

Confidence in Conversion: *How to know if we are truly saved* - Part 2
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: A strange thing has happened over these last few years, and for the most part, I don't like it. It was not too long ago that we had babies in the house, much like some of you are experiencing right now. Late night feedings, a foggy existence due to lack of sleep, and diapers...oh the diapers, were all part of this experience. We would laugh at spaghetti dinner faces, take video of droopy diaper runs through the house, and even while we didn't want to, laughed at public de-robing (not my daughters per se, but you get the point). Watching newborns and toddlers is thrilling, enjoyable, and gives a large sense of responsibility since these precious lives are literally in our hands. However, just like any living and breathing thing, they do not STAY in this state, but **transform** into independent, thoughtful, and maturing people. We sometimes wish we could freeze time, but we also know we raise our kids to eventually leave our house to start their own family/life.

Now, watching children run around acting like toddlers is cute, but a 42 year old man doing the same thing is no longer charming or adorable, **it's tragic**. To be labeled *childish* in one's adult years is not a complement, and the expectation for anyone who is an adult is that they would put away childish ways and **act** like an adult. Adulthood will breed **tangible, quantifiable, and observable** changes from our toddler days, and no one would argue against it: "*Yeah, I'm an adult but I still rub spaghetti on my face at dinner, still wear a diaper, and take my clothes off at the Regal Center*". No one would say that's acceptable, and would have to admit this person needs to change or truly is still a child.

Last week we started with the question: *how do I know if I am truly saved?* This question is vital, not only because God gives us that answer in Scripture (which means HE WANTS US TO KNOW), but assurance of our salvation frees us up to enjoy our relationship with God, live with full joy (1 John 1:4), and watch expectantly for the return of Christ. There is distinct freedom in **assurance** since we no longer have to **fear** the **future** and can have **confidence** in the **present**. We pointed out a few **principles of assurance**:

1. God is the one who Secures and assures that we will Persevere - Philippians 1:6 - "And I am sure of this, that He who *began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" We know that no one can snatch us out of the hand of the Father or Son (John 10:28-29) and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39)

2. Growth is both expected and inevitable for a true believer - Like any human child, it is normal for them to grow up in stature, intellect, and interpersonal relationship. Like newborn babies, we grow as we crave the pure milk of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2), through the speaking of the truth in love we are to grow up into Christ and maturity (Eph. 4:13, 15), grow in grace and knowledge of God (2 Pet. 3:18), and engage in the good works God had planned for us (Eph. 2:9-10). This is not an addition to salvation, not reserved for a category of Christian, but is the expectation of **every true follower of Jesus Christ**.

3. Assurance is based on the Results of salvation, not on earning - 1 John gives us "tests" or the attributes of a true believer so that we would know that we know the Lord. These are not tests that we take to gain salvation, but examinations of our life to see if what is **being produced** is consistent with

a life that is *born again* in Jesus Christ through His substitute on the cross for us that we believe by faith and entrust ourselves to, repenting of our sins and receiving forgiveness from His sacrifice.

We started last week with the first test question, which was "**Have we experienced a new relationship with God Himself**, specifically meaning do we have an active *love for God, do we know Jesus Christ, and do we have the Holy Spirit indwelling in us?* These would all be evident in our hunger for God's Word, our desire to obey, and our growth in knowledge. Now we will evaluate our **new relationship with sin, obedience, and holiness**, looking at our desires and the fruit God is producing in us.

Test #2 - What is our relationship with our sin, obedience, and holiness?

1. Does our life reflect the light & truth of Jesus?

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

1 John 1:5-7

Most of us have experienced it, heard about it, or read about it. A professing Christian who acts one way in public and another way at home. The professing Christian who has the foulest mouth and quickest temper in the office, the dad who serves at church on Sunday and yells in anger or inebriation during the week, or the Christian who never cracks a Bible, sets foot in a church, or has anything to do with other believers ("they're all hypocrites anyway").

Hypocrisy is a plague on God's church. In our culture, there is upside to *saying you're a Christian*, or at least it's respected or not punished, so the "saying" it part is easy. **But God is NOT impressed with our mere words** (Read Isaiah 1:10-20 to see what He thinks of hypocritical actions toward Him!). He gives no points for those who say the right thing but betray their words with actions. **Jesus** said He is the **light of the world**, and whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life (John 8:12). We know that the light is the truth of His person, but also the lamp and light of His Word (Psalm 119:105), which illumines our mind through the Holy Spirit. **Paul commanded** us to **walk as children of the light** since we USED to walk in darkness (Eph. 5:8). And walking in the light should be seen by all (Matt. 5:14) so that others will see what saved people are and will know what salvation brings (Isa 42:6; Acts 13:47).

This is difficult for those that were raised in a church (or church culture) or have been in a church a long time. When our life is a product of the culture around us (morality, goodness, etc), it's often difficult to know our motives or differentiate between cultural morality and that which is produced by **new birth**. One of the ways to diagnose: *are you the same person at home, in private, online, and in your thought life?* Do each of these areas reflect the light, or are you keeping things hidden in the darkness? Whenever we hear of a brother or sister fall into major sin or who have left the faith, it's often because they have **kept hidden who they really are!** Light exposes darkness, and light frees us from the darkness. So are you walking in the light of truth in all areas of your life, or are you keeping things hidden in the darkness?

2. Do we have conviction and confession of sin?

*"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.**"*

1 John 1:8-10

Before Christ saved us, we were sinful and LOVED IT! Sure we had to deal with the shame and guilt that sin brought, but our goal was to be happy or feel good and would pursue whatever means that would bring us that end. We sinned because we were **fleshly**, and could NOT walk in holiness because our hearts were **cold, stone, and dead**. But all of that changed when Christ moved us from death to life, from darkness to light, and stone hearts to soft ones.

Here is the reality today: **All of us are sinful. Often more sinful than we'd like to admit.** Even as we sin less **overtly, we recognize that the sin of our heart, motives, and desires still are present each day.** So a born again believer is NOT one who does not sin at all, but one that has a **new orientation toward sin.** We used to love it...now we HATE IT. We used to pursue it...now we run from it. We used to deal with guilt and shame with MORE SIN...now we know we can be forgiven through our Advocate and Propitiation (1 John 2:1-2). In fact, I believe Christians should be those that MORE READILY admit our sin since WE KNOW WE ARE FORGIVEN and NOT REJECTED.

But doesn't everyone feel bad for their sin? The answer is: yes and no. Here is what **2 Corinthians 7:10** says, *"For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* When God convicts us of sin, we not only confess it for forgiveness, but we turn from it toward righteousness. Worldly grief **produces sorrow but no change.** It feels bad but does not turn us. In Ephesians 4:25-32 it is clear what confession and repentance looks like: when is a liar no longer a liar? When he speaks the truth. When is a thief no longer a thief? When he uses his hands to give things away. When does bitterness and wrath go away? When we are willing to forgive as God in Christ forgave us.

Are you convicted about your sin? Ever? Do you regularly confess your sin? Do you recognize the areas of your life that you are prone to sin? New birth in Christ allows us to confess our sin and find forgiveness in Christ, and in that process we have assurance.

3. Do we have a desire to and practice of obedience to God's commands?

*"And **by this we know** that we have come to know Him, **if we keep His commandments.** Whoever says **"I know Him"** but does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. **By this we may know** that we are in Him; whoever says He abides in him ought to **walk in the same way in which He walked.**"*

1 John 2:3-6; cf. 5:2-3

We always do what we truly believe. We make time for what's valuable and push other things to the margin, prioritizing what is most important and letting the secondary go for when we have extra time. God gives us **commands for our good, and they are not burdensome!** Just like holiness is NOT set in opposition to happiness but is rather a means to BE happy, obedience to God in Christ is for our joy and best!

Obedience, then, does not exist in the **margins of our life!** Far too often for believers, clear, Biblical commands get pushed to secondary positions. We make room for the things that are valuable at the time (kids events, fun activities, entertainment) and sacrifice clear commands: **reading and knowing God in His Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, using our gifts IN THE CHURCH, evangelism and discipleship, giving, and serving.** Sure, we can do some of these things, some of the time, when we have time or it fits into another activity. But **keeping God's commands means** we not only KNOW what they are, but we make THEM the priority, pushing everything to the secondary position or letting them go altogether if we cannot do them AND obey. For the **born again** believer this means that we HAVE to differentiate between **GOOD AND BEST**, since what we need to say "no" to are often good things, not overtly sinful things.

So here is the diagnostic: *Are you growing in your obedience to God's commands? Is your greatest joy found in obeying Christ, or does it feel negative to you?* A true believer is assured when obedience is not only primary but welcomed and joyful.

4. Are we growing in our pursuit of purity?

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears, **we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.** And everyone who has this hope in Him **purifies himself** as He is pure.*

1 John 3:1-3

obedience is essential, but it is FAR GREATER than mere external conformity. We know that what God wants from us is **purity from the inside out**, which is why He cleanses our hearts (Ps. 51:10) and literally gives us new ones (Jer. 32:39-40; 2 Cor. 3:3). We know that when our hearts change, are softened, and the Spirit is guiding, we WILL desire to obey. What John says here is that all that we are doing now is preparing us for the time we will **see, be with, and be like Jesus**. God is purifying us and preparing us to serve Jesus for the rest of eternity, and we will do that WITH HIM.

So we should have a passion for purity, one that affects our minds, hearts, and conscience's. **Hebrews 9:14 says**, *"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**"* Dead works are those that we did FOR God without being purified BY God. All the good we did before Christ were filthy rags, not sweet aroma. What God does in us through **new birth and the blood of Christ is purify us from the inside out**. This means that we *cannot simply look at external markers for our standing with Christ, we must examine our hearts and consciences.*

So here are some diagnostic questions: *what do you find yourself dwelling on in your mind? Do you struggle with envy, worry, lust, or anger in your mind and heart? If people could see your thoughts and desires, would they see the same person or a impure one?* The path to purity is the cleansing from the gospel, the intake of God's Word (Rom. 12:1-2), and the pursuit of others in sincere, brotherly love (1 Pet. 1:22). Are those your pursuits?

5. Have we turned from practicing sin to practicing righteousness?

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

**No one who abides in him keeps on sinning;
no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.**

7 Little children, let no one deceive you.

*Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 **No one born of God makes a practice of sinning**, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 **By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.***

1 John 3:4-10

Finally, assurance comes when we examine the **course of our life over time**, not simply in the moment or day. We all sin (as we've said), and we may even sin the same way for a time, but none of us should be comfortable in our sin. Sin belongs to our old self, our former life. I remember when I was in Jr. high that we had PE uniforms that we'd wear every day, with the expectation that we'd bring them home at the end of the week to wash them. However, this young man would not bring his home for the semester, and by the end of year they would stand up on their own (and even had its own personality). The only thing to do with these at the end of the year was to take them off, bring them out to a field, and bury them deep. That is our old self. It stinks, but it no longer belongs in our life. However, sometimes we go out and dig up our old self and put it on, because we think it feels so comfortable and normal.

A true, born again believer is one who does NOT CONTINUE SINNING habitually, but puts off the old self and puts on the new. The new self is categorized by **righteousness, both in word and deed, in action and desire**. The course of our life, if looked at in a macro way, should be marked by righteousness, not sin. When there is an obvious sin or sinful habit, we are ruthless in cutting it out, in repenting of it, and turning from it.

Here is how **Paul describes it in Romans 6:6-7, 11-12**, "*We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, **so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin**. For one who has died has been set free from sin...So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey your passions.*"

The chains of slavery to sin have been broken, and we no longer have to sin or bow to our sinful desires, so we **should act like it!** The best way to fight against our sin is to pursue God in righteousness, rather than getting as close to sin as we can.

So, do you have habits of sin in your life that you do not address or struggle with? Are you comfortable with certain sins? Do you justify your sin? Is the course of your life one that displays a growth in righteousness or continually characterized by sin?

How are you doing on this test? Are you growing in your assurance? Are you humbled and even more dependant? Convicted? I know I am. Sin is real, ever-present, will make us stupid, and does not fight fair. Yet, we are no longer bound by sin in Jesus Christ, so we can now **admit our sin, confess it, receive forgiveness, be cleansed from it, turn from it, and abstain from it**. The true believer has assurance of salvation when he is moving toward holiness and purity, away from sin, and is readily willing to repent often.

For Further Study: I'd highly recommend "**The Gospel According to Jesus**" by John MacArthur. This book was foundational to my thinking about the gospel while I was in college, and explains clearly what the gospel is and demands.