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The Question of Sincerity in Our Relationship with the Lord

By Elder Ong Keng Ho

We all make promises. Some are more serious than others. Do you remember the promise you made to your spouse when you got married? You stood before your family and friends, and together with your spouse, pledged your love for one another—“to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish 'till death do us part.” After some years of marriage how are you holding on to that promise you made? Was it always strong and fervent? Were there times when perhaps you wonder why you made that promise? Humanly speaking, how do we hold fast to our pledge? Is it not about commitment, responsibility, the ring, integrity, perseverance or all of these reasons and more?

Somehow when it comes to our relationship with the Lord, our approach takes a different turn. Our sincerity is called into question whenever we falter in our faith. There are so many other reasons for disinterest in our relationship with the Lord. It could be lack of fervor, distraction or doubt, as we come to realize our responsibilities in the relationship and a growing unwillingness to commit to it. But we are quick to justify our departure by doubting our sincerity of coming to faith in the Lord. I must say that this is a natural and common reaction. But what is important is to look at the underlying reasons for such doubt, rather than rush to pinpoint insincerity as the entire cause of a faltering confession. It sounds honest and humble but it can be delusive. Should I be sincere in my relationship with my Lord. The answer is a resounding Yes. But should I and am I, are 2 different questions. Am I always sincere that I do not stray from Him? No!

At the outset, the feeling of sincerity of our faith is not a ground for salvation. It cannot add to our acceptance with God. The justifying efficacy is faith. Faith is an instrument whereby Christ's righteousness is put into our account. When we embrace Jesus Christ as our Saviour, God declares us righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to us, which is accomplished by Christ's own perfect active obedience apart from us. This is called justification and is a legal status. It is entirely accomplished by God. Adding any of our works on our part, such as how sincere my obedience is, only takes away the merit of Christ on the Cross. Hence we are saved by grace through faith. Saving faith is a gift of God. Romans 3: 22-25.

Saving faith therefore has three parts to it—proper knowledge and conviction of the gospel, and trusting in Jesus as our Saviour. Aside from the essential knowledge and conviction that what the Bible declares to us about Jesus is true, we also trust entirely on Jesus to remove our sin and guilt by his sacrifice alone when we confess our faith in Christ. Created in us by the Holy Spirit, this trusting essence of faith connects us with the reality of our relationship with our Saviour and Lord. John 6:44.

There is a distinction between having the status and knowing its reality. Prince William is of royal status because he is of royal blood. But he will only know the reality of being a prince when he assumes the duties of the palace and walks, talks and breathes royalty. He can be a prince and yet not sense the reality of princehood, if and when he behaves like a commoner. Similarly a Christian is insecure and feels insincere when he does not live out his relationship with Christ, by trusting and walking with Him as Saviour and Lord. He then loses that reality of his status as a redeemed child of God.

Hence when the reality of our relationship with Jesus nose dives for various reasons, we are to look back to that promise we received from God when we were baptized. Baptism is a sign and a seal like the ring in our marriage pledge. In it, we remember God's promise and our commitment. And thereafter, we persevere in our responsibilities, asking and trusting in the Lord's strength and enabling, holding on to His promise to be with us always. 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

Our Christian life is a journey in holiness. Often we sense we are not making sufficient progress on the basis of our obedience. Sadly, we then doubt our salvation or our first steps of faith in coming for baptism. But our works of obedience should not take away our standing with Christ, which is based on Christ's righteousness alone. Where justification is a legal declaration that is instantaneous, sanctification, or growing in holiness, is a process. Often we confuse the two. However, at the same time, the two are not separate. As James puts it, faith without works is dead. "Justification is by faith alone, but NOT by the faith that is alone." Knowing the reality of our relationship with Christ begins with sustaining a personal, intimate, vibrant, one-on-one relationship with Him. What we need to be reminded is that when we live out our relationship with God we do so because we are already accepted by Him. This is the freedom that only the gospel grants. It is living a relationship where we already have favor instead of living it to gain favor.

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