

## Is It Wrong to Question A Person's Profession of Faith?

A profession of faith is an act of openly declaring or publicly claiming a belief or faith. A Christian profession is when someone claims to have trusted Jesus Christ. Such a person says that he is a Christian and that he has believed in Christ at some point in time. It is a clear Scriptural principle that not everyone who **professes** Christ actually **possesses** Christ. The person who “has the Son” (1 John 5:12) is the person who truly possesses Christ and has eternal life. Just saying that you have believed on Christ does not make it a reality. Receiving Christ by faith (John 1:12) is a spiritual transaction that must take place in the heart.

Once this transaction is made in the heart, and the person has genuinely received Christ as Saviour, he has eternal life and he will never perish (John 10:27-30). Nothing said in this paper is meant to question the Biblical doctrine of eternal security, that a true believer is safe and secure in Christ forever.<sup>1</sup> The issue being dealt with here is that not everyone who claims to be a believer in Christ is a genuine believer.

Today in evangelical, dispensational circles, there are men who call themselves “free grace teachers.” Typically, such teachers never want to question someone's claim that he is a true believer. Their thinking is along these lines: *Having given a mere profession of faith, a person could then live however he pleases, and no one should question his profession or question the genuineness of his faith.*

One nationally known free grace teacher said it this way:

If someone tells us that they have believed on Christ, we don't run around holding their salvation hostage. We don't say, “Well, I don't see enough fruit in your life to prove that you really received Christ.”

After making this statement, this teacher added, “This is the free grace position.” The implication from this statement is that we are never to question a person's profession of faith based on how this person lives (his character and conduct, his fruit or lack of fruit). But if the person is not truly saved, which is certainly a possibility, are we really helping this person by allowing him to think that all is well with his soul? Not everyone who claims to be saved is really saved. Not everyone who “names the name of Christ” (2 Timothy 2:19) is really a true Christian! Not everyone who says he is born again is truly born again! There are tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:25); there are the false among the true; there was a Judas among the twelve disciples. We cannot see a person's faith and we cannot know a person's heart. We can only observe the way people live, hear the words they speak and witness the deeds that they perform.

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<sup>1</sup>See the following documents on eternal security:  
<http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/salvatio/security.htm> and  
<http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/salvatio/eshappen.pdf>

C. I. Scofield wrote a chapter on this very subject in his classic work, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. His chapter is entitled, “Believers and Professors.” He introduces it as follows:

Ever since God has had a people separated to Himself they have been sorely troubled by the presence among them of those who professed to be, but were not, of them. And this will continue until “the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity...Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:41-43). Scripture plainly tells us of this mingling of tares and wheat—of mere professors among true believers, yet misguided students have frequently applied to the children of God the warnings and exhortations meant only for the self-deceived or hypocritical. [Scofield’s last chapter, opening paragraphs].

Is it possible for a person to make a profession of faith that is not genuine and that does not last? Consider the following comments by fundamentalist writer David Cloud:

Many people have been saved at a church “altar,” but I am reminded of the countless, countless false professions that have been made at Bible Belt altars--hasty, emotional, ignorant, non-repentant decisions, decisions that didn’t last two weeks, let alone a lifetime. I know about this. I grew up in a Baptist church in the Bible Belt. All of the kids that I grew up with made professions of faith at an altar, but I don’t know of even one person that actually got saved then among the Baptist young people I grew up with, if there is such a thing as biblical evidence. I have known of the same thing in a massive number of churches. I have personally communicated with hundreds of people on this subject over the years.

I personally witnessed hundreds of false professions produced by this program at Highland Park Baptist Church in the 1970s. I worked in the bus ministry and in the chapel ministry and pastored one of their chapels. There were 63,000 baptisms at Highland Park during Dr. Lee Roberson’s 40-year pastorate (James Wigton, *Lee Roberson: Always about His Father’s Business*, p. 158). (The number of professions was vastly larger.) If 63,000 people were truly saved during those years, the moral climate of that part of the country would have been dramatically changed, but it wasn’t. In fact, the culture of Chattanooga and the surrounding area grew dramatically more wicked over the decades of the church’s ministry. As for the area of Highland Park itself, it deteriorated shockingly. “A fashionable, up-scale area of the city when Lee Roberson arrived in 1942, by the time he retired it had digressed into a typical ghetto-type area--with drugs, prostitution, and crime” (Wigton, p. 303). Yet a huge number of people in Highland Park had professed Christ and been baptized at the church. —from an email sent by David Cloud on November 28, 2019 entitled, “A Further Conversation About Quick Prayerism.”

The questions we want to answer in this paper are as follows: Did the Lord Jesus ever question a person’s profession of faith? Was the Apostle Paul ever suspicious of a mere profession? What did James think of a person who claimed to have faith but had no works? Did the Apostle John consider a person to be saved as long as he made a profession?

## John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus

### Matthew 3:7-12

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 12 Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

These Jews professed to be the children of Abraham and they believed such an heritage automatically entitled them to spiritual blessings from God (v. 9). Did John the Baptist put much credence in their profession (v. 9)? Did John the Baptist expect true repentance to be accompanied by fruits (v. 8)? What would happen to those not bringing forth good fruit (v. 10)? If John the Baptist warned fruitless people of the spiritual danger they were in, should not we do the same today?

### Matthew 7:15-20

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

How can we know the difference between the good and the corrupt? What does good fruit indicate? What does evil fruit indicate? Does fruit indicate anything about the tree? Is it wrong to be a fruit inspector if our Lord told us that such false prophets are known by their fruits?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Free grace teachers try to get around the obvious force of these verses by saying that the bad fruit that comes forth is not the saved person's wicked works, but it only refers to the false teacher's wicked words (his wicked false teaching). But then they even contradict this by teaching that total apostates are saved, even those who abandon Christ and teach against Christianity. Shouldn't teaching against Christianity be considered false doctrine?

**Matthew 7:21-23**

21 Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.

These people called Jesus Lord and claimed to do many wonderful works in His name. Did the Lord Jesus question their profession? Were these people saved?

**Matthew 7:24-27**

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. 26 And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

How did the Lord teach us to tell the difference between the wise man and the foolish man? Did it have anything to do with the person's obedience to God's Word?

**John 8:39**

They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

These Jews professed that Abraham was their father. Did the Lord Jesus believe their profession or did He question it? Compare also John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil."

**John 10:26-27**

But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me

Did the Lord indicate how we can identify whether a person is a true sheep? If someone does not follow the Lord Jesus, would this be a reason to question whether this person is really one of His sheep?

## The Apostle Paul

### **2 Timothy 2:19**

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

A “seal” is a mark of ownership. The Lord knows those who are His (those who belong to Him). There are many today who name the name of Christ. There are many who call themselves Christians. Paul did not assume that everyone who named the name of Christ was a truly saved individual. Along with the inner seal (which we cannot see) there is the outward evidence: “Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” Paul did not give comfort to those who continued in a wicked lifestyle. If the message of their lips is contradicted by the message of their life, which message are we to believe? Remember the proverb that a person’s actions speak louder than his words.

### **Titus 1:16**

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Here are people who professed that they knew God. “We know the Lord as our personal Saviour!” Did Paul believe their profession or did he question it? With their lips these people said, “We know God,” but the message of their life was different. By their works they denied God and said, “We don’t know God at all.” Paul believed the message of their life over the message of their lips.

## James the Brother of the Lord

### James 2:14-26

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Is there a difference between a man **saying** that he has faith (verses 14) and a man **showing** that he has faith (verse 18)? Did James believe the profession of the person who claimed to have faith or did he expect such a person to show that his faith was real?

While free grace teachers insist that a true believer can have a dead, lifeless and unproductive faith, this interpretation is contrary to what sound dispensational teachers have long taught, as illustrated by the following:

While we are justified in the sight of God by faith alone, a real faith must be evidenced by works.... There must be life-works, or else there is no life....When people are saved, ought they not to live as such? Ought not the new life to come out in fruits? It must come out if it be in; and if it does not come out, it is not there....It is very interesting and instructive to compare the teaching of Paul and James—two divinely inspired apostles—on the subject of “works.” Paul utterly repudiates law-works. James jealously insists upon life-works. If this fact be seized, all difficulty vanishes; and the divine harmony is clearly seen. —C.H.Mackintosh, *The Mackintosh Treasury*, “Life-Works” (pp. 660-662 in the one volume edition).

Empty profession is of no profit. He who speaks of faith in Christ is responsible to manifest it by his renewed life. In James 2 we are taught that we are justified before men by works, works that are the fruit of a living faith, which is manifest to all....If we believe God we will yield obedience to His Word, and so our faith will be manifested. —H.A.Ironside, *The Continual Burnt Offering*, see under December 7.

Faith merely professed is a dead thing, as a body would be dead if separated from the spirit (v. 26)...”Show me thy faith without thy works.” *Exhibit or let me see, not prove to me.* To show faith to man, works of some kind are necessary. We are justified in the sight of God when He sees our faith (which He alone can see). We are

justified in the sight of man when he sees our good works—fruits of faith.—*The Pilgrim Bible* with E. Schuyler English as Editor-in-Chief, see notes under James 2.

Several of these Scriptures [Scriptures which seem to indicate that a person can lose his salvation] bear on the important fact that Christian profession is justified by its fruits. Salvation which is of God will, under normal conditions, prove itself to be such by its own fruits (1 John 3:10; John 8:31; 15:6; 2 Pet. 1:10; James 2:14-26; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Heb. 3:6,14). —Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p.188 (his chapter on “Security”).

Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works. —Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* note under James 2:24.

James teaches that ‘Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone’; it is always attended by good works....A man may hear the truth and even say that he believes, but unless the fruits of living faith are evident in his life, he is not saved at all....Now if I say I have faith, but my life does not correspond to that which I profess, can the faith that I say I have save me? The answer is an emphatic ‘No.’ For a faith that produces no works cannot save anyone. There is no profit in a man claiming to possess something which he actually does not have....True faith necessarily results in fruit after its kind....The work of faith in a true believer will be indicated and proved by good works —Lehman Strauss (Bible Conference Speaker), *James, Your Brother—Studies in the Epistle of James*, pages 103,104,105,110.

James insists that a living faith will authenticate itself in the production of works. There is no antagonism between faith and works. They are not two totally distinct concepts, but rather two inseparable elements in salvation....James demands that the man who already claims to stand in right relationship with God through faith must by a life of good works demonstrate that he has become a new creature in Christ....In this passage [James 2] James insists that a genuine faith must prove itself by its production of works....A saving faith manifests itself in the production of works....Christian faith must manifest its existence in active obedience to God’s Word—D. Edmond Hiebert [noted dispensational commentator], *The Epistle of James—Tests of a Living Faith*, see Chapter 5.

James’ major point is that true faith will express itself in our doing of good works....James distinguishes between true or living faith and dead faith. The former is possessed and the latter is merely professed....What use or profit is there in saying I have faith if there is no corresponding external evidence of that alleged faith? The imaginary person lays claim to be a believer, and may even think he is one, but he gives no evidence of it in his life....Real inner faith wears the outward adornment of works acceptable to God—works undertaken, not in order to become a Christian but because one is a Christian....Genuine faith results in obedience and good works....Good works are the necessary product of genuine faith—Robert P. Lightner, *Solid Stepping Stones For the Christian Journey* (Studies in James), pages 34-38.

A truly genuine faith in God will produce a changed life....a barren faith is really no faith at all....A claim to possess faith is useless if no indications of life transformation are flowing from it....What James was contrasting was true faith, which inevitably produces action because it is alive, versus a mere claim to faith, which is profession only and has no life-changing power—Homer A. Kent, *Faith That Works—Studies in the Epistle of James*, pages 99-110.

Works are the outward proof of the reality of our faith. They give outward expression to what would otherwise be invisible. James insists that a faith that does not result in good works cannot save...James is describing the man who has nothing but a profession of faith. He *says* he has faith, but there is nothing about his life that indicates it—William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 2228.

## The Apostle John

### 1 John 2:4

He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

What is the message of this person's lips? Does he claim to know God? What is the message of this person's life? This disobedient person is a liar. When he professed to know God, it was a lie. In reality, he did not know the Lord at all.

### 1 John 2:9-11

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. 10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. 11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

If a person professes to be in the light, should we always believe that profession? If a person hates his brother, what does this tell us about his claim that he was in the light?

### 1 John 3:14-15

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Consider a person who claims to be a Christian. He names the name of Christ and says that he is a believer. However, he shows no interest in being with God's people. When the saints meet together on the Lord's Day, he is not among them. He would rather watch football games on Sunday. He shows no desire to fellowship with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. He also does nothing to meet the needs of fellow Christians. He cared little about ministering to their needs. Do we have the right to question this man's profession of faith? He claims to be saved but certainly does not show any signs of having spiritual life. Is it wrong to doubt his salvation?



## A Word of Caution

God has no problem discerning between the true and the false, between a mere professor and a true believer. God knows the hearts of all men. Judas may have fooled the other eleven disciples, but he did not fool the Lord. We do not know the heart and we cannot see whether a person has faith in Christ or not, apart from it's manifestation in life-works. There is not a great outward difference between a carnal Christian and a professing believer who has never truly passed from death unto life. Both are walking according to the flesh, and living as unregenerate men (1 Cor. 3:3). Thankfully, some believers are so devoted to the Saviour and so attached to the Vine that they have made their calling and election sure, and provide daily evidence that they belong to the Son of God. They remind us continually of their vibrant relationship with the Lord. Sadly, there are other professing believers who live in such a way that we really wonder if they have personally experienced the life-changing grace of God. But God is the Judge, not us. God has never given us the ability to distinguish infallibly between the true believer and the false professor. Only God knows for sure them that are His. Our responsibility is to exhort and encourage every believer to love and good works, and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25), and to point every professing believer to the Lord.

Free grace men are greatly concerned lest we should cause a believer to doubt his salvation by insisting that a believer must inevitably manifest, to varying degrees, the lovely virtues of the Lord Jesus and be fruitful unto every good work. However, consider the greater danger of giving false assurance to a person who is a mere professor and not really saved. If the person is unsaved, and we never question his profession or never challenge him as to whether he is a true believer, then we are assuring him that everything is all right when in reality he is bound for hell. What a colossal mistake to deal with a person in such a way!

Consider the other possibility. Suppose the person is a carnal believer who shows very little evidence of salvation. Out of concern for his soul, we share with this person that we are not sure he is really saved due to the fact that he rarely shows his faith by life-works. In other words, since he is living like a child of the devil, we wonder if perhaps he might really be a child of the devil, and we challenge him along these lines. Since this carnal one is really saved, we are not damaging his eternal destiny. If nothing else, we are encouraging him to walk worthy of his profession. "Dear Friend, if you are really a child of God, live like one and live in such a way that no one will ever doubt your salvation. Make your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16)."

Why do free grace men teach that no one is ever permitted to question a person's salvation or to doubt their profession? If a true believer does not have assurance of salvation, that is a problem. We need to help him understand what God's Word teaches about assurance. But this problem is not worthy to be compared with the problem of an unsaved professing believer who is given false assurance that he has eternal life. His eternal soul is in great danger. God help us.

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