



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 13th March 2016

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Philippians 3:1-3

Subject: Chapter 3, Part 1 - What do you make of it?

Sitting across the table, three believers were discussing another new movement that has arisen in the Christian world called “The New Reformation”. It seems that if you’re the real deal then this is the one you attached yourself to otherwise you are a bit suspect. During the discussion one of the believers said, “Well what was wrong with the old one?”

Don’t you just get tired of it all! Why don’t they just stick with the Bible instead of becoming spiritual Indiana Jones looking for the missing link? The innumerable proliferation of “movements” tells me, and maybe you also, that there is a tremendous need for God’s people to be secure in the faith, and not to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. So how do you know what is the ‘real deal’? While its true that we can’t see the true heart of a man to know what’s really going inside, millions of people are being tossed to and fro with the latest and greatest doctrines. It reminds me of a story I heard of a young lad who told his mother he had given his life to the Lord. The mother told him that he was just brain washed, to which the young lad replied, ‘If you only knew what went on in my brain you would be glad that I am!’

But seriously, should we be concerned about this topic? Millions of people are under the illusion that they are going to heaven when they are not; surely it is an extremely important topic. While we should always take care of the log jammed in our own eye before looking at others, we don't need a degree in theology or from anywhere else to look at this topic, for all we need is what God has given us, His Word. Though we have looked at this before, it is good to be reminded not so that we sit back and feel smug, and holy, and happy but so that we may be of help to others who think because they do even religious things, that they are right with God. So let's begin and continue simply, so that as we go, we can check our own selves as to this important issue and make adjustments if needs be.

The New Testament

The excellent news of forgiveness and eternal life is the heart of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record the ministry of Christ, who came

"to seek and to save that which was lost" as we read in Luke 19:10.

The Book of Acts records the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world and what an exciting book. The epistles unfold the gospel's rich theological content. They also exhort believers to the practical holiness that the gospel demands. Then finally, Revelation records the ultimate triumph of the gospel in the consummation of human history.

Along with the presentation of the gospel, there is a closely related theme of critical concern. Having clearly set forth the truth of the gospel, the New Testament writers are concerned that people should not be deceived about the genuineness of their salvation.

The New Testament constantly challenges professing believers to examine themselves and make certain that their faith is genuine. This concern for the genuineness of salvation was first addressed in the New Testament by the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist. In a move that seems shocking in our day of "user-friendly" approaches to presenting the gospel, John boldly confronted the false believers of his day:

*"When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**'"* (Matthew 3:7-8).

In one of the most sobering passages in the Bible, Jesus warned,

"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. 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?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Later, Jesus reiterated that warning in a parable:

"Behold, the Sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears let him hear." (Matthew 13:3-9)

As He explained the parable in private to His disciples, its point became unmistakably clear which is, not all who respond to the gospel are truly saved:

"Hear then the parable of the Sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)

What do you make of that? Simple don't you think? You are with me so far?

Simon Magus is a classic example of a false believer. He heard Philip's proclamation of the gospel and seemed to believe:

"Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and

they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed." (Acts 8:9-13)

By all outward indications Simon's conversion was real. He made a profession of faith, publicly identified with Jesus Christ in baptism, and even

"continued on with Philip" (Acts 8:13)

Yet all was not as it seemed, as Simon's later encounter with Peter and John reveals:

*"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, **for your heart is not right before God.** Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."* (Acts 8:14-24)

Tragically, even Simon's request that Peter pray for him does not reveal a repentant heart. He was not seeking forgiveness (or he would have prayed for it himself), but merely relief from the temporal consequences of his sin. Early church tradition names Simon as the founder of what later became Gnosticism, and reports his blasphemous claim to deity (Harold O. J. Brown (1984) *Heresies*. N.Y. Garden City Doubleday.pp:50). What do you think of that? Serious, don't you think.

The writers of the epistles also warned people not to be deceived about the reality of their salvation. Paul exhorted the Corinthians,

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5; cross reference with 1 Corinthians 11:28).

He cautioned his beloved son in the faith Timothy about those

"holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).

Writing to another young pastor, Titus, Paul warned of people who

"profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16).

Jude wrote of

"ungodly persons [in the church] who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

The Lord Jesus Christ warned the apostate church at Laodicea,

"Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16).

James 1:2-12, along with James 2:1-13 and James 3:1-12, James 4:1-12, as well as 1 John 1:6 with 1 John 2:3-4, 1 John 3:3-10, 1 John 4:7-8 and 1 John 5:2 all list marks of genuine saving faith.

The New Trust

Unfortunately, despite the clear warnings of Scripture, many are deceived about their true spiritual condition. Although they think they are on the narrow road leading to heaven, they are actually on the broad road leading to hell. They base their false assurance of salvation on a number of proofs that in reality prove nothing. Lets look at some of these and the list is by no means extensive.

Firstly, many people rest their hope of salvation on a past event. They may have prayed to receive Christ as a child or even as an adult, gone forward in response to a call, signed a card, or made a commitment somewhere. Sometimes well-meaning people encourage such false hopes by offering what may be termed '*sylogistic assurance*'. They present the following seemingly plausible syllogism to those who pray to receive Christ.

Let me explain the word by using the following example. John 1:12 says that

"as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name"; you just received Christ; therefore you have become a child of God"

Unfortunately, that syllogism is only true if the minor premise, *"you just received Christ"*, is true and that is the very point in question. Remember, Jesus taught in the parable of the soils that a fruitless profession of faith proves nothing. Genuine faith will inevitably produce transformation in a person's life; false or dead faith will not (Cross reference with James 2:14-26). Scripture nowhere points people back to a conversion experience to validate their salvation; ***the validation is a changed life***. Simon Magus not only made a profession of faith, but also was baptized and continued with Philip for a time, yet, as his further conduct indicates, he was never saved (Acts 8:21-23).

A second proof of an unsaved faith is a ***superficially*** moral life. It is certainly true that the new nature breaks the pattern of constant sin (see for reference 1 John 3:9), and that all Christians should live lives of increasing moral purity (also see for reference Matthew 5:48 and 1 Peter 1:14-16). The reverse is *not* true, however; all who live outwardly moral lives are not redeemed. Many unbelievers are honest, kind, generous, and seek to live according to high ethical standards. Such behaviour is commendable, but says nothing about their spiritual state. It may impress 'man' who

"looks at the outward appearance," but will not deceive "the Lord" who "looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7; cross reference with Proverbs 21:2).

Jesus scathingly denounced the most outwardly moral religious leaders of His day:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:27-28).

Unsaved people may behave according to moral standards for many reasons. Some do so because they are afraid of God. Others feel peer pressure to conform to the standards and expectations of their peer group. Children often lead moral lives to please their parents and avoid punishment and most tragically of all, many people believe that living a moral life will get them into heaven.

Whatever the motivation, external morality saves no one, since in God's sight

"all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Isaiah 64:6);

and

"by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20; Cross reference with Galatians 2:16).

The example of the rich young ruler shows that living a moral life cannot save anyone. He claimed to have kept (at least outwardly) the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:20). Yet his question to Jesus,

"Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16),

reveals that he knew that he did not have eternal life. Stephen Charnock comments,

"The opinion of gaining eternal life by the outward observation of the law, will appear very unsatisfactory to an inquisitive conscience. This ruler affirmed, and certainly did confidently believe, that he had fulfilled the law (v. 20): 'All this have I observed from my youth;' yet he had not any full satisfaction in his own conscience; his heart mistake and started upon some sentiments in him, that something else was required, and what he had done might be too weak, too short to shoot heaven's lock for him. And to that purpose he comes to Christ, to receive instructions for the piecing up whatsoever was defective."

(Charnock S. (1979) *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Reprint) Grand Rapids. Baker. pp:2:212).

That fact was confirmed by his refusal to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:21-26).

Another common misconception is that a mere knowledge of the facts of the gospel is evidence of salvation. But even

"the demons also believe [the truth] , and shudder" (James 2:19).

Many people know the truth of the gospel, but remain unforgiven and under eternal condemnation. Liberal theologians often have detailed knowledge of the truths of Scripture, but criticize them and refuse to believe them.

The writer of Hebrews says of such people,

"The word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:2).

No one, of course, can be saved unless he knows the facts of the gospel - that God is holy, that he is a sinner for whom Christ died a substitutionary death on the cross, and that salvation is solely by grace through faith. But mere intellectual assent to those truths does not equal saving faith, which includes trust and commitment. To know the truth but refuse to act on it only results in greater condemnation (Luke 12:47-48), not salvation.

The religious and moral scribes and Pharisees, after observing Christ's life, hearing Him speak, and seeing His miracles, concluded that Jesus

"casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24).

Since they had wilfully refused to believe the truth, Jesus, concerning them, declared,

"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31-32).

The scribes and Pharisees heard the truth, yet they rejected it and were eternally damned. Like the scribes and Pharisees, Judas saw Jesus' miracles and heard His preaching. Still, in spite of the three years in His presence, he too rejected the truth, betrayed Jesus, and is lost forever.

The writer of Hebrews also warned of apostate false believers:

"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Nor is religious activity proof of salvation. Many who are on the broad road leading to hell faithfully attend church, are baptized, take communion, and participate in the other rituals of their church.

"Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power"
(2 Timothy 3:5).

They are tragically deceived into thinking that their religious activity proves they are saved. They are like the apostates in Israel, of whom God declared,

"This people draw near with their words and honour Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13; cross reference with Isaiah 58:1-4).

The foolish virgins in Jesus' parable represent such people. Although in appearance they were no different from the wise virgins (who represent the redeemed), they actually represent unregenerate people, who will not be ready for Christ's return (Matthew 25:1-13). Ananias and Sapphira appeared to be no different from the other members of the Jerusalem church, until their greed and hypocrisy were unmasked (Acts 5:1-11). The Lord Jesus Christ declared to the church at Sardis,

"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead"
(Revelation 3:1 NIV).

An external form of religion without the inward reality of salvation will result in eternal damnation.

The final point that I am bringing before this morning, which is not proof of salvation is service in the name of Christ. It is a sobering reality that many who preach the gospel are not saved. Even Judas, the son of perdition (John 6:70-71; John 17:12), preached the gospel (Matthew 10:4-7).

"Many [such people] will say to [Jesus] 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?' And then [He] will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

In Philippians 3:1-3 Paul adds to the biblical teaching on this issue of distinguishing between genuine and false faith, both by implication and explicitly. He presents five qualities of true believers: they rejoice in the Lord, exercise discernment, worship in the Spirit, glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. These are the truths that we will be exploring next time. *ἄμην!*

