

The Statement of Basic Beliefs by the Members of the Restored Hope Network Presupposes the Inseparability of Faith and a Spirit-Led Life, Not a Rejection of the Doctrine of Eternal Security

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Occasionally someone interested in joining the Restored Hope Network wants to know if rejecting a doctrine of eternal security is a requirement of membership in RHN. In short: It isn't.

The first point of "The Statement of Basic Beliefs by the Members of the Restored Hope Network" reads:

1. *Sexual purity is a life-and-death matter.* Sexual holiness for Christians matters to such an extent that a sexually immoral life can get even self-professed Christians excluded from the kingdom of God.

The phrase "self-professed Christians" leaves ambiguous the question of whether we are talking about actual believers or only those who falsely profess to be so. Those who adopt an eternal security view but recognize that a transformed life is a necessary byproduct of saving faith can sign the doctrinal statement in good conscience.

The only persons who would have problems with the statement are those who hold an extreme version of the eternal security doctrine. This version says: It is legalism to warn self-professed believers who engage unrepentantly in egregious immorality such as homosexual practice that such behavior is indicative of those not walking by faith and thus in danger of being excluded from God's kingdom. This extreme variation of once-saved-always-saved favors assuring such persons that they will go to heaven irrespective of whether their life is primarily led by the Spirit or by sin.

Genuine saving faith necessarily expresses itself in a transformed life. To say "I have faith" is to say "I no longer live but Christ lives in me" such that I now "live for God" (Gal 2:19-20). Even John Calvin, no slouch when it came to advocating the eternal security of the believer, could say: "Those in whom the Spirit does not reign do not belong to Christ; therefore those who serve the flesh are not Christians, for those who separate Christ from His Spirit make Him like a dead image or a corpse. . . . Free remission of sins cannot be separated from the Spirit of regeneration. This would be, as it were, to rend Christ asunder."

Prof. Michael Horton (Ph.D., Oxford University) of Westminster Seminary in California, a Calvinist theologian who supports the eternal security of the believer, states:

It is as unloving to hold out hope to those who embrace a homosexual lifestyle as it is to assure idolaters, murderers, adulterers, and thieves that they are safe and secure from all alarm.... Paul's point is clear: For Gentiles, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, within proper social boundaries) is normal, but to take that view is to exclude oneself from the kingdom of Christ. A proud sinner defiantly ignoring the lordship of Christ while professing to embrace him as Savior is precisely what Paul says is impossible. These passages do not threaten believers who struggle with indwelling sin and fall into grievous sins (see Romans 7 for that category); rather, they threaten professing believers who do not agree with God about their sin.... [By] refusing to agree with God about the nature of such behavior as sinful, those who embrace sexual immorality as a lifestyle reject the gospel. One cannot even seek forgiveness for something that one does not regard as sinful in the first place.... We dare not try to cut Christ in pieces, as if we could receive him deliverer from sin's guilt but not from its dominion, or as Savior but not as Lord" ("[Let's Not Cut Christ to Pieces](#)," *Christianity Today* online, 7/12/12).

Scripture is quite clear on this point (translations below are mine from the Greek text):

1a. Paul on the Spirit-led life: "So then, brothers (and sisters), we are debtors not to the flesh, (that is,) to live in conformity to the flesh. For, if you continue to live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by (means of) the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these (very ones) are sons (and daughters) of God" (Rom 8:12-14).

"Do not be deceiving yourselves: God is not to be mocked, for whatever a person sows, this also he (or she) will reap, because the one who sows to his (or her) own flesh will, from the flesh, reap (a harvest of) destruction; but the one who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap (a harvest of) eternal life. And let us not be bad in doing what is good for in due time we will reap (our harvest), if we do not slack off" (Gal 6:7-9).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who "continue to live in conformity to the flesh" and think that they will live forever deceive themselves for they will die and not inherit eternal life; that only those who "are being led by the Spirit ... are children of God."

1b. Paul on sexual ethics: "If you are being led by the Spirit you are not under (the jurisdiction of) the law. Now the works of the flesh are apparent, which are (of the following sort): sexual immorality (*porneia*), sexual impurity (*akatharsia*), licentiousness (*aselgeia*), idolatry ... and the things like these, about which I am telling you beforehand [i.e., before God's day of judgment], just as I told you beforehand [i.e., when I was personally with you] that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:18-21).

"Or do you not know that unrighteous people will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceiving yourselves: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor 'soft men' (*malakoi*; i.e. men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners), nor men who lie with a male (*arsenokoitai*) ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10).

“Sexual immorality (*porneia*) and sexual impurity (*akatharsia*) of any kind ... must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.... Know this indeed, that every sexually immoral person (*pornos*) or sexually impure person (*akathartos*) ... has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:3-6).

“For you know what instructions we gave to you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God: your holiness [or: sanctification], that you abstain from sexual immorality (*porneia*), ... because the Lord is an avenger concerning all these things, just as also we told you before and were charging (you before God). For God did not call us to sexual impurity (*akatharsia*) but in holiness [or: sanctification]. For that very reason the one who rejects (this instruction) rejects not a human being but God who gives the Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thess 4:2-8).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who live unrepentant, sexually immoral lives “will not inherit the kingdom of God”; that leaving the jurisdiction of the law is dependent on “being led by the Spirit”; and that “deceiving yourselves” includes thinking that believers can engage in serial-unrepentant sins of an egregious sort and get away with it. Surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who do not “abstain from sexual immorality... reject ... God who gives the Holy Spirit to you” and cause God to respond to them as an “avenger.”

2. 1 John: “If we say that we have partnership with him and are walking in darkness, we lie and do not have the truth; but if we are walking in the light as he himself is in the light we have partnership with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:6-7). “The one who says, ‘I have come to know him,’ and is not keeping his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.... By this we know that we are in him: The one who says that he remains in him ought—just as that one (Jesus) walked—also himself to walk like this” (2:3-6). “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (2:15). “If you know that he is righteous, you know that also everyone who does what is righteous has been born from him” (2:29). “No one who remains in him keeps on sinning [i.e. as a pattern of life]; no one who keeps on sinning has seen him or has known him. Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who does what is right is righteous, just as that one (Jesus) is righteous. The one who keeps committing sin is from the devil, for from the beginning the devil is sinning.... Everyone who has been born from God does not keep on committing sin [as a pattern of life] ... because he has been born from God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are evident: everyone who does not do what is right is not from God, also the one who does not love his brother” (3:6-10). “We know that we have transferred from death to life because we love the brothers... No one who hates his brother... has eternal life remaining in him.... By this we will know that we are from the truth and will persuade our heart before him” (3:14-20). “The one who keeps his commandments remains in him and (Christ) himself in him” (3:24). “We know that everyone who has been born from God does not keep on sinning (as a pattern of life)” (5:18).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who walk in darkness, who continue sinning as a defining feature of their life, who are not keeping God's commands, or who love "the world" with its lusts have no partnership with Christ, do not remain in Christ and God, remain in death and have not transferred to life, are not in the light, have not come to know God, do not love God, are from the devil rather than from God, are liars, and have no basis for reassuring their heart that they belong to Christ. Christ's atoning blood does not continue to cleanse their sins; the truth and the love of the Father are not in them.

3. James: "What is the benefit, my brothers, if someone says that he has faith but (that same someone) does not have works? His faith cannot save him, can it? ... Faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.... I will show you my faith from my works. Do you believe that God is one? You do well. And the demons believe—and shudder.... Faith apart from works is barren.... You see that [in the case of Abraham] faith works together with his works and (that) from the works faith was brought to completion.... For as indeed the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (2:14-26).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who claim that they have saving faith in Christ but do not exhibit the works which characterize such faith really have only dead faith.

4. Hebrews: "For if we keep on sinning willfully [or: deliberately, intentionally] after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer left a sacrifice for sins but a fearful prospect [or: expectation] of judgment and a raging fire that is about to consume the adversaries. Anyone who set aside the law of Moses "dies" without mercy "on (the testimony of) two or three witnesses" [Deut 17:6]. How much worse punishment [or: vengeance, retribution] do you think will be deserved by the one who trampled under foot the Son of God and regarded as unholy [or: profane; literally: common, ordinary] the blood of the covenant by which he was made holy [or: sanctified] and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (10:26-27, 29).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who willfully persist in a life of sin have "outraged the Spirit of grace" and face "a fearful prospect of judgment."

5. 2 Peter: Warns about some who "entice with licentious desires of the flesh those who barely escaped from the ones living in error, promising freedom to them, though they themselves are slaves of corruption—for by whatever one has been defeated [or: overcome], to this one has been enslaved. For if, after escaping the defilements of the world through a knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and becoming entangled again in these, they are defeated [or: overcome], the last circumstances have become for them worse than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn away from the holy commandment that had been transmitted to them." (2:18-21).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who return to the forms of immorality that they engaged in as an unbeliever are in a worse state now than before coming to a knowledge of the truth.

6. John of Patmos, Revelation: “[The risen Christ says:] ‘To ... the church in Ephesus.... You abandoned your first love. So remember from where [i.e. from what high state] you have fallen and repent and do the first works. But if (you do) not, I am coming to you and I will move your lampstand from its place, if you do not repent.... To the one who conquers I will give to him to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise [or: garden] of God’” (2:1, 4-7).

“[The risen Christ says:] ‘To ... the church in Smyrna.... The devil is about to throw (some) of you into prison in order that you may be tested; and you will have distress [or: oppression, affliction, tribulation] for ten days. Become faithful to the point of death and I will give to you the wreath [or: crown] of life.... The one who conquers shall certainly not be harmed from the second death’” (2:8, 10-11).

“[The risen Christ says:] ‘To ... the church in Pergamum.... You did not deny your faith even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you.... But I have against you a few things, that you have there (some) holding to the teaching of Balaam [i.e., the Nicolaitans], ... [who teach you] to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.... So repent. But if (you do) not, I am coming to you quickly and I will make war with them with the sword of my mouth.... To the one who conquers I will give to him (some) of the manna that has been kept hidden and I will give to him a white stone...’” (2:12-17).

“[The risen Christ says:] ‘To ... the church in Thyatira.... I have against you that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and she teaches and deceives [or: misleads, leads astray] my slaves [or: servants] to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent, and she is not willing to repent from her sexual immorality. Take notice: I am throwing her onto a bed and those who are committing adultery with her into great distress [or: affliction, tribulation] if they do not repent from her works ... and I will give to each of you according to your works [i.e., what your works deserve].... And to the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end I will give to him authority over the nations’” (2:18, 20-23, 26).

“[The risen Christ says:] ‘To ... the church in Sardis.... You are dead. Become watchful [or: on the alert, awake] and firm up [or: steady] the remaining things that were about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.... Repent. So if you do not become watchful, I will come like a thief.... The one who conquers in this way ... I will certainly not blot your name out from the Book of Life...’” (3:1-3, 5).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who turn to idolatry or sexual immorality, or otherwise deny their faith, and do not repent will not inherit eternal life.

7. Jesus: “From their fruits you will know them. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In this way every good tree makes good fruit but the poor quality tree makes bad fruit. A good tree is not able to make bad fruit, nor a poor quality tree good fruit. Every tree that does not make good fruit is being cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, from their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven but (rather) the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name and didn’t we cast out demons in your name and didn’t we do many deeds of power in your name?’ And then I will declare to them publicly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me you who do the work of lawlessness.’ So everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be compared to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain came down and the rivers came and the winds blew and struck at that house, and it fell and its fall was great!” (Matt 7:16-27).

Jesus’ interpretation of his ‘parable of the sower’: “And these are the ones sown on the rocky ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy, and they have no root in themselves but are lasting for a time. Then, when distress [or: trouble, affliction] or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away [literally: are stumbled or tripped up, i.e., to their ruin]. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who heard the word and the concerns of the age [or: world] and the deception [or: seduction, lure] of wealth and the desires [Gk. *epithumiai*; normally: sexual desires] for other things come in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:16-19; compare 13:13: “But the one who endures to the end—this one will be saved”).

“I am the true vine and my Father is the one who works the soil [i.e., farmer, vine-grower, gardener]. Every branch in me that is not bearing fruit he takes away [or: removes; i.e., cuts off] and every one that is bearing fruit he prunes [literally: cleanses; i.e., clears of superfluous growth] in order that it may be bearing (even) more fruit.... Remain in me and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit from itself if it is not remaining in the vine, so neither (can) you if you are not remaining in me.... because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me he is thrown out like the branch and dries up and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned” (John 15:1-6).

In a context discussing sexual sin: “If your right eye threatens your downfall, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members be lost and not your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand threatens your downfall, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members be lost and not your whole body depart to hell” (Matt 5:29-30).

Also, to the woman caught in adultery: “Go, and from now on no longer be sinning” (John 8:11). Compare John 5:14: “No longer be sinning *lest something worse happen to you,*” namely, forfeiture of eternal life (5:24-29).

Since it is in Scripture, surely we all have to agree that self-professed believers who call Jesus “Lord” but do not bear the fruits of a transformed life will be turned back by Jesus on the Day of Judgment with the words, “I never knew you,” and will go to destruction. This includes sexual sin which threatens one’s downfall. We cannot deny the words of Jesus. Sexual immorality can get self-professed believers excluded from the kingdom of God.

Conclusion: The ideas that one’s faith is known by one’s fruit and that serial-unrepentant sexual immorality of an egregious sort is a prime indicator of a life not lived by faith are foundational concepts in New Testament teaching. Both those who think that one can never lose salvation and those who think that one can fall away from the faith are able to agree (indeed, must agree) on this point.

However, we do not want to admit to membership anyone who thinks it a good idea to assure homosexually active “gay Christians” (or any self-professed believers engaged in any kind of severe sexual immorality) that their behavior is no impediment to inheriting the kingdom of God. Paul, following Jesus, repeatedly warned self-professed Christians not to engage in grossly immoral patterns of behavior because those who did so were at high risk of being excluded from God’s kingdom. This is a historical fact and not up for debate (i.e. that Paul issued such warnings is self-evident from his own statements in Scripture, some of which I cite above). The position that self-professed believers can lead their life “in the flesh,” under the primary controlling influence of sin, and need not walk by the Spirit or be led by the Spirit (as if faith were a mere intellectual assent to the truth rather than a holistic life reorientation) is a heretical, anti-Christian position repeatedly contradicted in Scripture.