

THREE SEARCHING QUESTIONS

by Don Former

It is delightful to soar with Newton in that sweet song of assurance:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
'Twas blind, but now I see!

But every soberminded person realizes that multitudes have sung those lines with joy upon the earth, only to wake up in hell at last. Realizing that fact, and knowing the sin and deceitfulness of my own heart, I have often been compelled to sing with Newton the bass notes of another hymn which we wrote:

'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord, or no,
Am I His, or am I not?

We know that the vast majority of religious people in this world are lost. Many profess faith in Christ, but few possess faith. (Maa. 7:13-14, 21-23; 22:14; Luke 13:23-24). Most have been deceived with human religion. They walk in that broad way which leads to destruction. And I am equally certain that many who profess and practice the same things I profess and practice are yet unconverted. They are conservative and orthodox, but they have missed Christ. They embrace the true doctrine of Christ, but not Christ himself. Their religious devotion is but a form of godliness, without the power of life. Mere orthodoxy is not Christianity! And I have seen many whom I esteemed stronger, wiser, more zealous, more devoted, and more useful than myself forsake Christ and his gospel altogether. They had assurance; but it was a false assurance. They had peace; but it was a false peace. *Mere religious devotion and outward righteousness fit not Christianity!*

How then can anyone have real assurance that he is savingly united with Christ? It is needful for all who profess faith in Christ to examine themselves by the Word of God, honestly and sincerely asking God to show them whether they are in the way of life and eternal bliss or in the way of death and eternal destruction (Ps. 139:23-24; II Cor. 13:5). We must prove ourselves by Holy Scripture and make our calling and election sure. I cannot give you a certain formula by which assurance may be gained. But I know this: There are three graces created in the heart of every true believer by God the Holy Spirit. If you and I possess these three graces, if they are really and truly created in us by the power and grace of God, we are born of God. If these three graces do not live in our hearts, we are yet under the wrath of God.

The apostle Paul said, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (I Cor. 13:13). Here are three questions by which you and I must examine ourselves before God. May God give us grace to do so, lest we miss Christ and perish.

DO I HAVE THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT?

True faith is the gift of God. It is not merely a logical or emotional decision, though it is both logical and emotional. It is much more. Saving faith is created in the heart by the power of God the Holy Spirit. It is the gift of almighty grace. We "believe according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19). We are united to Christ "through faith of the operation of God" (Col. 2:12). God alone can create faith in the heart of a sinner. God alone gives men faith. And he does it through the preaching of the gospel, by which Christ is revealed in the heart (Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; I Pet.)

True saving faith is concerned with one thing: the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe on the Son of God? That is the one issue which is of eternal importance. "What think ye of Christ?" Nothing else really matters. True faith is taking God at his Word. It is believing what God says about his Son. It is submitting to the revelation of God in the Scriptures. It is trusting, believing, receiving Christ as He is revealed. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God ... He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:1, 13).

But saving faith is much more than mental assent to the truth of divine revelation, "Of all the poison which at this day is diffused in the minds of men, corrupting them from the mystery of the gospel, there is no part that is more pernicious than this one perverse imagination, that to believe in Christ is nothing at all but to believe the doctrine of the gospel!" (John Owen). Saving faith is a work of the heart (Rom. 10:9-10). True faith is the willful, deliberate, voluntary confidence of my heart in the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is trusting the merits of his blood and righteousness as my only grounds of acceptance before God. And it involves the bowing and submission of my heart to Him as my Lord (Luke 14:23-33).

And true faith, the faith of God's elect, is persevering faith (Heb. 3:6, 14). That is to say, if a person truly believes on Christ he will continue to believe on Christ. Faith is not an event in the believer's life. It is the believer's continual way of life, "The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). The true believer never ceases to live by faith in Christ. God's elect begin in faith, live in faith, and die in faith (Heb. 11:13). True faith never quits. It is not the man who begins the race who wins the prize, but the one who finishes the race.

DO I HAVE THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL?

Where there is true faith in the heart there is also the confident hope of the gospel. Paul says that a man is saved who cannot be moved away from the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:23). Faith unites us to Christ. Faith brings us all the blessings of grace and salvation in Christ. But hope anchors my soul in the stormy sea of life. Hope inspires my courage in the midst of trouble. And hope causes me to persevere, looking beyond the things of time to eternity (Lam. 3:21-26; Rom. 8:24-25; II Cor. 4:16-18).

For what do I hope? I hope to be accepted before God. I hope to be fully pardoned of all sin and completely acquitted of all charges before God's holy throne. I hope to inherit all the glory and bliss of Immanuel's land. I hope to be found in Christ at last, not having my own righteousness, which is after the law, but the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Christ. What is the basis, or foundation, of my hope? For me that is an easy question to answer. All my hope before God for all things rests entirely and alone upon the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, my all-sufficient substitute! I have absolutely no confidence in the flesh, in anything I have experienced, in anything I have felt, or in anything I have done. My soul's hope is Christ alone!

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

"His oath, His covenant, and His blood
Support me in the whelming flood:
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

But there is another question which I must answer. There is one other thing which I must have if I am truly born of God. And this is the most telling of the three. This question searches deeper and tells more than either of the other two.

DO I HAVE THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN MY HEART?

Is my heart ruled, governed, and motivated by the love of Christ? Do I have within me the kind of love that Christ produces in his people? Love is absolutely essential to true godliness, Paul tells us that if we have all other things, and have not love, they shall profit us nothing. The absence of love is fatal. As you read I Corinthians 13, do not think to yourself, "Love is a very great virtue, most commendable and useful, it would be a great thing if I could obtain it." Oh, no! We must have it! The Holy Spirit tells us that this love is something which characterizes all who are born of God. We must have it, or else we are not born of God. If I do not have this love, no matter what else I may have, no matter what else I may do, if I do not have the love of Christ in my heart, I am a lost man. And the same is true of you. C. H. Spurgeon said, "This love is the common, everyday livery of the people of God. It is not the prerogative of a few. It is the possession of all. It is put before you not only as a thing greatly desirable, but absolutely needful; for if you excelled in every spiritual gift, yet if you had not this, all the rest would profit you nothing whatsoever. You must attain it, or you cannot enter into eternal life." This love is not a condition to be met in order to get salvation. But it is the sure result of God's saving grace in Christ.

Christian love is greater than all other spiritual gifts and graces. Without love, all other gifts and graces are meaningless and useless (I Cor. 13: 1-3). This one thing, love, is the fulfilling of the law of God (Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10). And love is the one sure mark and evidence of a saving union with the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Where this love is absent grace is absent. No man is born of God who does not have the love of Christ implanted in his heart as a ruling principle of life (I John 2:9-11; 3:14, 23; 4:7, 8, 16, 20; 5:1).

The love of Christ, or the absence of it, is a thing easily identifiable. This is not some profound, mysterious point of theology. It is not sweet-sounding, but useless, emotion. The love of Christ is a gift of divine grace that is clearly demonstrated in the lives of God's elect "(I Cor. 13:4-7). This love causes a person to be kind, patient, content, gentle, even tempered, humble, self-denying, generous, honest, truthful, forbearing, and forgiving toward others, both in the church and out of it.

Love is preferable to all other gifts and greater than all other graces, because love is the only thing that will last forever (I Cor. 13:8-13). All other gifts will come to an end. All other graces will cease. But love will go on in heaven. Faith will be no more, when we see him in whom we have believed. Hope will be no more, when we have that for which we have hoped. But love will continue and come to perfection when we enter heaven. Love is the only thing we have in this world which we can carry into the world to come. Heaven is a world of love, perfect, unceasing, glorious, Christ-like love. *No one will enter that city of peace and world of love except those who have the love of Christ in their hearts.*

In the light of these three searching questions, let everyone honestly and earnestly examine his own self before God: Do I have the faith of God's elect? Do I have the hope of the gospel? Do I have the love of Christ in my heart? "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

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