

Lecture 11: Genuine Faith

“Today I am going to give you the most important test in your life,” Professor Grimes announced.

The class let out a collective groan. “Again?” Brad asked. “But, seriously, we just took a test two classes ago! We’ve only had like one lecture since then. There’s no way it’s time for another test.”

Iris spoke up. “I didn’t see anything about a test on the syllabus.”

Professor Grimes nodded. “All of that is very true. However, there are many kind of tests in life and very few of them involve a pen and some paper. For example, each day of your life your character is tested. Your moral values are tested. Your punctuality is tested. Your willingness to get the job done is tested. Despite what you may think, life is full of tests – and how you do on them determines the sort of life you have, and where you will end up when your life is over.

“The test I am going to give you today is not a formal test. I’m not going to be handing out exams and I’m not going to give out any grades. But that does not make this test any less important. If you fail this test and do nothing to remedy that situation, you will find yourself in a great deal of trouble – because God is the one who is going to be grading you.”

Wally spoke up. “How did you get God to start grading your exams?”

Professor Grimes sighed. “God is *always* grading you, Wally. As I explained in our second lecture, He watches everything you say and He knows everything you do. The day will come when you will have to stand before God and give an account of what you have said and what you have done. If your sins are covered by the blood of Christ then you will be rewarded for your acts of service. However, if you died without ever believing in Christ then God will hold you accountable for all the wicked acts that you have ever done. He will cast you into the Lake of Fire, where you will be tormented for all of eternity.”

Brad spoke up. “I thought people went to Hell when they died. The unsaved, I mean.”

“Didn’t you listen to anything I said when we talked about the afterlife? It’s no wonder you’re failing this class! As I explained in that rather lengthy lecture, Hell is just a holding place where the wicked await their final judgment. Revelation 20 tells us that after Satan launches his final attack against God (which is something we’ll cover in our last lesson), the Lord will remove everyone from Hell so they can stand before Him and be judged. At that time they will be condemned for all the evil they have done, and God will cast them into a place the Bible calls the Lake of Fire. Technically speaking, it isn’t accurate to talk about people spending eternity in Hell. Hell is actually a holding cell, where people await their final judgment – which, I assure you, will not be any more tolerable than Hell itself.”

Iris spoke up. “So what is this test you’re going to give us?”

“It is a test of faith,” the professor replied. “In Matthew 7:14 Jesus said that the road to salvation was narrow and few people would find it. In Matthew 7:22-23 He added that *many* people would think they were saved,

but in reality they weren't actually saved at all. When the Day of Judgment comes there will be many people who will tell Jesus that they were His servants, but Jesus will turn them away and say that He never knew them.

"In other words, the world is full of people who think that they are Christians *but who are actually lost*. This is a very serious situation, because it means that billions of people think they are on the road to Heaven when they are actually on the road to Hell. Now, if you already *know* that you are lost and on the road to Hell then you might be motivated to do something about it. But if you think you're going to Heaven when you're really not, then you have a serious problem. It's very, very difficult to get those people to seriously consider the fact that they are lost. Their false assurance inoculates them against the gospel."

Brad spoke up. "Well, I know for sure that *I'm* saved. I still remember the wonderful feeling I had when I went up to the altar and got saved. I'll never forget that moment."

"And you are willing to base your entire eternity on a *feeling*?" Professor Grimes

asked. "It may surprise you to know that Mormons also claim that when they converted to Mormonism they had a wonderful, life-changing feeling. Catholics say exactly the same thing. There are even atheists who had a good feeling about abandoning Christianity and rejecting all belief in God. All a good feeling means is that *you felt good about that decision*. It says absolutely nothing about whether that decision was right or wrong. There are people in this world who do terrible, horrific things and yet feel very good about it."

Iris spoke up. "But that's how I've always been told to verify my salvation. My pastor said to go back to that moment and claim it."

"And what about the Bible?" Professor Grimes asked. "Can you find that particular bit of advice anywhere in its pages? Did your pastor offer you any Scriptural support for that bit of advice?"

"Well, not that I can think of," Iris admitted.

The professor sighed. "It is *very* important to take everything that you are told and compare it with the teachings of the

Word of God. There are many people who are quite wrong about what the Bible says, and there are others who will outright lie about its teachings. If you cannot verify the claims that you hear then you *must* reject them. Do not *ever* believe something just because someone told you to believe it. Your faith must be rooted in the teachings of the Bible, not in what so-and-so told you.

“The truth is that the Bible offers a very concrete and practical way to test ourselves to see if our salvation is genuine – and its directions do *not* involve trying to remember a feeling you had ten years ago. Today we are going to study what the Bible actually has to say about this matter.”

Wally spoke up. “And then you’re going to grade us?”

“No, God is going to grade you. But what I have to say will tell you what sort of grade you’re going to get. That way if you’re going to fail you can take action to change your fate while there is still time to do so.”

The professor picked up his notes off his makeshift desk. “So how can we tell if our salvation is genuine? The answer is found in

the book of I John. In fact, I John 5:13 tells us that John actually wrote that epistle so people could know whether their salvation was genuine. You see, God does not want us to go through our lives wondering if our faith is real. He wants us to *know* that we are saved and then rest in that assurance. I John presents us with the acid test.

“The first point that the apostle John makes is that all genuine believers have admitted that they are sinners and have asked Jesus to forgive them of their sins. We find this in I John 1:8-10. This may seem obvious, but it is vital, and there are millions of people who fail this test. If you claim that you have no sin, or that your good deeds are enough to get you to Heaven – as millions of people do – then you are a lost soul on the road to Hell. If you have never repented of your sins and asked Jesus to forgive you for what you have done, then you are a lost soul on the road to Hell. You *cannot* get to Heaven on the basis of your good deeds. You must confess your sins and seek God’s forgiveness for them.”

Brad spoke up. “But what if you’ve been

a pretty good person who has never done anything really bad?"

"God's standard is *very* different from yours," Professor Grimes replied. "If you have ever told so much as a single lie then you are a liar, and that is enough to send you to Hell. If you have ever stolen even a single thing then you are a thief, and that is enough to send you to Hell. If you have ever lusted after someone then you are an adulterer, and that is enough to send you to Hell. In the sight of God there are *no* people who have never 'done anything really bad'. There are only depraved sinners who richly deserve His judgment.

"So that is point number one. The second point is that genuine Christians submit to the lordship of Christ. We find this in I John 2:3-5. What this means is that genuine believers seek after holiness and try to obey God's commands. Now, this doesn't mean that they obey God perfectly, but it *does* mean that they hate their sin and they try to live a life of obedience."

Iris spoke up. "So in order to stay saved we have to obey God?"

Professor Grimes shook his head. “You have it backwards. When a person becomes a Christian God changes them and gives them a new heart. Since they are now saved and are no longer in bondage to sin, that person will *want* to obey God. He will hate his sin and will seek after holiness. The fact that he is trying to live a life that pleases God is a sign that he really *has* been changed and truly is a Christian. In other words, a life of good works is evidence that your salvation was real. Likewise, if a person does not have any of the fruits of the Spirit and is living a life of utter depravity, that is a sign that his faith is *not* real.

“The issue in our day is that there is a whole class of people who has come to God and said ‘Jesus, keep me from going to Hell, but don’t you dare try to tell me what to do. I’m going to live my life as I see fit and I want you to stay out of it.’ That sort of prayer *cannot* save you. If you reject the authority of Christ over your life and refuse to obey Him then you are not a Christian at all. In order to be saved Jesus must be your Savior *and* your Lord. *This is not optional*. No one who lives their life saying ‘God, you have no right to tell

me what to do!’ is a Christian.”

Wally spoke up. “But what if I disagree with the Bible?”

“Young man, that is *not* an option. As I explained weeks ago, the Bible is the Word of God and was written by God Himself. Its teachings are absolutely binding. If you disagree with what it says then that means *you are wrong* and you need to change. If your opinions do not match the opinions in the Bible then your opinions are wrong and *you* need to change. If you reject the Bible and say ‘Eh, I disagree with that stuff and I’m going to do my own thing’, then that is very strong evidence that you are not a Christian. No one with genuine faith would ever dare to do such a thing. Genuine believers tremble at the commands of God. They do not ignore them.”

Iris spoke up. “But I hear people do that all the time.”

“As do I,” the professor replied. “That is one of the reasons why I believe that very few people in our churches are actually saved. It frightens me that people have so little fear of God that they feel free to say things like ‘God,

your commands and opinions are completely wrong and you need to change'. That is a strong sign that they are actually children of the devil. True Christians fear God and hold His commands in high esteem. They do not treat God like some sort of foolish child who needs to be corrected."

The professor returned his attention to his notes. "So that is point number two. Point number three is that genuine Christians are characterized by love – both for other Christians and even for their enemies. We find this in I John 2:9-11. Now, this doesn't mean that Christians don't occasionally sin and do things that they later regret. However, it *does* mean that they are not characterized by anger and malice. I John 4:20 is very clear about this: it is impossible to hate your fellow men, who you *have* seen, and love a God who you *haven't* seen. If you have nothing but hatred in your heart for other people then that means you also have hatred in your heart for God."

Iris spoke up. "But what about criminals and murderers? Isn't murdering people bad? Don't those people deserve to be hated?"

“Well, that is a good question. I am *not* saying that we should accept murder, or that we should act as if it’s not a serious crime. We should vigorously oppose such appalling behavior and we should seek to stamp it out. I also want to point out that there are times when it is appropriate to get angry. Christ Himself got angry on a number of occasions, and yet Christ never sinned. But Jesus was also clear in Matthew 5:44 that we are to love our *enemies*. We really should show love and compassion to those who hate us and try to tear us apart.

“Now, let me add that the Biblical definition of love is quite different from the modern counterfeit. Love does not mean ‘only say nice things to people’. It means that you need to act in ways that honor God – and at times that may mean condemning them for their sin, removing them from their fellowship, and even arresting and prosecuting them. There is nothing loving about telling a murderer ‘Oh, it’s ok that you killed those people. We’re going to show you love by not arresting you or trying to stop you.’ That is madness. What the murderer needs is

for someone to stop him. He needs to be condemned and told to repent of his terrible sins and seek forgiveness from Christ. Buying him a chainsaw is the *wrong* thing to do.”

Wally spoke up. “But the Bible says we’re not supposed to judge other people.”

“No it does *not*,” Professor Grimes said firmly. “What Jesus actually said in Matthew 7:1-5 is that you should not condemn others for sins that you yourself are guilty of. Instead you should repent of your sins and *then* tell others to stop sinning. That way you are not being a hypocrite. The truth is that the Bible actually commands us to tell others to repent of their sins. In fact, the gospel itself is a condemnation of sin!

“That brings us to the fourth point. In order to be a genuine Christian you must believe that Jesus is the Messiah. We find this in I John 2:22-23.”

Iris spoke up. “Isn’t that the very definition of Christianity?”

“You would certainly think so – and yet I once knew a young man who claimed to be a Christian but said he did not believe in

Jesus.³⁷ It was madness! In order to be saved you must believe that Jesus is God Himself – the uncreated and eternal God who is part of the Trinity. You must believe that Jesus became a man, lived a perfect life, and then died for the sins of man. You must believe that He rose from the dead. In other words, you must believe the Bible’s account of Jesus.

“This is very important, because there are many people who believe in a false Jesus. For example, Muslims believe in a person called Jesus but their Jesus was not God and did not die for anyone’s sins. He was just a prophet. Likewise, Mormons believe in a person called Jesus but their Jesus was just a man who lived a good life and earned his way to godhood. Those religions believe in a *false* Jesus – and you cannot be saved by believing in someone who isn’t real. If you take a rock out of your backyard, turn it into an idol, and name it ‘Jesus’ and worship it, the fact that

³⁷ This is a true story; I did not make this up. I actually did once meet someone who claimed that very thing, and I spent almost an hour trying to get him to understand how foolish he was being. (Did he repent and believe? Sadly, no, he did not.)

you gave it the name Jesus does *not* somehow give it magical power to save you. In order to be saved you must believe in the real Jesus.”

Brad spoke up. “Catholics believe in the real Jesus.”

“But as I pointed out in an earlier lecture, they deny His power to save you. They teach that you must earn your way to Heaven through a life of good works. Believing in the real Jesus isn’t going to help you if you are trying to earn your way to Heaven. You cannot be saved by Jesus if you have rejected His sacrifice.

“So that is point number four. Point number five is a simple one: genuine Christians have their heart set on the things of God, and not on the carnal things of this world. I John 2:15-17 is very blunt: if you love the things of this world then the love of the Father is not in you.”

Brad spoke up. “That sounds kind of vague to me.”

“There’s nothing the least bit vague about it! Jesus said that you cannot serve two masters. Either you *are* working for the glory

of God and the advancement of His kingdom, or you *are not*. Your life is either going to be all about God and what He wants, or it is going to be all about you and what you want. Are you passionate about holiness and the gospel, or is your focus instead on the latest toys? Are you trying to save souls, or are you trying to get a big house, a nice car, and a lot of money? Who are you *really* serving with the precious few years that God gave you on this world?

You see, the Bible tells us that everything in this world is just temporary. 2 Peter 3:10 says that God is going to utterly destroy this planet and everything that it contains. Your big house, your nice car, your money and your fame are all going to be burnt up – destroyed by what the Bible calls ‘fervent heat’. You’re not going to get to keep *any* of it. You might as well be building sandcastles on the beach! Since none of these things matter – and, in fact, since they actually distract us from God – genuine believers don’t really care about the things of this world and instead are passionate about building God’s kingdom. That is their focus.”

Iris spoke up. “Does that mean that everything we do has to be spiritual? Is God only pleased with us if we become full-time missionaries to Africa?”

“Not at all,” the professor replied. “In Ephesians 6:5-8 the apostle Paul told the slaves of Rome to serve their masters well, because in doing so they were honoring God. It’s like I said at the beginning of this lecture: all of life is a test. When we get out of bed and take care of our families, that can bring honor to God. When we go to work and do a good job for a boss who doesn’t appreciate it, that can bring honor to God. Honoring the Lord isn’t something that is limited to Sunday morning worship services. When we live a quiet life, pursue holiness, and serve others, that brings honor to God. Micah 6:8 puts it this way: ‘...what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ We make this so much harder than it needs to be.”

Professor Grimes looked back at his notes. “And that brings us to the very last point – and this is an important one. So far we have seen that a genuine Christian is

someone who has repented of his sins, has wholly submitted to the authority of Christ, has a life characterized by love, has put their faith in the *real* Jesus, and seeks God's kingdom instead of their own. But there is one more point, and it is crucial: you must *continue in the faith*. Anyone who abandons their faith in God and dies without repenting was never a Christian at all. I John 2:19 says that their faith was phony."

Iris spoke up. "How is that different from losing your salvation?"

"Well, as I said in an earlier class, you cannot lose your salvation. If you *could* lose your salvation then that would mean you could also *keep* your salvation, by living a good life and making the right decisions. At that point, though, you're not trusting in Christ anymore – you're trusting in your ability to do the right thing. In other words, a salvation that can be lost by your works is a salvation that can also be kept by your works. But as we discussed earlier, salvation is *not of works*. Since you cannot earn your salvation, that means you cannot lose it. Once you become a Christian you are sealed and cannot

be lost. Your salvation depends upon the perfection of Christ, and He is not going to change.

“The situation that the apostle John talks about is a little different. Imagine that you had a chair sitting in the corner. From what you can tell it looks like a pretty good chair, and it seems to be pretty solid. Since it looks good you finally decide to sit on it – but when you do so the chair collapses. The chair *seemed* to be good, but it actually wasn’t any good at all. When you tested that chair you found out that its supposed strength was just an illusion.

“People’s faith can be like that. A person may say that they believe God and they may think that they really do love God, but the storms of life will reveal the truth. When a loved one dies and they get angry with God and abandon Him, they reveal who they truly were all along. Like the chair that collapsed, it turns out that they didn’t *really* believe that God loves them or that all things work together for good. They didn’t really trust Him at all. Their faith was just a sham – it fell apart the moment it was tested. All the trial

did was reveal what God already knew – that their faith was worthless.

“If your faith is genuine then it will last a lifetime. You may struggle with doubts from time to time and you might go through some terrible trials – but in the end you will die in the faith. In other words, real faith *lasts*. It doesn’t last because you are trying to keep it; instead it lasts because it is genuine.”

Iris spoke up. “So you’re saying that people who renounce their faith weren’t actually believers at all.”

“Exactly,” Professor Grimes said.

He paused a moment and looked at his students. “As I said at the beginning of class, this is the most important test that you will ever take. If you want to avoid facing the eternal wrath of God, you *must* be a Christian. There are many people who have deluded themselves into thinking that they are Christians when they actually aren’t Christians at all. *Do not be one of them!* Pay attention to what the Bible has to say, and examine yourself. Are you sure that your faith is real? After all, you are betting all of eternity on it – and if you die in your sins you won’t be

able to fix things. It will be far too late for that. This is your chance to examine yourself, *before* you stand before God and are judged. Don't waste it.

"Is there anything that anyone wishes to say?"

There was utter silence in the class. No one said a word.

"Very well. Then you are dismissed – but think about what I have said. This is one exam that you cannot afford to fail."

