

S T U D Y G U I D E



The Assurance of Salvation

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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The Duty of Pursuing Assurance

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Presupposed in our Savior's terrifying words during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:21) was the reality of a glorious throne room of God, the eternal sanctuary of all those who believe in Him, as well as a wretched abyss of torment reserved not just for the powers of darkness but for those who blaspheme against the Triune God, failing to repent in fruit-producing faith. Jesus contends that one could dupe himself or herself with a false assurance. For this reason, every man and woman must commit to the quest for complete confidence of salvation. In this lecture, Dr. R.C. Sproul expounds upon the duty every Christian has to pursue full assurance.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 7:21–23, 12:46–13:9, 18–23

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand why the Christian has a duty to pursue full assurance.
2. To be able to articulate what, according to Jesus, is the true mark of a Christian.

QUOTATIONS

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

—Matthew 7:21

*As I watch'd the ploughman ploughing,
Or the sower sowing in the fields—or the harvester harvesting,
I saw there too, O life and death, your analogies:
(Life, life is the tillage, and Death is the harvest according.)*

—Walt Whitman, from *Leaves of Grass*

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. Jesus, the “feel-good guru?”

- a. The Sermon on the Mount, often regarded as an upbeat message about the ideal life, contains one of the most alarming utterances of Christ Jesus: “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21).
- b. The following exposition of Matthew 7:21–23 drives those who profess faith in Christ to ponder their assurance that that faith is true.
- c. Note that Jesus says He *never* knew the individual who feigned communion with Him, which, of course, precludes the notion that the person in question was ever saved.
- d. Note also the use of “Lord, Lord” in verse 21. Addresses such as these denote urgency as well as intimacy (cf. Gen. 2:11, 46:2; Ex. 3:4; 2 Sam. 18:33; Ps. 22:1; Mark 15:34; Luke 10:41, 13:34, 22:31; Acts 9:4, etc.).
- e. Therefore, the people described in these verses are those who profess a loving feeling for Christ, but are not known by Him, because, after supposedly entering the kingdom, they have not changed in ways that mark the true Christian.

II. Who, then, does “the will of the Father”?

- a. The parable of the soils (Matt. 13:1–9) helps us understand the problem introduced at Matthew 7:21, that not everyone who calls on the Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, that despite millions of professions, not all are genuine.
- b. Matthew 12:46–50 sets up the context: The true mother, brother, or sister of Christ Jesus is the one who does the will of the Father.
- c. Notice the similarity to the previous text (Matt. 7:21). Who among those who say, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven? Those who do the will of the Father. What, then, does this look like? Consider the parable.
- d. Starting at Matthew 13:18, Jesus explains the parable of the soils allegorically. (Note that the allegory *is* the message of the story, given by Christ Himself, and so parables should not be treated as allegorical indiscriminately.)
- e. The word never sinks into some folks, Jesus says in verse 19, as it does, albeit briefly, into those described in verses 20–21. In today’s language, these people may run joyfully down the aisle at an evangelistic crusade, but forget about the planted seed (word) almost immediately.
- f. Notice that the signs of faith and the lack thereof are *outward*; that is, one receives the word in joy, endures for a while, and then, under the pressures of trials or persecutions, falls away. Faith in others *can be observed* (Matt. 7:16; James 3:12).

- g. Leaving the individuals of verse 22 aside for the present (see lecture No. 4, “False Assurance”), we see that those sown on good soil are hearers who understand. God changes the heart (soil) of the hearers, and the hearers become doers producing fruit.
- h. To be sure, not everyone produces the same amount—some a hundredfold, another sixty, and another thirty—but each one produces fruit.
- i. This clearly goes against a popular yet false doctrine in the church today, summed up in the catch phrase “carnal Christianity,” the idea that one can be a Christian without producing any fruit for a lifetime because of a lingering sin, etc.
- j. We are not justified by a mere profession of faith in Jesus, for we are more than able to honor Jesus with our lips when in truth our hearts may be far from Him (Isa. 29:13–14; Mark 7:6–7).
- k. Only when we are justified by faith alone does a true profession of faith follow. To correct this falsity in the church, we must leave off counting Christians according to signatures on decision cards; rather, the measuring rod must be the clearly revealed standard of God’s Word (therefore hindering both libertines and legalists).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. According to Jesus in Matthew 7:21, everyone who intimately calls on the Lord and is busy with “Christian” work _____.
 - a. Must be a Christian
 - b. Must be a liar
 - c. Is not necessarily a Christian
 - d. None of the above
2. Jesus commands the apostates to depart from Him, saying that they are truly workers of lawlessness, and that He _____ knew them.
 - a. Always
 - b. Partially
 - c. Never
 - d. Once
3. The use of a double address (e.g. “Lord, Lord”) in Hebrew signified urgency and _____.
 - a. Antipathy
 - b. Admonition
 - c. Intimacy
 - d. Exasperation

4. Who will enter the kingdom of heaven, according to Jesus in Matthew 7:21 and 12:50? _____
 - a. Whoever has a conversion experience
 - b. Whoever makes a profession of faith
 - c. Whoever does the Father's will
 - d. Both a and b

5. How many "seeds" are truly Christian in the parable of the soils? _____
 - a. Three
 - b. One
 - c. Two
 - d. Four

6. "Carnal Christianity" refers to the false notion that _____.
 - a. One can deny the deity of Christ and still be saved
 - b. One can become a Christian and still eat meat
 - c. One can be saved while remaining completely fruitless throughout life
 - d. One can be saved and live a completely perfect life

7. Which of the following follows from justification by faith? _____
 - a. A true profession of faith
 - b. Entrance into the kingdom community
 - c. Spiritually good deeds
 - d. All of the above

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Matthew 7:15–20. What two verses share the same principle regarding what determines a person's final destiny? What is the principle that will protect an individual against the coming judgment? What other verse in the gospel of Matthew is identical to verse 19? What issue/danger does this address (cf. Matt. 13:37–43, 49–50; 25:31–46)?
2. Continue reading Matthew 7:21–23. Remember that the cry "Lord, Lord" is an emphatic profession of faith, but still falls short of Jesus' expectations of a true disciple. Is this profession insincere or self-deception (cf. Matt. 25:44)? What, then, is the ultimate criterion for entrance into the kingdom of heaven (e.g. note the two ways the apostate falls short)?
3. Read Matthew 24:36; and Luke 10:12 and 17:31. Now read Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 3:30; Amos 5:18, 20; and Zephaniah 1:8, 14, 18. What do you gather "in that day" refers to in Matthew 7:22? Who specifically will be the judge on that day, according to Matthew 7:21–23? Who would Jesus' audience have expected to hear would be judge? Describe and discuss Jesus' striking claim. Why is "charismatic" activity no substitute for genuine obedience and a personal relationship with Christ Jesus?

4. Read Matthew 12:48–49 and compare it with 15:3–6. What is the point here, if not disrespect to His mother (cf. Matt. 10:34–37)? Now focus on Matthew 12:50. The “disciples” (v. 49) thus privileged are described in what way? Thinking back on our discussion of Matthew 7:15–23, what is emphasized once again? What is the true touchstone of an authentic relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? How does this relate to the following parable of the soils?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss as a group how Matthew 7:21–23 drives us to pursue assurance. As a thought-provoking impetus, think of ways you have served the church and plug them into verse 22.
2. In consideration of this lecture’s discussion of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the soils, what are the true marks of an elect person? Discuss as a group the different soils and their impediments (weeds, sun, birds), and what these “conversion experiences” look like in today’s society.
3. If someone you know asserted that a person can be a Christian while spending his or her entire life fruitless, how would you respond? Use Scripture to support your answer.

SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY

MacArthur, John. *The Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 123–33
Parsons, Burk. *Assured by God*, pp. 19–36
Sproul, R.C. *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp. 167–178
———. *Eternal Security* (audio series)

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