

WASTED FAITH

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Jim Elliff

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CHAPTER ONE

A Very Real Concern

Most people will spend far more time examining the vegetables in the supermarket than they will ever spend scrutinizing their faith. In the following pages we will take a hard look at *faith* ... your faith. We will pry off the lid of deceptive faith and smell its contents. In the process, we will come to an understanding of what is authentic—the faith that is the acceptable response to the activity of God. And we will discover the disturbing possibility that what we thought was conversion to Christ may have only been a shadow, an illusion, a mere experience.

Why would I encourage skepticism about your faith? The reason is perhaps too obvious to say: Deception is the eager

companion of the easily convinced. Those who are *too* easily assured, who will not trouble with investigation, are likely to discover too late that they own a cheap imitation of the real. They may be like the man in Jesus' parable of the wedding feast who was cast out because he did not have the proper wedding clothes (see Matthew 22:1-14).

The person with an experience alone to validate his eternal state is in a most serious condition. The one who says, "I know I'm a Christian because I prayed the sinner's prayer," and who believes all subsequent doubts are attacks from the enemy, is not using a biblical pattern of thinking. Such a person may be strolling precariously along the lip of hell.

Faith must have a distinct beginning in each genuine Christian life. The Scriptures repeatedly emphasize this. One moment an individual does not believe (trust, have faith—this is the meaning of the word). The next moment (although the exact point in time is not always discernible) the same person is a believer. Biblically-based Christians have always accepted this. But external acts that are considered by many to clearly mark the beginning point of faith (specifically-worded prayers, physical responses to gospel invitations, etc.) often prove to be misleading. And the deception grows stronger when the person is confidently assured by well-meaning friends or Christian

leaders that his response or prayer *definitely* marks the beginning of his or her life as a Christian.

Regardless of what others may have told you about the significance of an event in your past, let me ask you a searching question: *Right now*, is your faith authentic or counterfeit? Stop and think this through. Paul did not write the following words to admitted unbelievers but to professing Christians—people like you and me. He warns:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We are obeying God by reexamining the issue of our own salvation. We are also acting with the highest level of common sense, considering the stakes. Will you search it out? What is most alarming is the risky willingness of many professing Christians to gamble eternity on an emotional one-time experience, a “sinner’s prayer” properly prayed, or a feeling of substantial relief at a juncture in time, without ever taking a serious look at what is evident now, at this moment. Is eternal life of so little value that it seems unnecessary to examine yourself for evidence of it? Is there nothing to lose? Hell is engorged with

people who once thought of themselves as Christians. Is there no danger for you?

To reveal the true nature of your faith, strip away your reliance upon family traditions, church attendance, church membership, or baptism. Look deeper than the pious words you say in the right company. Look beyond the well-intentioned assurances given by a trusted parent, pastor, or evangelist. Set these insufficient comforts aside and look at what is left. Then determine if you have what the Bible describes as genuine Christian faith.

After reading the Gospels through for the first time, a monk of the Middle Ages reportedly said, “Either these are not the Gospels, or we are not Christians!” Indeed, this is not a new problem, and it could be *your* problem.