

Can I be certain about my Eternal Destiny?

We've seen from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7 that at the final judgment there will be those who are self-deceived, i.e., they believe themselves to be his disciples but prove otherwise by their ongoing disregard for the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Notice from the text in verse 22 that these people who are self-deceived actually believe that their own external works of righteousness are what make them acceptable to God. "On that (judgment) day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?'" Like many of the first century scribes and Pharisees, these people seem to be very religious. But, Jesus' response to them proves that their external, religious works were not the genuine works of heart obedience that picture a true and lively faith. They were never children of the King and in the end they'll be shut out of the kingdom. Clearly, performing acts of kindness, mercy and service to others can be good things to do. And yet those acts, in and of themselves, do not automatically affirm that someone is a Christian. Christians will do acts of mercy, kindness and service but they do them—not to be right with God—but because they are already right with God in Jesus Christ.

We've seen the problem that these people have in verse 22. Let's look now at the punishment that will come to those who are self-deceived. "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" These people do not seem to know that they were not ready to meet Jesus Christ in the judgment. This passage clearly points to the reality that people can have a false assurance about their eternal destiny. Let's examine some of the ways in which people can be falsely assured of their standing before God. My prayer is that the teaching on false assurance will be a benefit to many.

There was a time when those who had publically professed their faith in Jesus Christ would sometimes struggle with the assurance of their salvation. Sadly, many today never give it a second thought. It's ironic that at a time when biblical literacy is at an all-time low, assurance of our salvation is at an all-time high. After all, didn't the minister say, "Once saved, always saved"? Although it's true that those who possess genuine salvation can never lose it, the key question becomes, "Is my salvation genuine?" Let's review some false teachings that will potentially bring about false assurance.

—Antinomianism: This is a word that simply means, "against law." This teaching says, "Since I'm forgiven in Christ, it doesn't matter how I live my life." This person falsely believes that salvation by grace means that there's no need to obey the Holy Scriptures. As a pattern of life, these people will generally live their lives for themselves and rarely, if ever, connect in membership to a local Church. They may occasionally attend church, but they'll decide for themselves whether or not it's necessary. This person says in effect, "I'm basically a good person. I go to work, pay my taxes and do the best I can. How could God require more of me than that?" The antinomian is convinced that if they say they believe in Jesus and if they've prayed a certain prayer, they should never doubt that their salvation is genuine.

—Legalism: The contrast to antinomianism is legalism. The legalist is the person who believes that they're right with God based on what they do. In other words, my assurance comes from being busy in religious and moral duties. External acts of obedience, mercy and kindness make me acceptable to God. I am saved, not by Jesus' sacrifice, but by what I do. Both of these teachings have a false view of the work of Christ, ultimately. Lastly,

—An orthodox view of salvation with no real desire for Jesus or the scriptures. Unlike the first two false views, this person has a biblical understanding of grace but not a true saving belief. Their correct biblical understanding has brought about no accompanying positive life change, by grace (see James 2:14-20). This person has knowledge and assent but no personal trust.

In contrast to the above three views, a genuine Christian is one who is seeking, by grace, to live a life of trusting God through his word. How may we detect false assurance? It will never produce a true love for God and a genuine desire to do his will but rather, it's only interested in immunity from punishment.

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