

Confidence in Conversion: *How to know if we are truly saved* - Part 1
1 John 1-5

*"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that **you may know that you have eternal life.**"*

Introduction: When I was growing up in the 80's, one of the favorite family activities was going to the pizza parlor for dinner as a family. Typically a Friday night, Round Table Pizza provided a time for the family to sit together and for the kids to go play video games. Now these games never cost more than a quarter (Dutch people never played the elite \$ 0.50 games...or at least Bakker's never did), you got about 1-3 minutes of game play, and within about 15 minutes (amazingly the time it took to cook a pizza), all your quarters were gone. This is why life changed when we got our first Nintendo gaming system at home where you could play for free. But it changed even more when we learned there were cheat codes built in to the system, and if you put those in, it accessed *unlimited life*, which meant we could play a game like *Contra* or *Mario Bros.* and not worry about dying and losing the progress of the game. There was a newfound **confidence** in playing, knowing that the game would not end.

When it comes to our salvation from sin and judgment in Jesus Christ, God wants us to have the **confidence of clarity**, desiring that we would know that our salvation is not only **secure**, but it is **real**. Far too many conversations have been had with people at funerals of a loved one who had passed away, and the family clings to the hope of a **decision** made in early life without any other marker. Too many have banked on a **profession of faith** at one point in life, but have not demonstrated any fruit, leaving those around to question the validity of the profession. Still others live in **debilitating doubt** as to whether they are right with God, being unable to enjoy a reconciled relationship with God (doubt itself is not bad, but when doubt grips and lingers, it has adverse affects). **But it is NOT GOD's INTENTION for us to have this lack of clarity.** He actually intends for us to have **ASSURANCE** of our salvation, and even gave us an entire book of the Bible to help us.

The letter of 1 John was written to the churches of Asia Minor to help give them assurance in the core tenets of Christianity and salvation, since they had been filled with doubt from false teachers. In 5:13, John says, **"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."** Not only does this signal the fact that John wanted the church to know, it also means that we CAN actually know. **Assurance** of salvation is possible. So to any of us who have asked, "How do I know if I'm a Christian", or "Am I really saved?", 1 John is for you, and this sermon set will help.

Before getting into the text, it's important to understand a few Biblical principles:

- **Examination in our life is needed –**

2 Corinthians 13:5 says, ***"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? –unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"***

It's appropriate to talk about testing as all schools are back in session. Testing and examination not only show what you know, but the expectation is that one would actually **pass the test, not fail**. In other words, testing gives a clear look at where someone stands based on the basis of what they are being tested in. It is extremely important to remember, when we are looking at these tests that we **are NOT TALKING ABOUT THE MEANS of salvation**, but the **RESULTS!** Testing ourselves is to

examine our lives to affirm what God is doing and how He is working. If there are areas that are exposed or weak, we can address those, which is a gracious thing.

- **False Assurance of salvation is real...and tragic** – One of the most sobering passages of Scripture is found in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not **prophesy** in your name, and **cast out demons** in your name, and **do many mighty works** in your name?’ And then I will declare to them ‘**I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.**”*

There will be MANY on the day they stand before the Lord in judgment who will think they are true believers but will be found wanting. They will point to the things *they did* in the name of Jesus as a basis for entrance into heaven, but Jesus will have a different one: **He never KNEW them!** This means that if anyone is looking to themselves or something they did as a foundation of assurance, this should be a stark warning.

In our culture, we have created a conundrum. We teach the gospel to our children and others, and want to quantify whether they understand or even agree with what was taught, and ask for a positive response. We have a catalog of “raising your hand”, “praying a prayer”, “throwing a stick in the fire”, or “coming forward after service.” Its understandable *why we use these tools*, but there is an inherent downside to them. It places the onus on **us** for salvation and by extension, assurance. The reality is, as we have looked at over these last weeks, unless God by His grace regenerates our heart, gives us grace to believe, and causes us to be born again (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3), we could NEVER make a decision for Christ, turning from our sin, and follow Him.

“The genuine believer has assurance of salvation not only because of past profession of faith but also because of the ongoing work of God in His life that continues to transform him in the image of Christ.”¹

Profession alone is NOT evidence, but the divine work of regeneration and the ongoing work of the Spirit of God in transformation. A profession without evidence of faith can have little assurance of eternal life.

- **Perseverance is expected...and given** – Assurance of our salvation is bred out of another reality that the Bible teaches, and that is the doctrine of Perseverance.

*“This doctrine affirms that those who have been truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit, made new creatures in Christ, and are kept by the power of God will never ultimately fall away from apostasy and eternal destruction. The **reason for this confidence** is NOT FOUNDED upon the believer's strength or will, but upon the faithfulness and power of God. the God who saves His people also keeps them by His power. The God who justifies the believer will certainly sanctify him and ultimately bring him to glory.”²*

This is exactly how the apostle laid it out in the letter to the Philippians:

*“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you **will bring it to completion** on the day of Jesus Christ.”* Philippians 1:6

Salvation is a work begun, continued, and completed by God. Look at Romans 8:29-30:

¹ Paul Washer, “Gospel Assurance and Warnings”, p. 11.

² Washer, p. 89.

*"For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be **conformed** to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called and those He called He also **justified** and those He justified He also **glorified**."*

Do you notice that this is all work that God does, to declare us righteous, make us like Jesus (present and progressive sanctification) and He's the one who glorifies. It's the same as Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:11, that washing, sanctification, and justification were all done **to us**, and when God works IN US, He expects that we will work THROUGH HIM (Phil. 2:12-13)

What are the implications of this? A person who is truly regenerated, born again WILL become progressively more like Jesus, moving toward holiness and righteousness. **Perfectly?! By no means. Progressively? You betcha.**

Does this mean perseverance is up to us? No. If it was up to me to keep me saved, I'd fail every time (and so would you!) God is the one who keeps. But **because He keeps, we can work.**

What does that mean for those who made a profession but do not persevere or endure?

*"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that **it might become plain they are not of us.**" 1 John 2:19*

Whenever someone professes Christ but lives like He does not exist, there are **two possible realities:**

- 1) They are a believer who needs to repent and turn back to Christ - and a true believer WILL do this
- 2) They are an unbeliever, living out their **true reality**, and they need to be called to repentance

What about a loved one who professed early on and passed away after falling away? We trust that the Lord is gracious and loving, and can save at the last moments of life (Thief on the cross) and is the One who truly knows the heart and life of any person.

- **Confidence breeds specific results** – Having assurance of our salvation gives us specific gifts:

1. **Answered prayer** (1 John 3:21-22; 5:14-15) - We have confidence that He **hears us**, and when we ask anything according to His will, He will give to us out of that will.

2. **Long for Jesus Return** - When Jesus returns in judgment, it will be a shocking terrifying experience for those who will be judged. However, for the assured believer, we have **confidence and will not shrink from Him in shame** (1 John 2:28; 4:17), knowing that He is coming to bring us to Himself and ultimately reign with Him

3. **Bold access to Jesus our Lord** - *"This is according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have **boldness and access with confidence** through our faith in Him."* (Eph. 3:11-12)

Test #1 - We experience a NEW RELATIONSHIP with God Himself

Question #1: *Do you experience fellowship with God out of a love for Him?*

1 John 1:3 *"that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our **fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ.**"*

Growing up in the church, you could not have fellowship without food, and we even named a room in the church "The Fellowship Hall". But fellowship is not just sipping coffee and catching up about the weather (ITS HOTTTTTT!), it is **experiencing the same intimate communion** with God that John experienced. John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and he had a special place among the others. When we have true fellowship generated out of salvation, we pursue God through His Word, prayer, and love. We have tasted and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8), whom we draw near to (Heb. 4:16) and call Abba, Father (Rom. 8:15). Just as in a marriage relationship, this communion is regular, growing, and ongoing. The foundational discipline to know God is His Word, which He gave us to know Him. Disciplining ourselves is always difficult, but a true believer WILL HAVE a growing appetite for truth (1 Pet. 2:2) BECAUSE he wants to commune with His Father.

1 John 5:1-2 *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who **loves the Father** loves whoever has been born of him. **By this we know** that we love the children of God, when we **love God and obey His commands.**"*

Simply put, many say they have a love for God, but love always demonstrates itself into action. If we truly love God, it will be demonstrated in **loving fellow believers** and obeying His commands. We will talk about the first one next week, but for now, we'll remind ourselves that **ignorance is NOT BLISS when it comes to loving God**. A neglectful husband cannot love his wife (I don't know how she desires to be loved" is a terrible response by a husband). A believer who loves God is one who learns, studies, and keeps the commands that God has given us, not to earn, but to please and glorify.

Question #2 Do you know Jesus Christ?

When we talk about faith in Jesus Christ, we are talking about something that affects our heart, mind and will. With our mind we comprehend the knowledge about Christ, with our heart we have an emotionally settled confidence in His work, and with our will we **trust and commit ourselves to Him**. To know Jesus means we engage all three of these facets of faith.

1 John 2:5-6 *"**By this we may know that we are in him:** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same manner as He walked.:*

1 John 2:22-23 *"Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. **Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.**" (see also 4:1-3)*

1 John 5:9-12 *"Whoever **believes** in the Son of God has the testimony in himself."*

Jesus is not just a good teacher or a moral example, He is the Son of God who gives life. We know Jesus when we understand Him completely in our intellect, we have strong affections for Him in our heart, and commit ourselves to walk in the same way He lived.

Question #3 Do you have the Holy Spirit?

1 John 4:13 *"**By this we know** that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of His Spirit."*

Every true believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14)

1 John 2:27 *"But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie ---just as it has taught you, abide in him."*

Being indwelt and thus filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean we engage in more ecstatic worship, although we should have our hearts, emotions and affections engaged in worship all the time. The Holy Spirit **convicts, encourages, guides, and brings joy to our heart as we read the Word.** (1 Cor. 2:10, 12; John 14:26; 16:8, 13). He will direct and guide our hearts to Christ (1 John 4:2) He will produce the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23) that can be mimicked but not produced by any other way.

How do you know if you have the Spirit? Do you have a growing understanding of God's word? Are you convicted of your sin to the point of repentance? Do you know and understand Christ more and more? Is there good fruit being produced in and through you?

So to summarize, do you love God, know Christ, and have the Holy Spirit? Are those areas growing in you, or have you neglected those things? For those who cannot answer these questions positively, the good news is that there is good news. Jesus died for sinners like us, taking our place on the cross so that we could have a newly reconciled relationship with God. When we recognize our sin, believe in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, His death and resurrection, and repent of our sin, turning away from it to Jesus, we can be born again. Today, on this blistering day, is a day that you can know Jesus as your Lord, God as your loving Father, and the Spirit as your faithful guide in truth.

For further reading:

"Am I really a Christian" by Mike McKinley is a short, clear, and accessible study on the marks of being a true believer, complete with study questions. I'd recommend it for your own study, for your family going through it with your kids, or if you are beginning to disciple someone.