

# THE DANGER OF FALSE CONVERSIONS

## INTRODUCTION

---

- A serious issue facing the church today is: Who really is a Christian?
- There is no more important topic to address than this one as it relates to one's eternal destiny and determines where they will spend eternity
- Being wrong on the issue of genuine salvation carries with it great and dire consequences
- It is necessary to ask this question since nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe they will go to heaven when they die
- Yet, many who claim to be a Christian and hold forth to the promise that they have eternal life continue to live in rebellion to God
- In many cases, the behavior of many "Christians" is virtually indistinguishable from those who don't know Christ...many participate in the deeds of the flesh and spurn the way of holiness
- They believe that their conduct has no relationship to their spiritual status – even if they continue in a lifestyle that is clearly contrary to God's Word
- Yet Jesus specifically stated that "few" are truly saved:

**Matthew 7:13-14** ~ Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it

- Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is...unbelievers do make false professions of faith in Christ
- Thus, there are "unsaved believers" who think that their belief in Jesus is sufficient to save them, yet their life fails to give evidence that they are truly following Christ

Simple assent to the gospel, divorced from a transforming commitment to the living Christ, is by biblical standards less than faith, and less than saving, and to elicit only assent of this kind would be to secure only false conversions. So the gospel really is at stake in this discussion.

J. I. Packer, foreword to *The Gospel According to Jesus* by John MacArthur, 1994, ix.

I consider [this] to be the greatest weakness of contemporary evangelical Christianity in America. Did I say weakness? It is more. It is a tragic error. It is the idea – where did it ever come from? – that one can be a Christian without being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It reduces the gospel to the mere fact of Christ's having died for sinners, requires of sinners only that they acknowledge this by the barest intellectual assent, and then assures them of their eternal security when they may very well not be born again. This view bends faith beyond recognition – at least for those who know what the Bible says about faith – and promises a false peace to thousands who have given verbal assent to this reductionist Christianity but are not truly in God's family.

James Montgomery Boice, foreword to *The Gospel According to Jesus* by John MacArthur, 1994, xi.

- This "new Gospel" has spawned a generation of "professors" but not "possessors" of true faith in Christ
- It has resulted in an insidious easy-believism and cheap grace that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners
- But it is really an example of "another Gospel" Paul warned about:

**Galatians 1:9** ~ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

- Perhaps I am more sensitive to this since this was my testimony – 18 years as a "make believer"

## POSSIBLE CAUSES OF FALSE CONVERSIONS

---

### **Oversimplifying the Gospel**

---

- Sometimes this stems from canned or programmed approaches to sharing the gospel which often abbreviate it, downplay the demands of the gospel, or leave out key aspects of the gospel altogether
- In order for someone to be saved, they must understand the gospel clearly including concepts such as good and evil, sin and punishment, repentance and faith, God's holiness and wrath against sin, the deity of Christ and His atonement for sin, and the resurrection and lordship of Christ
- Oversimplification is a greater danger than giving too much detail...it is the truth - found in God's Word - that saves, but that truth must be understood

### **Coercing a Profession of Faith**

---

- Often out of a desire to see someone saved (especially children), some kind of active response to the gospel is often solicited
- This could include: raising a hand, walking an aisle, coming forward at an altar call, signing a card, praying some repetition of "the sinner's prayer," asking Jesus into your heart, having a camp "high," or having some other spiritual/religious experience
- Children in particular will almost always respond in whatever way parents ask—not at all guaranteeing real acts of faith in Christ
- There is great danger in pressuring or coercing a confession from the mouth of a child, for genuine repentance will bring forth its own confession as the Lord opens the heart in response to the gospel

### **Assuming the Reality of Salvation**

---

- False conversions can be reinforced by assuming that any response to the gospel is full-fledged saving faith
- The temptation here is to regard regeneration as a settled matter because of an outward indication that a person has believed in Christ
- One cannot assume, however, that every profession of faith reflects a genuine work of God in the heart
- This is particularly true of children...children often respond positively to the gospel for a host of reasons, many of which are unrelated to any awareness of sin or real understanding of spiritual truth
- However, only when a person's stated convictions and beliefs are tested by circumstances in life can their spiritual condition be more clearly discerned
- Thus, while many people do make a genuine commitment to Christ when young, many others - perhaps most - don't come to an adequate understanding of the gospel until their teenage years
- Others who profess Christ in childhood turn away
- Thus, not all "expressions of commitment to faith" should be taken as decisive proof of conversion

### **Assuring Someone of Their Salvation**

---

- Often, professing believers are given assurance of their salvation because of some past event in their life
- As a consequence, the church is filled with professing believers whose hearts are devoid of real love for Christ, but who think they are genuine Christians because of something they did previously
- This is often reinforced by the idea of writing the date of salvation in your Bible
- However, it is the role of the Holy Spirit - not another person - to give assurance of salvation (Rom 8:16)
- Too many people whose hearts are utterly cold to the things of the Lord believe they are going to heaven simply because they responded positively as children to an evangelistic invitation

- Having “asked Jesus to come into their hearts,” they were then given a false assurance and taught never to examine themselves and never to entertain any doubt about their salvation
- A person’s salvation can only be sure by looking at the present pattern of their life (obedience, fruit, love for Christ, etc.) rather than some past event

### **Rushing the Ordinance of Baptism**

---

- Although Scripture commands that believers be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38), it is best not to rush into the ordinance in the case of a child
- Because it is extremely difficult to recognize genuine salvation in children, rather than rushing them into baptism after an initial profession, it is wiser to take the ongoing opportunity to interact with them and wait for more significant evidence of lasting commitment
- Even if a child can say enough in a testimony to make it reasonably clear that he understands and embraces the gospel, baptism should wait until he manifests evidence of regeneration that is independent of parental control
- Because baptism is seen as something clear and final, the primary concern is that when a younger child is baptized he tends to look to that experience as proof that he was saved
- Therefore, in the case of an unregenerate child who is baptized – which is not uncommon in the church at large – baptism actually does him a disservice
- It is better to wait until the reality to which baptism testifies can be more easily discerned

### **The Practice of Infant “Baptism”**

---

- A number of denominations practice infant “baptism” and many of them for different reasons
- Yet, often, at best, such a practice only confuses the person about the status of their conversion as they grow up, and, at worse, causes them to think they are saved when they may not be

### **The Belief in “Carnal Christians”**

---

- According to some, a carnal Christian is a third category of people: 1) believer; 2) unbeliever; 3) believer who lives in a persistent state of sin and disobedience...a person who lives their whole life with little fruit or evidence that they are a believer
- This belief is often held on the basis of a faulty understanding of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

**1 Corinthians 3:1-3** ~ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

- This passage teaches that believers can be immature and marked by carnal, fleshly desires at times
- But it does not teach that believers can operate in a constant state of carnality and still be a true believer (i.e. that it is possible to be saved yet see nothing of the outworking of regeneration in one’s lifestyle/behavior)
- “Carnal Christian” is not a plane of spiritual existence where one can remain indefinitely....it is never spoken of by Scripture as a perpetual state for believers
- Biblically, a true Christian who lives in sin will eventually be disciplined by the Lord (see Hebrews 12)...no discipline means no salvation (Heb 12:8)
- Thus, no one who persists in willful, deliberate sin and rebellion against the Lord should be encouraged with any promise of assurance of salvation

## THE REALITY OF FALSE CONVERSIONS

---

### Matthew 7:21-23

---

**Matthew 7:21-23** ~ 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.’

- This has to be one of the scariest verses in the Bible – to think you are heaven-bound only to be turned away
- Notice that it is only “he who does the will of My Father” that is saved – clearly no past experience – not even greatly religious experiences – can be viewed as evidence of salvation apart from a life of obedience
- Notice also that this sober warning is directed at “many” – Christ here was not speaking about an isolated group of fringe followers...instead this refers to many on that day who will stand before him, stunned to learn they are not included in the kingdom

### Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23 – Parable of the Sower and the Seed

---

- This parable describes the various conditions of people’s hearts in response to the Gospel and shows that false conversions are a reality:
  - Vs. 4, 19           Hard Soil = Unresponsive Heart
  - Vs. 5-6, 20-21    Shallow Soil = Superficial Heart (false conversion)
  - Vs. 7, 22           Weedy Soil = Worldly Heart (false conversion)
  - Vs. 8, 23           Good Soil = Receptive heart (notice the evidence of fruit)

### Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 – Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

---

- This parable describes not how believers and unbelievers coexist in the church but how believers and unbelievers coexist in the world (vs. 38 ~ the field is the world)
- Its purpose is not to describe how believers look like unbelievers but how unbelievers look like believers
- The message of the wheat and tares is simply that God does not sanction any effort that would rid the world of unbelievers by force

### John 15:1-6 – The Vine and the Branches

---

- Notice that there are fruitful branches in this metaphor and fruitless branches
- The fruitful branches represent genuine Christians who are lovingly pruned by Christ in order to produce more fruit (vs. 2)
- However, the fruitless branches represent “unsaved believers” who are only superficially attached to the vine...these are phony Christians who profess faith in Christ but do not really know him...they are branches who only appear to be connected to the True Vine
- As a result, they are cut off and burned (vs. 2, 6)

### 1 John 2:19

---

**1 John 2:19** ~ They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

## THE COMMITMENT NECESSARY TO AVOID FALSE CONVERSIONS

---

- Numerous passages describe the cost of following Christ:

**Matthew 10:37-39** ~ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

**Matthew 16:24-26** ~ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

**Luke 9:57-62** ~ As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

**Luke 14:26-33** ~ If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

## HOW TO PREVENT FALSE CONVERSIONS

---

### Preach a Clear Gospel

---

- Becoming a true child of God involves repenting of sin and having faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- A person who cannot verbalize the nature of sin, who does not seem to be repentant toward God because he is a sinner, or who does not realize that he must turn away from his sin, cannot fully understand his need for a Savior
- Therefore, don't dismiss discussions about sin and the need for a Savior

**Luke 5:31-32** ~ And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

### Demonstrate the Need for Repentance

---

- Biblical repentance is more than just an intellectual exercise
- And it is more than just having remorse over sin....Judas had remorse but not repentance:

**Matthew 27:3-4**~ Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

- Salvation is impossible apart from genuine repentance

**Matthew 4:17**~ Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

**Acts 2:38** ~ And Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”

**Acts 3:19** ~ Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”

**Acts 17:30-31**~ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness

## **Focus on the Lordship of Jesus Christ**

---

- The name “Lord” (*kurios*) points to Christ’s authority
- Therefore any relationship with Him must acknowledge this lordship by submission and obedience
- Christ has all authority over every person; thus, the question is whether or not we’re willing to submit to that authority
- We don’t make Jesus Lord, He is Lord!

**Luke 6:46**~ And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?

**John 20:28** ~ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

**Acts 2:36**~ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified

**Acts 16:31** ~ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.’

**Romans 10:9**~ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved

**Philippians 2:9-11** ~ Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is – the anointed Savior and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords. He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives.  
A. W. Tozer, *I Call it Heresy*, 18-19.

## **Expect That Justification Will Produce Sanctification**

---

- Justification is the declaration God makes that a believer is “just” as a result of Christ’s atonement for sin
- Sanctification is the process God uses to make us more like Christ after we are justified
- Those whom God justifies, He will sanctify; there is no true justification without true sanctification

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
Free – John 4:1	Costly – Luke 14:25-33
Instantaneous – John 3:8	Process – John 8:31
Position – Col 2:11-14	Practice – Col 3:1-11
Requires obedience to one command: Gospel – Acts 6:7	Requires obedience to all of Christ’s commands – Matt 28:19-20
Focuses on cross of Christ – 1 Cor 1:18	Focuses on cross we are to take up – Luke 9:53
Christ’s love for me – John 3:16	My love for Christ – 1 John 4:19
Concerns Christ’s righteousness – 2 Cor 5:21	Concerns my righteousness – Luke 14:25-33