

Professing but not Possessing (Titus 1:15-16)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on July 8, 2008

www.goldcountrybaptist.org

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul says “**test** yourselves ... **examine yourselves**.” I’ve never been one who really enjoyed taking tests or undergoing any type of examination. I suspect most of you when you were students didn’t especially look forward to “exam time.” As a young person and student, I feared examinations and tests because I inevitably and invariably wasn’t ready, which I confess to my shame. This passage speaks of a type of test we can’t afford to not be ready for. Look at the verse ... are you ready for this test?

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB95) ⁵Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; **examine** yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you **fail the test**? [this uses the same root word as “examine” or “test” with the a-prefix meaning opposite, you failed the exam]

This test is an open-book test, you can take it with open Bible, an open heart examination with no less than eternal destiny at stake. This is a pass-fail only test. It’s not graded on a curve and your score is not based on how others around you or others have done. Will you pass or fail (NKJV “disqualified” – with marginal note “do not stand the test”)? Test yourselves to see if you stand the test and are truly in the faith, examine yourselves to see if you are truly saved. It’s one thing to be present *in* Christ’s church this morning – it’s quite another thing to have Christ present *in you*, and that’s the question-of-questions in this test or exam

- “Is the LORD Jesus in you?”
- Do you know *about* God, or do you *know God* savingly?
- What is the basis for your belief that you are saved?
- Is it something *you did* in the past, or is there clear evidence of what the LORD Himself *is doing inside of you in the present*?
- Is Christ this year making you more like Himself because of the inner transformation that is continually taking place by His grace?

It’s one thing to have information in your mind about Christ, it’s quite another thing to have the mind of Christ within you, as Scriptures say true believers do, growing you to think like Christ, talk like Christ, live like Christ. It’s one thing to profess salvation, it’s another to possess it.

Now turn to Titus 1. I have a great concern and heavy burden on my heart as we approach this text, which I believe is the same great concern Paul had for the Corinthian church as well as the Cretan church that Titus was assigned to minister to.

There were people sitting in church, maybe even every week:

- who *assumed* they were in the faith, for whatever reason(s)
- who were *sure* they were saved and going to heaven
- who *professed* to know God (and even did know some things about God)
- who *knew* the right things to say about Jesus
- who even *believed* the right facts about Jesus in their head
- who *understood* good works can never save anyone

- who in the words of Hebrews 6, have at least some degree of being *enlightened* to more truth than other unbelievers and have *tasted* of some of the benefits of being around the things of God and people of God and have *partaken* at least to some degree in spiritual things
- who in the words of James 2, they *say* they have faith, but their lack of good works proves otherwise
- who in the words of Jesus (originally written by Isaiah), *honor Him with their lips* but their hearts are far from Him
- Or who in the words of Titus 1:16 they *profess to know God* but by their actions deeds they deny God and show that they do not possess a true relational knowledge of God

Titus 1:15-16 (NASB95) ¹⁵To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. ¹⁶They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

They profess but they do not possess saving knowledge of God. Verse 15 describes them as “defiled and unbelieving” (v. 15) but v. 16 says they think they’re believers and profess they know God.

The biblical word “know” goes beyond intellectual understanding or mental assent and includes an intimate inner relationship that manifests itself outwardly in actions that flow from our hearts.

Vance Havner has said: “Salvation does not come from the assent of the head but by the consent of the heart.” As 1 Samuel 16 says, God looks at the heart. Has your heart consented and repented?

I am sure there are people sitting in this room this morning who if they died today they would miss heaven by 18 inches (the distance between their head and their heart). You have a mental acknowledgment and understanding of the gospel and many Bible verses up here, but your heart has never bowed in repentance to Jesus as Lord. If you’re honest, your will has not been surrendered to His will and your heart does not truly love Jesus or long to obey and please Him

This weekend our country remembers what happened on July 4th, in the year 1776, in the original colonies and government of what would come to be known as the United States of America.

A year probably as not familiar to you is 1746, some 30 years earlier, which from a spiritual vantage-point, came on the heels of perhaps the most significant event to ever take place on the continent of North America – the Great Awakening, which brought spiritual liberty to thousands as God’s sovereign grace moved across this land through preaching that exalted Christ and expounded His Word by the enablement of God’s Almighty Spirit.

The human instrument especially used by God in this movement was a man named Jonathan Edwards. Last month in Southern California, there was a conference called the Resolved Conference (see www.resolved.org), which is named after Edwards and his famous resolutions that he began writing as a teenager (and I shared many of those with you at the start of this year). I have been blessed by listening to the powerful messages from that conference, messages that are faithful to the same God-entranced view of God’s glory in all things from Edwards.

Rick Holland said in his opening address that he considered that Great Awakening driven by the God-centered theology and preaching of men like Edwards, that awakening was not only the greatest true revival ever on this continent, but he said it was arguably the greatest revival since the days of Jonah in Nineveh. The other speakers at Resolved include John Piper, C. J. Mahaney, Steve Lawson, and John MacArthur.

Here's how the latter described in another message a vital contribution that Edwards made:¹

In 1746 Edwards wrote *A Treatise on Religious Affections*. The reason he wrote that was to deal with the problem not unlike the very problem we're discussing ... That publication, *A Treatise on Religious Affections* had to do with the matter of evidence for true conversion. The concern of Edwards in writing was to delineate the issues regarding who is really a Christian. In the explosive drama of 1739-1740, the years of the great awakening, it seemed as though conversions were happening in great numbers. It didn't take long after those years to begin to realize that there were some people who claimed conversions who were not real. There were many excesses. There were people who waxed in to emotionalism and emotional experiences, which would be in some ways a sort of a precursor to contemporary ... mania. There were people who claimed to have had valid and real experiences with Jesus Christ, but whose lives did not demonstrate any evidence to verify it. There were thus those who were then attacking the great awakening and saying it was nothing but a big emotional bath and there was nothing real about it.

And so, partly in defense of true conversion and partly to expose false conversion, Jonathan Edwards took up his pen and wrote *A Treatise on Religious Affections*. And his purpose was to present evidence for true conversion. And summing it up very simply, "The supreme proof of a true conversion is holy affections, zeal for holy things, longings after God, longings after holiness, desires for purity." And he really did touch the heart of true conversion. And at its heart it is a set of new desires. That's what he said. He said, "Where there is true conversion there is a zeal for holy things." He had been very concerned about Satanic counterfeits, of conversions during the great awakening. And so he wanted to distinguish between what he called "saving operations of the Holy Spirit," and "common operations of the Holy Spirit." Saving operations of the Holy Spirit obviously produced 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."

So the main thesis of this, one of the greatest pieces of American literature, frankly, to say nothing of theology, the main thesis of this classic work is that holiness and the pursuit of holiness is necessarily involved at the very outset of true salvation. "Grace, saving grace, planted in the heart at the time of the new birth is," he said, "a principle of holy action or practice." [True believers] have a longing to know God, to follow God, to pursue holiness. Grace planted in the heart, said Edwards, produces holy action. In fact he said, "As the principle evidence of life is motion, so the principle evidence of saving grace is holy practice." He said that true salvation always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert, therefore wherever a confession of conversion is not accompanied by holiness of life, it must be understood that the individual concerned is not a Christian.

... Edwards said, and this is the thesis of his whole *Treatise on Religious Affections*, "The truly saved pursue holiness." They aren't always as holy as they ought to be, [but] they pursue it. They ... long to do what is right even if they don't. They have holy longings, holy aspirations and holy affections. [Not sinless perfection, but a new direction]

He stated then that the evidence for the reality of one's salvation was simply and comprehensively quote: "The love and pursuit of holiness." That he taught as the enduring mark of a Christian and therefore singularly the best way to get in touch with the reality of a spiritual condition and thus the source of assurance. He said while the experience of a young Christian may be like a confused chaos, he will still follow holiness and true religious affections differ from false affections in that the true are always related to holiness, that is to doing what is right, to pursuing what honors God.

"... When persons are possessed of false affections and think themselves out of danger of hell, they very much put off the burden of the cross, save themselves the trouble of difficult duties and allow themselves more of the enjoyment of their ease and their lusts. Some of these at the same time make a great *profession* of love to God [sounds like Titus 1:16] ... Where joys and other religious affections are false and counterfeit, individuals once confident that they are converted have no more earnest longings after light and grace, they live upon their first work or some high experiences that are past and there is an end to their crying and striving after God and grace, but the holy principles that actuate a true saint have a far more powerful influence to stir him up to earnestness in seeking God and holiness ..."

What he's basically saying is the false Christian makes a profession but has no holy longings. The true Christian makes a profession and has holy longings. I don't always do what I want, but I want to do what God wants. I don't always do what I desire, but I always want to do what God desires. And when my desire is the same as His, it doesn't mean my flesh is always going to cooperate. But my holy longings are evidence of regeneration.

And so Jonathan Edwards insisted that the work of Christ in justification was always accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. And to separate the two was to do terrible violation both to Scripture and the purposes of God in redemption. Free grace and holy practice, he said, are not inconsistent but perfectly joined, even as the chief sign of life is motion, the chief sign of saving grace is holy motion, movement toward holiness ...

[Edwards was rightly fighting against] this erroneous concept that a person's true state is known by a past experience rather than a present pursuit of holy things. Jonathan Edwards then went on to talk about assurance and he said, "Your assurance then is based on the fact that you see in your life the pursuit of holy things." That's the substance of your assurance.

... [Scripture does teach] if you have saving faith you're saved forever. The only question remaining then is "was my faith saving faith...was my faith the real thing...how do I know that?" Ask yourself whether you have a longing for holy things. Ask yourself whether you seek those things which honor God. Ask yourself whether you long to do His Word, whether you love His law and delight in it. Ask yourself whether you are distressed greatly by your sin because you have such holy affections. Yes, Edwards would agree. He would say yes, faith in Christ is sufficient for assurance, yes, faith in Christ is sufficient for assurance if you know your faith is real. How do you know it's real? By the love of holy things...by the love of holy things.

Now this is precisely Peter's point [in 2 Peter 1 which you can study further]. Jonathan Edwards is right on track with the Apostle Peter ...

What Jonathan Edwards says is that if you want to enjoy your salvation and be sure you're saved, then look at your life and see if you have holy affections, if you pursue holiness. Peter says if you are adding all these things and pursuing all these things and giving diligence to all these things and you're going to be fruitful, then you're going to look at yourself and you're not going to forget whether you're saved, you're going to know. Well [the Epistle of 1st] John essentially says the same thing. John in his whole first epistle delineates the factors of such a pursuit. Peter says it involves faith and knowledge and self-control and perseverance and godliness and brotherly kindness and love and you want to know something? John says basically the same thing only John says it in much greater detail. John delineates those same elements that identify holy affections, the pursuit of holiness which is characteristic of the regenerate.

In the context of Titus 1, Paul is speaking especially of those from Jewish background who are attending Christian churches on Crete, and verse 15 suggests they had carried over the ideas about purity based on rituals or ceremonies, rather than a heart that has been transformed by Christ and received His righteousness as a gift.

These men may profess salvation in verse 16, but verse 14 describes them as being caught up in myths and men's legalistic rules and false teaching by false teachers, and things that had been added to scripture, and people were turning away from the truth.

We don't know all the specifics of these errors that were going around the island of Crete, and we don't need to, because it's not hard to think of unbiblical additions to Scripture and myths like:

- that you are pure inwardly if you show up at church
- that you are pure before God if you do not do the extreme and outward sins that rank pagans do in the world
- that you're saved if you've been christened, or confirmed, or catechized, or baptized, with Bible verses memorized
- or maybe you think being a member of a church makes you a member of God's family, or serving in church

- here's a very popular and problematic myth: you're definitely saved if you repeat the words of the "sinner's prayer," or if you came forward at an altar call, or if during the closing prayer you raised your hand or signed a card

The problem with all those ideas is that they are *ideas* that are not presented in the Bible as biblical evidences of salvation. It's possible to do all those things, and be one of those who profess to know God as Titus 1:16 says, but as verse 15 says your conscience is defiled because you are unbelieving and impure inwardly.

This may offend or trouble or upset some, but I cannot assure you that you're going to heaven because of any of those things or because of how you felt one time at summer camp or because you came forward at a big crusade or because of some temporary time in the past when you read the Bible and seemed to have an interest in spiritual things but it didn't last.

Iain Murray writes:

Man has made a connection between coming forward after an appeal and 'coming to Christ', but [faithful preachers in the past before the 20th century like] Spurgeon would have strongly repudiated any such connection. Not only does such an evangelistic method not exist in Scripture, it vitiates what Scripture does teach on coming to Christ: 'It is a motion of the heart towards Him, not a motion of the feet, for many came to Him in body, and yet never came to Him in truth ... the coming here meant is performed by desire, prayer, assent, consent, trust, obedience.'²

True salvation cannot be lost, because it is all a work of God from start to finish, but it's possible to be lost and have a false assurance. As Titus 1:16 says you can profess to know God, but actually deny Him. Better to be a Christian and examine yourself and make sure you have truly repented, then to be a non-Christian who never tests or examines your heart to see if you're in the faith.

True salvation is assured by continual transformation that can only be attributed to Christ, holy new desires, a new person in Christ.

2 Cor. 5:17 "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, all things have become new"

The Bible does speak in terms of fruit or the way we walk as evidence of the Spirit, but not the way we walked an aisle.

Titus 1:16 is clear in its warning of who profess they know God verbally, but don't truly. Mere words have never been enough. Godly actions and affections are inseparable.

Hosea 8:2-3 (NASB95) ²They cry out to Me, "My God, **we of Israel know You!**" ³Israel has **rejected the good**; The enemy will pursue him.

Jeremiah 22:16 (NASB95)¹⁶"He **pled the cause of the afflicted and needy**; Then it was well. Is not that **what it means to know Me?**" Declares the LORD.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said there will be many on judgment day who think they know the Lord, because of all the things they've done, in His name, saying Lord, Lord, etc. ... But He'll tell them "I *never knew* you [i.e., intimate relationship], depart from me ..."

In Titus 1:16, the word "profess" is in the perfect tense which means it began at a point in the past and they continue to profess.

But "deny" and "being disobedient" are in present tense – they continue to perpetually deny God by their actions in the present. Peter denied Jesus three times (and we all deny Jesus at times) but true believers repent and are restored, unlike Judas who never did.

***KEY CROSS REFERENCES:**

1 John 2:4 (NASB95) The one who says, "I have come to **know** Him," and does not keep His commandments [*habit/pattern*], is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

Ezekiel 33:31 (NKJV) So they come to you as people do, they sit before you *as* My people, and they **hear your words, but they do not do them**; for **with their mouth they show much love**, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain.

Ezekiel 33:11 (NKJV) Say to them: '*As* I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

If these verses describe you, God's words through the prophet Ezekiel are also pleading with you this morning: "I will not take pleasure in you dying in your sins apart from me. Why should you die?! Turn from your evil ways, repent, and you can live today!!" I am here as an ambassador of God to plead with your heart with all my heart and with all the time I have, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith! I cannot save you, but Jesus can and will save and change your hard heart if you'll humbly repent and trust Him

God in His grace gives us passages like Titus 1:16 so we don't have to be those who "profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and **worthless...**"

That word translated as "worthless" in NASB may in your translation read "disqualified" (NKJV) or "unfit" (ESV, NIV). It's the same Greek word in 2 Corinthians 13:5 where it is translated "fail the test," or used of those who "do not stand the test" or examination of whether they are truly in the faith and whether Jesus is truly in them. These people fail the test and do not possess saving knowledge of God, but ... *they profess* they do.

That word translated "worthless" here or "fail the test" in the other verse was a word used of counterfeit coins in ancient Greece. They looked like the real deal, but they were not genuine, authentic, or of the proper weight, and so they were rejected as worthless.

In Hebrews 6, in a passage very similar to the context of ours, it talks about professing believers who are so close but who do not possess true saving faith, and it compares their lack of fruit to a plant (v. 8) that "yields thorns and thistles, it is **worthless [same word]** and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."

The word was commonly used of metals that were rejected by refiners because of impurities. The impure metals were discarded, so the word carried connotations of worthlessness and uselessness. Certainly purity and impurity is part of this context in verse 15.

The word was used in their culture to describe a soldier who failed miserably in the testing or hour of battle, who may have *professed* to be brave, but who proved to be a coward by his deeds or actions.

When a stone was rejected by builders because of a flaw which made it unfit for construction, the rejected stone was clearly marked by a capital "A" (for *adokimos*) on its surface. There was some examination or test of all these things, and those that failed the test were unapproved or disqualified and rejected.

This is the same word Paul used in the verse we read earlier:

Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; **examine** yourselves [verb form *dokimazo*!] Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you **fail the test?** [*adokimos*]

In Titus 1:16, those who fail the test, who are disqualified or worthless, are described as “disobedient” and those who deny God by their actions or works. Disobedience and disbelief go together, and so does true saving faith and good deeds. We are not saved by our good works, but if God saves us, He also produces good works

John MacArthur writes in *The Gospel According to Jesus*:

‘the person who has believed will *yearn* to obey. Because we retain the vestiges of sinful flesh, no one will obey perfectly (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:10), but the desire to do the will of God will be ever present in true believers ... That is why faith and obedience are so closely linked throughout Scripture.

A concept of faith not producing surrender of the will corrupts the message of salvation. Paul spoke of the gospel as something to be obeyed

(Rom. 10:16 KJV[“*they have not all obeyed the gospel*”];

2 Thess. 1:8 [which speaks of God’s flaming vengeance of wrath or retribution against those “*who do not know God and ... who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*”]).

Here is how [Paul] characterized conversion: “Though you were the slaves of sin, you **became obedient** from the heart” (Rom. 6:17). The result he sought in his ministry of evangelism was “obedience ... by word and deed” (Rom. 15:18). And he wrote repeatedly of “the **obedience of faith**” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Clearly, the biblical concept of faith must lead to obedience. “Believe” is treated as if it were synonymous with “obey” in John 3:36 [NASB]: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey the Son shall not see life.**” Acts 6:7 shows how salvation was understood in the early church: “A great many ... were **becoming obedient to the faith.**” Obedience is so closely related to saving faith that Hebrews 5:9 uses it as a synonym: “Having been made perfect, He became **to all those who obey Him** the source of eternal salvation.” Hebrews 11, the great treatise on faith, presents obedience as a by-product of faith: “By faith ... Abraham **obeyed**” (v. 8)—and not just Abraham. All the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 showed their faith by obedience.

Obedience is the inevitable manifestation of true faith. Paul recognized this when he wrote to Titus about “those who are defiled and unbelieving.... They profess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him” (Titus 1:15–16).

To Paul, their perpetual disobedience proved their disbelief. Their actions denied God more loudly than their words proclaimed him. This is characteristic of unbelief, not faith, for true faith always produces righteous works. As the Reformers were fond of saying, we are justified by faith alone, but justifying faith is never alone. Spurgeon said, "Although we are sure that men are not saved for the sake of their works, yet we are equally sure that no man will be saved without them."³

The words of the classic song "Just as I am" can certainly express the heart of true and simple saving faith in coming to Christ with only the plea of Christ and His blood shed for thee. But we know that God's transforming grace does not leave true believers just as they were as unbelievers.

Our song also should be "trust *and obey* for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." If you're a true believer living in unrepentant sin and disobeying Him, you will not be blessedly happy in Jesus until you repent. One of the recurring themes of the Old Testament is that there is blessing with obedience, repentance leads to rejoicing. And as you delight in the Lord and obey Him from the heart, and grow in His grace, you can experience the comforting truth of another song "*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine, heir of salvation, purchased of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood. This is my story, this is my song [the assurance was because of a changed heart that was] praising my Savior all the day long*"

If you do not have biblical evidences and assurances that you would go to heaven if you died today, I pray your heart will truly surrender in repentant faith today to Jesus as Lord.

The story is told of a very pious family with a daughter and sister who seemed very devout. She was a regular attendant at church, participating in all the parts of the services -- singing, praying, and the Lord's Supper. All believed her to be genuine. Finally she was taken suddenly and seriously ill. A minister was informed of her serious illness and, at her request, came to see her. He expected to find a happy, victorious Christian; but not so. The sick young lady asked him to have a seat, saying, "I am glad you came, for I cannot bear to go out of this world a deceiver and a hypocrite without telling someone." Then she said, "I cannot afford, for the sake of my loved ones, to tell you all of the sham, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy of my life. I have talked about religion, have professed religion, and pretended to be a Christian; but I am not and have never really loved the Lord or His service. Now I must die without any of the prospects of religion and be shut out of heaven forever." Then the minister spoke of the mercy and grace of God. "Yes," she replied, "but that is not for me now. I have been a worthless hypocrite, and God is justly my enemy. My character is finished. What I am, I shall be forever. The tree is even now falling, and it is too late now."⁴

It doesn't have to be too late for you. As Hebrews says numerous times "Today if you hear God's voice, do not harden your hearts."

As Peter said in Acts 3:19 "Repent and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Or as Paul would say “Don’t be one who professes to know God, but by your deeds you deny him” – instead believe in your heart in Christ and His perfect life and death and resurrection on your behalf and confess truly that He is Lord, and Romans 10:9-10 says if you do both those things you can be saved from God’s wrath by God’s grace for God’s glory. When you’re truly saved, you will be changed, with a new heart, new desires, and a new nature that is increasingly made more like your wonderful merciful Savior.

¹ John MacArthur, “Our Precious Faith: Tests of Assurance from First John, Part 2”

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/Transcripts/61-9>

² Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 103 (Banner of Truth Trust: Carlisle, Penn., 2002).

³ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic and Professional Books, Zondervan Pub. House, 1988.

⁴ As cited by www.preceptaustin.org