

Salvation - Is It Real?

In 1746, about six years after the Great Awakening, in which Jonathan Edwards was the primary instrument of God to preach the gospel and bring about the greatest revival in American history thus far, Edwards wrote *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*. He wrote it to deal with a problem not unlike one we face today: the matter of evidence for true conversion. Many people want the blessings of salvation, especially eternal security, but no more.

In the explosive drama of the Great Awakening, it seemed as though conversions were occurring in great numbers. However, it didn't take long to realize that some people claimed conversions that were not real. While various excesses and heightened emotional experiences were common, scores of people didn't demonstrate any evidence in their lives to verify their claim to know and love Jesus Christ, which led critics to attack the Great Awakening, contending it was nothing but a big emotional bath without any true conversions.

Thus, partly in defense of true conversion and partly to expose false conversion, Jonathan Edwards took up his pen. He came to this simple conclusion. The supreme proof of a true conversion is what he called "holy affections," which are a zeal for holy things and a longing after God and personal holiness. He made a careful distinction between saving versus common operations of the Holy Spirit. Saving operations obviously produce salvation. Common operations of the Holy Spirit, he said, "may sober, arrest and convict men, and may even bring them to what at first appears to be repentance and faith, yet these influences fall short of inward saving renewal" (Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* [Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987], p. 255).

How can you tell whether the Holy Spirit has performed a saving operation? As the principle evidence of life is motion, Edwards wrote, so the principle evidence of saving grace is holy practice (pp. 262-63). He said true salvation always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert. Therefore, whenever holiness of life does not accompany a confession of conversion, it must be understood that this individual is not a Christian.

In the very year Edwards' treatise was published, popular teaching asserted that, to the contrary, the only real evidence of true salvation is a feeling based on an experience--usually the experience at the moment of the alleged conversion. That teaching introduces the prevalent but erroneous concept that a person's true spiritual state is known by a past experience rather than a present pursuit of holiness. Edwards flatly

contradicted that notion: "Assurance is never to be enjoyed on the basis of a past experience. There is need of the present and continuing work of the Holy Spirit ... [in] giving assurance" (p. 265). This is no esoteric theological debate: the substance of your assurance is at stake.

A number of New Testament writers, of course, were very concerned about this matter of true salvation, as was our Lord Jesus Himself. The apostle John dedicated his first letter to the subject, stating his theme at the end: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Throughout the letter is a series of tests to determine whether you possess eternal life. If you don't pass these tests, you'll know where you stand and what you need to do. If you do, you'll have reason to enjoy your eternal salvation with great assurance.

11 Biblical Tests of Genuine Salvation – from John MacArthur

- 1. Have You Enjoyed Fellowship with Christ and the Father?**
- 2. Are You Sensitive to Sin?**
- 3. Do You Obey God's Word?**
- 4. Do You Reject This Evil World?**
- 5. Do You Eagerly Await Christ's Return?**
- 6. Do You See a Decreasing Pattern of Sin in Your Life?**
- 7. Do You Love Other Christians?**
- 8. Do You Experience Answered Prayer?**
- 9. Do you Experience the Ministry of the Holy Spirit?**
- 10. Can You Discern between Spiritual Truth and Error?**
- 11. Have You Suffered Rejection Because of Your Faith?**

Matt 7:21-23 NIV 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

