METHODS employed in evangelical Christianity over the last century and a half have given rise to a policy of equating salvation with a “profession of faith” in Christ. Many never doubt the eternal destiny of their souls because they followed the procedure prescribed from the pulpit or in a “gospel” tract. They have been told that to question one’s salvation is to question God. They have obediently followed steps 1, 2, 3, and 4, which supposedly adds up to salvation. Therefore, because they have followed the “plan,” they assume themselves to possess eternal life. However, I encourage every professor¹ of faith in Christ to “*give diligence* to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10).

Scripture provides ample cause for us to assert that there will be multitudes of professing Christians cast into hell at the Day of Judgment (Act 8:5-24; Gal 4:19-20; Heb 6:1-6; 10:23-31; 2Pe 2; Jude). The most profound warning to professors was issued by our Lord Himself and recorded in Matthew 7:21-23. He stated unequivocally that in that Day many would make their profession, would declare Him to be “Lord,” and even point to certain apparent spiritual achievements in an attempt to substantiate their claim to salvation. However, He will in turn command their damnation! How that ought to stir each individual who professes faith in Christ! Why will such a tragedy occur? The answer is contained in verse 21 and the conclusion of verse 23—they do not the will of God, but rather they “*work iniquity*,” even though professing allegiance to Christ. The phrase *work iniquity* means to perform against the Law, suggesting that one lives in utter disregard of God’s holy Law.

The picture is simply this: many who are confident of their relationship to Christ and make this profession with all boldness, will spend eternity under the wrath of God. All they have is a *profession*. The practice of their daily lives is a contradiction of true piety. They turn the grace of God into lasciviousness² by making “once saved always saved” a license for sin. There are multitudes who will readily admit that they are “backslidden,” but refuse to consider the possibility that they have never received the “grace of God that bringeth salvation” (Ti 2:11). I suggest that it is expedient for *all* who name Christ as Saviour to carefully examine themselves to see if they be in the faith (2Co 13:5).

Evidence of Saving Grace

The New Testament contains many portions of Scripture that are to be employed by the professing Christian in self-examination. However, for the sake of conciseness, only one passage will be appealed to at this time.

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. 4 ¶ Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. 5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. 6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1Jo 3:1-10)

¹ **professor** – one who says he believes in the Christian faith, but who may not have a new heart (Joh 3).

² **lasciviousness** –inclination to lust or sexual desires.

1 John 3:1-10 gives the most emphatic declaration of true Christian character found in Holy Writ. John's major contention is simply stated in this proposition: The child of God will *strive after holiness* and will in fact *maintain a pattern of righteousness*. This contention is based on three arguments developed in 1 John 3.

First, John refers to the believer's *keen anticipation of Christ's return*. He alludes to our relationship with God in the inner man. The world knows us not—that is, it does not recognize our true identity as the children of God, because our likeness to God is *spiritual* and not physical. However, John suggests that our present appearance is by no means permanent. Christ will return, and when He appears we shall appear with Him—conformed to His perfection [both] internally *and* externally (v 2). Every true believer has this hope within and longs to be perfect, even though he knows that perfection will not be realized until Christ returns. Therefore, it is this truth of grace that led John to declare with all confidence, “every man that hath this hope in him *purifieth* himself, even as he is pure” (v 3).

All who possess spiritual life are anxious for Christ to return in order that they might attain to perfection. Yet, till that happens, the people of God—each one of them—strive to purify themselves from all that is contrary to godliness. Spiritual complacency is foreign to the child of grace. He is hungry for experimental righteousness.³ Until his Lord returns he will watch against the uprising of dormant lusts and every thought that exalts itself against God.

Secondly, every true Christian will *practice righteousness* as a direct result of Christ's work upon the cross. John reminds us that the Son of God “was manifested to take away our sins” (v 5). The word translated “take away” means to bear, and is a direct reference to the vicarious⁴ death of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of His people. Romans chapter six teaches that God sent Christ not only to take away or bear the penalty of sin, but also to put away the strength of the sin nature: “Our old man was crucified with him...that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). Consequently, the true believer can never again be under the dominion of sin! He may fall victim to temptation, but he will never again be under the tyranny of the Adamic nature (2Co 5:17). The death of Christ assured that, upon conversion, the Christian will have a new master and cannot be held captive by sin again, even though he will not attain perfection this side of eternity. *Sanctification*,⁵ not perfection, is the experience of life for every believer!

Finally, we conclude our treatise with John's irrefutable statements in verses 7-10. Verse seven is a clear warning against man-issued confidence of salvation. “Let no man deceive you” ought to be a warning not only to those who profess salvation, but also to ministers who practice the deplorable habit of telling inquirers that they have been saved. Assurance of salvation is a matter for the *exclusive ministry of the Spirit of God*! Then we have the primary test of every profession: “He that *doeth* righteousness is righteous.” A righteous standing before God (i.e., justification) is always demonstrated through the practice of righteousness. Righteousness is simply obedience to the Law of God and commands of Christ. Those who are antinomian in their living (i.e., utter disdain and careless disregard for the moral Law of God) stand in an extremely precarious position before the Holy Judge of the universe. While good works cannot bring justification, they always *result from* justification and regeneration (Eph 2:10).

John dogmatically asserts that those who sin are *of Satan*. The word translated “commit” signifies doing or practicing (v 8). The apostle is here speaking of a man's *habitual* manner of living. Thus, the purpose of Christ's coming was to destroy the work of Satan, namely unrighteousness. Our Lord came to put away sin. For that reason alone the practice of righteousness, the obedience to the Law, and the absence of habitual sin must be essential to any assurance of salvation.

However, the crux of our argument comes in verse nine. John points to the new birth and says, “Whosoever is born of God does not commit [i.e., practice] sin.” Then he offers the following explanation: The seed of Christ (i.e., the life of God) resides in every regenerate man, which makes the *pursuit of sin impossible*,

³ **experimental righteousness** – godliness in one's own experience and conduct.

⁴ **vicarious** – achieved by one in the place of another; substitutionary.

⁵ **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God's Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 34) See Free Grace Broadcaster 215, *Sanctification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

because sin is the very antithesis of God. For one to profess faith in Christ and remain in the practice of sensual appeasement and ungodliness is the epitome⁶ of contradiction and, furthermore, indicates *spiritual deception*. True faith must produce good works (Jam 2).

The apostle concludes with the declaration that *holiness is the manifestation of true salvation*. “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God” (v 10), which is to say that if one continues in sin, even though he professes Christ as Saviour, he has not been born into the family of God. These verses 1-10 are the clearest description of a Christian found in Scripture—thus it behooves every professor to *examine* himself thereby!

Application

For those who have persevered thus far in reading, you have seen the uncompromising demand for holiness in each one who professes to be a child of God. Now I must inquire, how do you view yourself in light of 1 John chapter three? Remember, God’s demands do not bend for anyone! Without holiness “*no* man will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14)! My dear friend, does your heart pant after holiness, or do you comfortably condone your sin? Are you content with open disobedience, or do you mourn every passion that wars against the Spirit? No one can give you assurance, and you had best not rely on anything other than the undeniable witness of the Spirit within your heart—a witness that craves righteousness and hates even the garment spotted by the flesh. Oh do not draw back from self-examination; rather ask God to reveal the true state of your soul! ☞

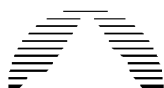
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⁶ **epitome** – summary or condensed account of anything.