

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 18 AUGUST 2019



*The author with her family*

## Don't Trust in Your Christianity

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“How do I know I'm really a Christian?”

In my teenage years I brought this question to a godly mentor. The answer I received was encouraging, seemingly logical, and dangerously misleading.

“Why are you concerned about it?” was the reply. While I forget the details of the conversation, the point was clear: if you fear hell and you *want* to be a Christian, isn't that evidence enough?

He seemed to make a good point. So I happily moved on, confident my ticket to heaven was on-call. Why wouldn't it be? I was pro-Jesus and anti-hell.

Of course, that assurance was perilous because I was not yet a Christian.

Actually, any casual assessment of a person's salvation is dangerous, since a Christian-looking life isn't necessarily related to salvation. It's entirely possible to tack on biblical habits and religious-like affections to an utterly unsaved soul.

I know this far too well. I was once a Bible-school graduate, aspiring missionary, and committed evangelist. I was also a non-Christian. Unless our head knowledge

shifts to life-altering trust, it's not biblical Christianity. I'm afraid many find themselves in a similar predicament of pretence after growing up “Christian,” developing “Christian” habits, and embracing “Christian” ideals – all without any real knowledge of the truly narrow road that leads to eternal life.

People have come to believe that a Christian-looking life is ample assurance of salvation. And such self-deception is dangerous – perhaps the most dangerous deception of all.

### Deadly Eight

Here are eight deadly ways we can look, feel, and act like Christians without actually trusting in Christ.

#### 1. I said the “sinner's prayer”.

We all know a rote prayer doesn't save a soul, yet a particular prayer is often pointed to as the primary evidence of one's salvation. Prayer *is* often associated with the moment of conversion, but no matter how memorable a prayer is, salvation only occurs when wholehearted repentance and faith (Acts 20:21) is a reality in a person's heart.

#### 2. I'm convicted when I sin.

Whether Christian or non-Christian, God's law is written on our hearts, and therefore we should feel guilty when we sin (Romans 2:15).

Even unrighteous Esau cried over the consequences of his sin (Hebrews 12:17). Non-Christians often feel bad about their sin, but what we do with our conviction – that is, whether we repent and obey God – is most telling (2 Corinthians 7:10).

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### 3. I feel close with God.

Feelings are one of the most common deceivers in this day and age. What we feel is quickly elevated to the status of truth. But the truth is, we can feel a whole host of things that may or may not align with reality.

### 4. I'm becoming godly.

This was my most prevalent flaw: I was convinced I was saved because I was far more Christlike (and humble!) than most other people. The pre-converted apostle Paul probably felt the same way. In Philippians 3, he says if anyone had reason to trust in his own righteousness, he had more! In fact, when it came to "righteousness under the law," he was "blameless" (Philippians 3:6). As a young man, Paul would've been "godly" by today's standards – and he wasn't yet converted.

### 5. I pray, read the Bible, and go to church.

Prayer, Scripture reading, and church attendance are central habits for the Christian life. Yet some people who attend our churches are not saved (Matthew 13:24–30). Some taste the goodness of God's Word and have no relationship with God (Hebrews 6:4–9). And non-Christians everywhere pray for any number of reasons (Matthew 6:5).

### 6. God is blessing my life.

God kindly gives sunshine and rain to Christians and non-Christians alike (Matthew 5:45), along with a multitude of other daily blessings (James 1:17). His common grace fills our lives. Though we're right to credit God for his kindness, we can't assume his gifts imply his saving grace.

### 7. I've made a difference for Jesus.

Matthew 7:22–23 is abundantly clear that some who think they've done great works for the cause of Christ will be denied access into heaven. No amount of leading small groups, helping with service projects, or going on mission trips can ensure salvation. Many with such résumés will hear the Saviour's chilling words: "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).

### 8. I know Jesus died and rose again.

This one is, by far, the most deceiving of what might be considered spiritual fruit. Agreeing with the facts of the gospel isn't equivalent to saving faith. Just think, the demons have far deeper theological understanding than do any of us, yet not one is saved (James 2:19). Unless our head knowledge shifts to life-altering trust, it's not biblical Christianity.

## Surviving the Deadly Eight

All of these assurances were a part of my non-Christian life. I certainly looked, felt, and acted like a Christian, and it deceived me (and everyone who knew me) for decades. And yet, counterintuitively, this same lifestyle now serves as evidence of real salvation.

Pre-conversion, I was buried under the weight of conformity. I wanted to do what I thought Christians were supposed to do – and I did it with all my might. For years, I was busy putting on Christianity.

Then the day came when God showed me my sin – the day I truly understood what separation from a holy God meant. It was the day I turned from my sin (even the sin couched in "Christian living"), to trust in what Christ did on the cross to grant me forgiveness.

From that point on, my assurance of salvation had nothing to do with what I had done, or could do, or will do; instead it had everything to do with what *Christ had already accomplished*. My confidence turned to him, and there's nothing more assuring.

But here's the irony: when looking Christian was no longer my highest goal, a Christ-follower is what I became (1 John 2:3–6). When our trust is in Christ, a Christian-looking life will naturally follow.

For the person who rests in Christ, godly habits, ideals, and affections don't spring from conformity to Christian culture. That type of evidence is not sufficient. Our fruit comes from a heart transformed by the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 36:26) through the forgiveness found in Jesus (Acts 10:42–43).

And once our focus is fixed on Christ alone, any and all assurances that come from a godly life become reasons for sweet rejoicing! When we know our salvation is in him, a godly, prayerful, church-going, conviction-driven, Bible-reading life becomes beautiful evidence of the work of God.

A Christian-looking life is never enough. A life lived in Christ always is. At that point we can – in fact ought to – rest assured.

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