

Title: Confirming Your Calling (Part 6)

Passage: 2 Peter 1:8a

Theme: Growing in the knowledge of grace demonstrates the reality of grace

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{{ Read Passage }}

(be certain about His calling and choosing you / make your calling and election sure.). That speaks to our assurance (we can be certain of our justification before God). But it also speaks to self-deception. That there are those who think they are Xns when in fact they are not.

[i] The Amost Christian Discovered (Matthew Mead)

Mead was an English Puritan who preached in London to a rather large congregation. Very well known, more so than any other in London at that time.

No stranger to affliction. Yet, in true Puritan fashion, Mead saw God's hand of mercy in whatever afflictions Divine Prov. brot his way. ==> *"Everything this side of hell is mercy, and the mercies I receive are greater than my burdens."*

As a pastor he was deeply concerned for those under his charge. As a theologian, he knew all to well that there was nothing more dangerous than bad doctrine and self-deception, partic. t/SD of false faith.

Hence, his great work ==> "TACD" – a grave warning to t/myriads of false professors of a non-saving faith.

The book (originally a series of sermons) was reprinted about 15 years ago. John MacArthur wrote a forward to this fresh release ==>

"Matthew Mead's challenge to spurious believers is as timely today as when he wrote it in 1661. More than just a period piece, this volume offers a much-needed antidote to the shallowness and flippancy that characterizes today's Christianity. It contrasts sharply with the modern tendency to embrace as a brother or sister in the faith everyone who names the name of Christ. It sounds an alarm that few today would dare even whisper. In fact, *The Almost Christian Discovered* provides sobering proof of how far the contemporary church has slipped from the moorings of her heritage. [Today's] Christians, conditioned to accept carnality, worldliness, and compromise as part of the normal Christian experience, are certain to be shocked by Mead's admonition. We are not used to hearing truth presented in such straightforward and confrontive terms. Matthew Mead is no diplomat He is a real preacher, and he speaks with prophetic accuracy." [John MacArthur, Foreward]

[ii] Convicting!

Every true believer in JC, when taking a hard look at t/reality of spurious faith, will sense some degree of conviction. As MacArthur observes, "[Mead's] expose of the "almost Christian" rips the cover away from the subtle forms of hypocrisy that lurk in all our hearts."

Hope ==> God use such warnings, not only to spur t/elect on toward perseverance, but to convict those who are religious but not regenerate.

[ii] Mead's Introduction - he gives his central thesis

"There are very many in the world that are almost and, yet, but almost Christians." {restate}

Instinctively, we shy away from that sort of contention. If for no other reason than to be almost a Xn is like being almost pregnant. But Mead's point is that t/CH has always had tares among the wheat. Cf. Matt. 13.

"Many are near heaven and, yet, are never the nearer. Many are within a little of salvation and, yet, shall never enjoy the least salvation. They are within sight of heaven and, yet, shall never have a sight of God. It is said of the truly righteous, he shall "scarcely be saved"; and it is said of the seemingly righteous, he shall be "almost saved." "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." The righteous shall be saved with a "scarcely"; that is, through much difficulty. He shall go to heaven through many sad fears of hell. The hypocrite shall be saved with an "almost"; that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven." [5]

That's the paradox! How low a true believer may fall and yet have true grace. How high a hypocrite may go and yet have no grace!

"The saint may be cast down very near to hell and yet shall never come there, and the hypocrite may be lifted up very near to heaven and yet never come there." [6]

[iv] Where does that leave us?

Should we despair? Not if we're believer. Can we have assurance? Yes. Another ? is this: "Are these warnings of any benefit to t/true Xns?"

Mead contends (I agree) that ==>

we ought not be shaken or discouraged by this.

The warnings against falling short of God's grace are not there to wound believers, but to awaken sinners from their slumber.

Mead uses as an example ==> (Jesus in Matthew 26) ==> "One of you will betray me." ==>

". . . they that were innocent suspected themselves most and, therefore, cried out, "*Master, is it I?*"

So when we hear or read passages like 2 Peter 1:10 / or Heb. 3:12 -- We cry out from our souls: "*Is it I?*" & we cling t/more tightly to t/blood stained robe of our Lord.

We look at where we stand. Solely on t/imputed right. of JC or are we trusting in ourselves, our religiosity, our baptism, or something else?

Warnings against laxity and unbelief are used by t/HS to fuel our perseverance.

[v] That we who do believe wrestle with these things is a sign of life

Those who are dead remain unmoved.

Example ==> Bring a lawsuit against a corpse. Go to t/visitation room at a funeral parlor, pick out a man from among t/dead who are on display there, and threaten him! Tell him that you will tear his eyes from his sockets! Tell him that you will rip his tongue from his mouth! Will he fear // move?

He won't have a care in the world. He's dead! Same thing with those who are spiritually dead. I can warn you that your apathy against t/things of God, your fruitlessness, your false doctrine are sure signs that you are lost and hellbound. You must repent before it's too late. But there will be those who will turn a deaf ear; who will sit there & tell themselves that they believe in Jesus, they are better than most, and no one ought to be fanatic at religion.

UNLESS - God uses those warnings as a means to pull your dead heart from your chest; that with new eyes you can see t/lostness of your estate and believe.

[vi] Many (if not most) among the spiritually dead remain unmoved

But Mead also points out that this isn't always t/case. There are those whose consciences are pricked by t/truth & like t/Jewish leaders to whom Stephen preached in Acts 7 ==>

51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit;"

Those who heard Stephen's words of truth were "cut to the quick".

Jesus said that t/HS comes to convict t/world as to sin, right. and judgement. (Jn. 16:8).

Some are convicted so as to be saved.

As a rebellious teenager I was convicted of my sin & resisted t/Spirit of grace. For those destined to E.L. that Spirit of grace is ultimately irresistible. After months of fighting against God I was given eyes to see.

Some are convicted so as to be saved. Others, many others, are convicted of their sin, their rejection of truth, so as to be condemned.

That's something Matthew Mead addresses as well ==>

"There, the strife is between the will and the conscience; conscience enlightened and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, that is against sin; the will and affection, not being renewed, are for sin. And this causes great tugging and combats, many times, in the sinner's heart. Thus it was with the Scribes and Pharisees. Conscience convinced them of the divinity Christ and the truth of His being the Son of God, and yet a perverse will and carnal affections cry out. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" [41-42]

[vii] The rest of Mead's book is guided by a series of 5 questions

The first question dominates t/book. Half of its pages are devoted to it.

[I.] Question One [16]: "How far may a man go in the way to heaven and yet be but almost a Christian?"

Close doesn't count except in horseshoes and hand grenades.

How close can someone be to Christ & yet not know Christ?

How close can someone be to heaven, yet be an heir of hell?

Mead answers that ? with a series of 20 replies.

1. He may have much knowledge.
2. He may have great gifts.
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the word.
7. He may delight in the word.
8. He may be a member of the church of Christ.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great and visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer.
13. He may suffer for Christ.
14. He may be called of God.
15. He may, in some sense, have the Spirit of God.
16. He may have some kind of faith.
17. He may love the people of God.
18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.

19. He may be, in some sense, sanctified.

20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true Christian can, and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

A. Yes, a man may have great knowledge of the things of Christ and yet not know Christ

1. Knowledge IS essential

There can be no saving belief in X if there is no knowledge about t/things of X.

a. Verses 3-4 ==>

I. Salvation's Sufficiency: The Believer's Inheritance (3-4)

A. An Inheritance Granted by Grace (3)

B. An Inheritance Gained Through a Knowledge of Christ (3)

Time & time again in this text we see knowledge on display (v. 2,3,5,8).

b. What did we see back in verse 2?

Grace and peace be multiplied to you . . .

How is it multiplied? Through knowledge ==>

. . . in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

COL 1:9-10 [we] ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

(1) This is true knowledge

What I referred to as ==> A Familial knowledge of God Through Christ

Family or genetic knowledge that can only come through a change in one's spiritual DNA – New Birth.

Philippians 3:10 ==>

I consider all things to be "loss" on account of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord

1 thing to refer to knowledge of X; another to speak of greatness of KOX; Here: it's the "surpassing greatness" of KOX.

Surpassing what? Everything! Tru knowledge of JC surpasses everything (nothing excluded)

Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

That's a tru knowledge of JC. Like a man who finds something of such great value that he's willing to give up everything he is & has to gain it

(2) Familial knowledge

Not just knowing facts // Intellectualism. *"To know experientially; to know with experience; to know personally; to have a relationship with."* So imp. that t/o Script. idea of "knowing X" is used as a syn. for salvation.

John 17:3 (Jesus' HP prayer) "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

It isn't merely academic. Hell won't only be t/abode of apostates, pagans, and heretics. It will be populated by 1000s whose theology was otherwise orthodox.

[I.] Question One [16]: "How far may a man go in the way to heaven and yet be but almost a Christian?"

His answer ==>

A. Section I. A man may have much knowledge and much light; he may know much of God and His will, much of Christ and His ways, and yet be but almost a Christian. For, though there can be no grace without knowledge, yet there be much knowledge where there is no grace.

"To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head and heat in the heart, knowledge in the understanding and zeal in the affections. Some have zeal and no knowledge - that is blind devotion. Some have knowledge and no zeal - that is fruitless speculation. But where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian."

"It is not every knowledge of God and Christ that interests the soul in eternal life. For why, then, do the devils perish?" They have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though by their fall, they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge."

James 2:19.

Not only knowledge, but practice.

[II] C. Section III. A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be but almost a Christian.

He can exercise what appear to be genuine spiritual gifts.

He can even profess allegiance to Christ!

"In St. Matthew, you read of some who came and made boast of their profession to Christ, hoping that might save them. "Lord," say they, "have we not prophesied in Thy name, cast out devils in Thy name, done many wonderful works in Thy name?" Now what does our Lord Christ say to this? "Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me."

Mark, here are they who prophesy in His name and yet perish in His wrath; in His name cast out devils and then are cast out themselves; in His name do many wonderful works and yet perish as wicked workers. The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing than calling a ship the Safeguard or the Good-Speed will keep her from sinking. As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts, so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths. Now, then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then a man may be a high professor of religion and yet be but almost a Christian." [27]

[III] D. Section IV. To come yet nearer, a man may go far in opposing his sin [even hate his sin] and yet be but almost a Christian.

"A man may forsake the life of sin and yet retain the love of sin. Now, though leaving sin makes him almost a Christian, yet loving sin shows he is but almost a Christian. It is less evil to do sin and not love it than to love sin and not do it, for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace, but to love sin argues strength of lust. "What I hate, that I do." Sin is bad in any part of man, but sin in the affection is worse than sin in the conversation; for sin in the conversation may be only from infirmity, but sin in the affection is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy." [36]

"All sin may be chained and yet the heart not changed."

[IV.] H. Section VIII. A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges and yet be but almost a Christian.

An "A.C" may even delight in the WOG -

"There are many who delight in the Word because of the eloquence of the preacher . . . "

[V.] I. Section IX. A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"A man may hope for heaven and yet be doing the work of hell. He may hope for salvation and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences." [50]

[VI] J. Section X. A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the Word, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead gives a few examples of this from Scripture. King Saul being one from the OT. Simon from the NT (Acts 8).

"Again, Simon Magus is a great proof of this truth. He was under a great and visible change. Of a sorcerer. he was turned to be a believer. He left his witchcrafts and sorceries and embraced the gospel. Was not this a great change? If the drunkard leaves his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profane-ness, they think this is a gracious change and their state is now good. Alas! Simon Magus not only left his ;ins but had a kind of conversion, for "he believed and was baptized."

"Not every change makes a man a Christian. Indeed, there is a change that makes whoever is under it a true Christian. When a man's heart is so changed that it is renewed; when old things "are done away and all is

become new"; when the new creature is wrought in the soul; when a man is "turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God;" when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly, then a man is a Christian indeed." [51-52]

[VII] K. Section XI. A man may be very zealous in the matters of religion and yet be but almost a Christian.

Romans 10:2; Phil. 3:6.

[VIII] L. Section XII. A man may be much in prayer. He may pray often and pray much and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the Pharisees whom yet our Lord Christ rejected for hypocrites.

[IX] Mead Gives Several More Answers to this Question of "The Almost Christian Discovered" – But I don't want to belabor the issue

Point by point Mead uses Scripture to answer each question and any possible objections. By the time he gets to the end of his list, Peter's words in v. 10 scream from t/page – "...be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you..."

One may wonder about assurance. If it's easy to be self-deceived how can we be self-assured? (I'll address that in more detail in a later message).

On page 83, Mead thus comes to his "one great conclusion:"

Section XX. A man may do all as to external duties and worship that a true Christian can and, when he has one all, be but almost a Christian.

"You must know that all the commands of God have an *intra* and an *extra*. There is the body and soul of the command. Accordingly, there is an internal and an external worship of God. Now, the internal acts of worshipping of God are to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, etc. The external acts of worshipping of God are by praying, teaching, hearing, etc. Now, there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship. There is such a difference that they distinguish the altogether from the almost Christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor. Indeed, in this very thing the main difference between them lies." [83]

I fear that our churches are filled w/moralists and creedalists. They are those who claim to believe in X. Their theology is orthodox. They go to CH. But it's all "external."

They're religious. They do religious things. But like t/Pharisees, they are whitewashed tombs filled with dead men's bones.

I hear story after story about professed Xns who have sound professions. They look great on Sunday. But their lives demonstrate no real repentance from and sorrow over sin!

I know of a man, a gifted teacher w/a doctorate in theology, who used his influence to sow discord in a local church. The pastor of that congreg. told me about what he was doing & I said, "Good grief! This is so basic. Of all men, he ought to know better." It later came out that this man was also physically beating his wife. Apparently, there were times when she would be absent from church for a week or to, using some excuse when t/real reason was that she was hiding t/bruises visible on her body.

I could tell you many others . . .

Common element in all of this is that there's no repentance but plenty of rebellion. That's the difference.

We all look at our lives & see sin. Like Paul we bemoan that ==>

Romans 7:19 **For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.**

7:24 **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?**

7:25 **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . .**

8:1 **THERE is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in [Him].**

"The professor rests in duties, and so is but almost a Christian; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ. This is the way to be altogether Christians for, if you believe, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." [86]

"Why, then, should any saint of God be discouraged when he hears how far the almost Christian may go in the way to heaven? Whereas, he who is the weakest true believer, who has the least true grace, goes further than he, for he believes in and loves God. Should the almost Christian do less as to matter of external duties; yet, if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved. Should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he does, yet, had he not faith in Christ and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected." [85]

"The almost Christian can pray but he cannot love God. He can teach or hear but he cannot take delight in God. Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite: "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" Will he take pleasure in God?" Ah, no! He will not, he cannot!" [85]

"Pray much, but then believe much too. Hear much, read much, but then love God much too. Delight in the Word and ordinances of God much, but then delight in the God of ordinances more." [86]

We are brought back to grace.

That's where we began wasn't it? Verses 3-4? ==>

I. Salvation's Sufficiency: The Believer's Inheritance (3-4)

A. An Inheritance Granted by Grace (3)

[It is by Christ's] **divine power** [that we have been granted] **everything pertaining to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.**

Where there is true grace there is fruitfulness.

II. Salvation's Service: The Believer's Faithfulness (5-9)

A. Faithfulness Demonstrated Through Seven Virtues (5-7)

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence . . .

. . . and in [your] moral excellence knowledge;

. . . and in [your] knowledge, self control . . .

. . . and in [your] self control, perseverance . . .

. . . and in [your] perseverance, godliness;

. . . and in [your] godliness, brotherly kindness,

. . . and in [your] brotherly kindness, love.

The apex of the sorites.

How's that for an introduction to verses 8-9? We'll get there, LW, next week.

B. Faithfulness Contrasted with Vice (8-9)

What lies in our hearts? Is it ==>

1. Ambition or Apathy?

An ambition that isn't just outward religious acts, but a love and service that flows from a passion for the things of Christ.

Wrap up with this challenge, one that Matthew Mead gave to his congregation 350 years ago ==>

"Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven and perish in a delusion? Would you not be found fools at last? For none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls and for eternity? Oh, then, labor after, and pray for, a thorough work of conversion. Beg God that He would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be altogether Christians. All other changes below this saving change, this heart-change, make us but almost Christians." [54]

Boil it down to 2 basic areas ==>

1. What do you believe?
2. How do you behave?

For t/true Xn both of those questions presume an internal change of the heart (new birth / regeneration).

1. What do you believe? a. God; b. Gospel

Do you believe in God's true nature? That He is Triune?

Do you confess w/your heart t/full deity of t/Father, Son, and the H.S.

If you do not, you cannot be saved.

What do you believe as to the Gospel?

Do you believe that your only hope is in JC? Not t/CH; Not your works.
But that justification is solely by God's grace as a gift received by faith.

1. What do you believe?
2. How do you behave?

What's really in your heart? Is there love for God and His Word? Or
indifference/apathy?

Is there love for the brethren?

Is there sorrow for sin and repentance

Do you demonstrate grace in your life as it relates to others? "Partakers
of grace demonstrate graciousness." Or is your life characterized by
pettiness / unforgiveness?

Do you love God's Word? Do you receive it as t/very voice of God?

Love t/Gospel of grace?

Is your life and your confession marked by perseverance?

If these sorts of things are yours and are increasing (v. 8).

Be diligent (v. 10). Cf. Verse 11.