**Can I Know that My Faith is Genuine?**

In this series of articles we’re following the teaching of the apostle Paul, primarily from Romans 6, and we’re seeking to answer the question, “Does God’s free grace in Jesus Christ given for sinners make obedience to the scriptures optional?” Earlier in Romans, Paul writes that the law brings knowledge of sin (3:20). Beginning in 3:21, he begins expounding the great truth that Christians are those who have been justified (declared righteous) by God’s free grace alone. Because of our justification in Jesus Christ, Christians have a new standing or position in the sight of God. Christ’s righteous life is imputed (or credited) to us and his sacrificial death paid for our sins past, present and future. That’s the gospel! Christians now have:

—a new Identity: in Jesus Christ

In chapter 5 Paul begins contrasting Adam—the one who is responsible for sin and death coming into the world—with Jesus (the second Adam) who brings righteousness and the reign of grace. In 5:20 Paul teaches us that when the Mosaic Law was given (on tablets of stone) sin increased in proportion to the written law. But this truth is not the end of the story. God has provided super abundant grace. Paul explains: “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

In chapter 6 Paul writes that mankind, apart from Jesus, is “enslaved to sin” (6:6). And yet, in Christ, Christians have been freed from slavery to sin, i.e., our old master. Christians now have:

—a new Master: We who are united to Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (6:4-5), now have a new Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of Christ, then, the lives of genuine Christians must, necessarily, change for the good. We’re those who’re raised in Christ to “walk in newness of life.” (6:4) Even though our salvation rests on grace, i.e., the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, Paul is clearly teaching that grace does not make obedience to the scriptures optional.

It’s true that Christians are imperfect people and positive change rarely comes as quickly as we hope. Struggle with sin is a daily reality in the life of every Christian. And yet, by God’s grace, our lives have changed and are positively changing. This raises the issue of hypocrisy as well as false assurance. Sadly, many who claim to be Christians and even sometimes attend a local church will often live lives that are not much different from non-believers. In our world today we will often see this exhibited by some in the political realm. When politicians and other leaders claim Christ, while regularly deceiving and playing fast and loose with the facts of any situation, their hypocrisy can bring shame on the name of Jesus Christ and his true Church. This being true, how can someone know that they have a genuine, saving faith? Is it enough to say the words, “I believe in Jesus” and yet there’s no desire for Jesus, His truth and His church?

According to the apostle Paul, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Salvation means that, by grace, we’re trusting fully in Jesus, continuing to turn from sin daily while also seeking to obey the commands of scripture. Theologians have identified, from scripture, three distinct truths that will help to determine if our faith in Jesus is genuine. The first is:

—knowledge: It’s a general biblical truth that we need to know what the Bible says about our sin and what Jesus Christ has accomplished for the sins of his people. In Acts 4:12, speaking of Jesus, we read, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” The second element of a genuine faith is:

—assent: We not only need to know what the Bible says about Jesus and what he’s done for sinners we must believe that it’s true. At this point I would give a warning. It’s not enough just to say we believe intellectually. Listen to these words from James 2:19: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” The third element is:

—trust: It’s only when we genuinely trust in Jesus, inclusive of seeking obedience to the scriptures (John 14:15), that we can have assurance of salvation. James writes, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Jesus is the Lord and Master of a Christian’s life and genuine Christians will seek, by grace, to obey their Master.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.