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True and False Assurance



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In the article "True and False Assurance," Steve Gregg discusses the topic of assurance of salvation. While it is not necessary for individuals to have assurance of their salvation, it is important for them to understand false presumptions that can lead to a false sense of security. True assurance of salvation comes from obedience to God's commandments and love for God and others. Believers should persevere in seeking God and maintain a surrendered life to Christ to experience genuine salvation and discipleship.

Transcript

So, as we talk about assurance of salvation, I want to actually question something that I was always taught, and that is that if you pray with somebody who's come forward at an altar call, if you lead someone to the Lord, apparently, that you need to make sure they have assurance of salvation. The way you do this is by quoting a Bible verse to them. The Bible verse of John, chapter 1, says, This verse was always the last verse you give somebody before you send them on their way.

Do you know that you have eternal life? And if they have said a prayer, and have jumped through whatever hoops you've been instructed to direct them through, then it must be that you insist upon them saying they know they have salvation, they know they have eternal life. And this seemed entirely orthodox to me for a long time, until after I'd lived a long time, which I have, and after I'd led a number of people to the Lord, and after I'd seen many of them fall away, or some of them that I had, as I thought, led to the Lord, didn't seem to ever really live a holy life in any sense, I began to wonder whether it was a good idea to have given such people assurance of their salvation. And I began to wonder why it is so important that we give people this assurance.

It seems to me that God is the one who needs to give people the assurance of their salvation, and if He doesn't do it, I don't believe it's appropriate for me to do so. Because if God doesn't bear witness to them that they're saved, then I'm not sure I would bear witness that they are. Now, they might be, they might be saved, and I might not know it, but that's not for me to tell them.

That's for God to tell them, and they can read the Word of God for themselves. You know, 1 John is an epistle that's about assurance of salvation. And it gives a number of tests of salvation.

We'll look at those tonight, but we're going to look at other material, too, in the Scripture. The Bible throughout the New Testament, and some of the old, too, actually indicates that there are people who think they are saved, and they have what seems to be assurance of salvation, but they are not. And I'd like to talk about five things very quickly that can lead a person to a false assurance of salvation.

And I would say that although it's best if all people are in touch with the reality of their own relationship with God, therefore, if people are saved, they should know they're saved, and if people are not saved, they should know they're not saved. That's the ideal. But if it was necessary either to have saved people who didn't know they were saved or unsaved people who thought they were, I'd opt for the first.

I don't think it's ideal to have saved people not know they're saved, especially on their deathbed. That'd be particularly a problem. But I have known people that I think I'm pretty sure are saved, and they're not positive, but they have all the fruit, but they're just kind of judging themselves maybe more harshly than I think maybe the Scripture would in some cases.

But I don't know. I don't know if they're saved, and if they don't know, I feel sorry for them, because I know I am. And it certainly makes a big difference, knowing that you are.

But again, if I either had to settle for saved people thinking they're not saved or not being sure that they're saved, and unsaved people who are quite sure that they are saved, I think the saved people who don't know they're saved are better off than the unsaved people who think they are. But neither is really ideal, and neither is what I would opt for. I would think it best for unsaved people to know they're not saved.

And therefore, those who have a false assurance of salvation need to really find that out. And there are five things I find in Scripture, there may be others, that may lead people to believe they're saved when they're not. The first of them is presumption that time erases guilt.

These are not Christian people. These are not people who know the gospel. But they are people who have a sense that there is a place called heaven, probably, and a place called hell, probably.

And there probably is a God who's going to judge everyone, and that some people probably won't go to heaven. But they will, and they're sure that they will because they have not violated too many of the standards that they think are the most important

standards for people to observe. And even if they are made to acknowledge that they have broken God's laws in the past, they often feel that because there's been no consequence that they have felt for the disobedience, that God has overlooked this or that time has perhaps caused this to kind of just dissipate.

And, you know, with the passage of time, we tend to forget offenses and perhaps God does, too. And there are many in the scripture who seem to have gotten the impression that their offenses were forgotten because a long time had passed between the time of the offense and the time of the reckoning. Esau is an example that it seems to me, and the writer of Hebrews brings this out, that Esau, for a morsel of food, sold his birthright.

But decades later, when his father, he thought, was dying and his father wanted to give him the patriarchal blessing that that only really went with the birthright. And Esau had no right to it because he'd sold his birthright years earlier. Esau sought to get that blessing in the providence of God.

As you probably know, the story Jacob got that blessing instead of Esau. And when Esau learned of it, he was dismayed and he wept because he thought that he would get the blessing, even though he had done something very irreverent previously in casting it away. But that had been a long time ago.

He thought he'd gotten away with that and that, you know, by now his dad or everybody, maybe even God himself, would just kind of ignore that fact. It was a major, a major irreligious thing that Esau had done in casting off his birthright, which was a sacred thing. It had to do with the Messiah, had to do with the call of God on a people of God and so forth.

And Esau just didn't care for it all. The Bible says he despised it, his birthright. And yet he thought that he'd still be OK.

He'd still get the blessing in the end, but he didn't get the blessing. And Jacob had a couple of sons or three that found out the hard way. Also, that old sins are reckoned with eventually.

And though they may have forgotten their sins, God does not. Reuben, for example, the firstborn of Jacob, on one occasion slept with his father's concubine. Obviously a horrendous act, not only of adultery, but of incest, really.

And and a great insult to his father, a horrendous sin. But it says Jacob, the father heard about this, but apparently he did nothing about it. Time passed and then decades later, probably 30 years later, when Jacob was dying and conferring his patriarchal blessing upon his sons, Reuben, the firstborn, stood in line to expect the blessing of the firstborn.

And he was denied it because of what he had done 20 or 30 years earlier, at least something that had never been punished, something that he'd gotten away with, he

thought. But time had passed. The guilt of that, the shame he probably felt over that had pretty much dissipated.

And he did not realize until it was too late that he had lost his birthright because that Simeon and Levi, two other sons of Jacob, had the same problem. They went out and murdered some people in their youth. And later on, when they stood next in line for the birthright after Reuben was rejected, they were rejected, too, because of what they'd done.

They were not punished at the time they did it. And so they felt like they'd gotten away with it. But later they found they'd lost more than they had realized.

It says in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and verse 11, because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil. People who don't get punished instantly for their sins feel that they've gotten away with it and often feel that God has overlooked it. And they often have reason to think, well, you know, I may have lived a wild life when I was a kid, when I was a young man, I sowed my wild oats, but I've lived a pretty conservative life since then.

And after all, why would God hold any of those things against me? That's old news, those sins. Well, of course, guilt doesn't go away. There's no statute of limitations in God's court.

You know, if you go seven years without getting caught, you know, you don't have to suffer or anything for it. That doesn't work with God. There's no statute of limitations to assume that old sins and the guilt of old sins dissipates with the passage of time.

Just because nothing has happened to indicate you got caught is a big mistake. People make a lot of people walking around, not knowing how much trouble they are in with God. It says in in John, chapter three, in the closing verse that he that does not believe has the wrath of God abiding on him.

Now, just do these people know they have I mean, when you see the average unbeliever walking on the street, do they know they have the wrath of God hovering over them? Like a sort of Damocles hanging from a thread, ready to fall and destroy them at God's whim. They probably have no no idea of this at all. That doesn't mean it isn't true.

They they walk about with the wrath of God upon them. And when they die, that wrath is manifested in a way that they never knew it would be. They presume themselves to be on good terms with God, but their presumption is greatly mistaken.

Another problem, of course, and this also is not usually among Christians, but it can be, is the presumption of merit wrongly defined. The assumption is that God will reward merit and that if I've been good, I have merited something from God. And and if I've done good deeds more than bad, then God kind of owes me something.

And people who think they're saved like this, a good example, that would be the Pharisees and particularly the story Jesus told about the Pharisee in Luke, chapter 18 and verse 11 and following up the publican in the Pharisee went to pray and the Pharisee said, God, I thank you. I'm not like other men. He says, I pay my tithes of everything I have.

I fast twice a week. I keep your laws. I'm not an adulterer, a fornicator, a thief like this publican over here.

And he congratulated himself that he had merited much in contrast to the publican who had really nothing to commend himself. And the publican didn't pretend that he did. Publican beat his breast.

He was ashamed even to look into heaven. He said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. But Jesus said the second man went down to his house justified.

The first man did not. The Pharisee who who justified himself, the Pharisee that thought that his merits made him a shoe in for heaven. Jesus said that man didn't go home justified.

He wasn't saved. He thought that his good works would get him saved. And it simply wasn't the case.

It wouldn't happen. And then there's that scripture that if you listen to me regularly, you hear me quoted a lot. It's one of the most important scriptures, I think, to quote often.

And you've heard it a lot from me if you listen to me much, because I think it's a very frightening scripture that everyone needs to deal with. It's in Matthew, chapter seven, verses twenty one and following. Jesus said, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

But he who does the will of my father in heaven, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name. And then I'll declare to them, I never knew you depart from me. You who practice lawlessness.

Now, I don't know if these people appeal to their prophesying and they're casting out demons and their mighty works, they did as like something to merit salvation or whether they saw that as an evidence they were true Christians. But they certainly thought that the deeds they did were something God should be proud of, something God should acknowledge, something that should count for something. But as we see in this illustration, it didn't count for anything.

Now, these people are not the Pharisees. These people would apparently be Christians. I don't know that the Pharisees ever prophesied in Jesus name or cast out demons in Jesus

name.

There was one man who tried that. Actually, seven sons of Sceva tried that were not successful, but that wasn't very common. Doing works in Jesus name is something usually Christians do or people who think they're Christians.

These people clearly aren't Christians because Jesus said he never knew them. They're not saved, but they certainly thought they were. And Jesus said there will be many in that day who have this particular reaction, who obviously think they're saved based on stuff, religious stuff, deeds they've done, preaching, even delivering people from demons, I mean, helping people in the name of Jesus.

But they did not do the will of the father, which we better find out what that is, because without doing the will of the father, you don't enter the kingdom of heaven, according to Jesus Christ. In this statement, a third presumption is a presumption of faith wrongly defined. Many people would say, well, I'm going to have because I believe in Jesus.

But I think you are probably the people in this room are probably familiar enough with scripture not to make the mistake that is commonly made. Because what is commonly made is the mistake of thinking that saying you have faith is the same thing as having faith that saves you. There are many people who say they have faith.

I have relatives who have all their lives said they had faith. They were church members and so forth, but whose salvation is questionable in my mind just because their activities have not necessarily been consistent with that. James said in James chapter two, that faith without works is dead.

There is a faith that doesn't have works. It is a faith of a sort, but it's a dead one. And if you're hoping to get life, you can't get life from something that's dead.

Faith that does not produce actions works is not a faith that counts for anything for salvation. In Galatians five, Paul said the same thing in Galatians five, six. He said in Christ it's not circumcision that makes a difference, it's not uncircumcision that makes a difference.

What makes a difference is a faith that works through love. To say you have faith but to have no works is to fool yourself into thinking you're saved when you are not. And many are in that class.

Another presumption that leads to a false assurance of salvation is a presumption of grace wrongly defined. Not only do people misunderstand what faith is, they misunderstand what grace is. There are many who feel that to be under grace is the same thing as being under no obligation.

That if you're saved by grace, then it really doesn't matter how you behave. Paul knew

that there would be some that would think this way and he anticipated them. In Romans chapter six and verse 15, he says, what then, shall we sin because we're not under the law but under grace? Now, there's very few people I know who would say, yeah, we're not under the law, we're under grace, so we should sin.

I know very few people who say we should sin. Even those who think they can get away with sinning are not usually so bold as to recommend sinning. But there are many who do sin and live in sin and do not repent.

And when confronted about their sin, they would claim that they are saved because of grace. They're not under law and not under law means they don't ever have to obey God. Not under law means to them there's no obligations.

It's a free gift, as they say. Well, it is a free gift. That's a biblical term.

However, that term can be greatly misunderstood. To misunderstand grace as a free gift that comes with no obligations, no conditions, is to not read the Bible very carefully. Grace is conditional.

By grace, you've been saved through faith. And faith itself, as we have already pointed out, is something that makes a difference in your behavior. A person who claims that he has grace or that he's under grace, but he does not live for God, is a person who is fooling himself.

He is misinterpreting what grace is. Jude indicated that there would come a time when false teachers would come and do great damage to the church. Because, as he says in the book of Jude, verse four, at the end of that verse, he says they turn the grace of God into lewdness.

They turn the grace of God, the concept of grace, into some kind of permission to sin. And I know this very well because I would say the church I was raised in made this mistake. They didn't intend to, but I remember very well as a teenager in the high school group, sitting around speaking with the high school group leader, and the question came up, well, if we're Christians and we live in sin, can we still go to heaven? And the leader of the group, who was a seminary student in the denomination, he was just very uncomfortable with the question, because his theology told him, well, yeah, you can live in sin and still go to heaven.

But he didn't want to give these kids permission to live in sin, and he really seemed observably uncomfortable in answering the question, because his theology taught one thing, that he would never want anyone to practice. He didn't want these kids going out and fornicating and using drugs and getting drunk, but his theology told him it's really kind of okay if they do, because it's not going to have any impact on their salvation. And that is the skewed view of grace that many evangelicals hold.

That grace does not... grace means you have no obligations. Grace means you don't have to obey. That is not what the Bible teaches on the subject.

Paul, who is, of course, the one that people who appeal to grace in this manner often like to quote the most, Paul doesn't agree with them. In Titus chapter 2, and many of you have heard me use this verse many times. There are certain verses I use a lot.

I'm not ashamed of it. Some of them need to be repeated. But in Titus chapter 2, Paul says in verse 11, For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us.

The grace of God teaches us. What does the grace of God teach us? That we don't have any obligations, that we don't have to obey God, that we're not under the law, we're under grace. Is that what the grace of God teaches? No.

He said the grace of God has appeared and teaches us this. The grace of God teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. That's what grace teaches us.

If you are under grace, grace will teach you that. You will have grace inside, teaching your heart to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age. There is no salvation for those who do not have this grace teaching them this.

They may have something they refer to as grace, but it's not the grace that Paul was talking about. They wrongly define grace, they wrongly define faith, and as a result they get an assurance of salvation that is simply false and misleading. One other presumption I want to mention that leads to a false assurance of salvation is the presumption of unconditional security.

I believe in the eternal security of the believer, but the believer is defined in terms of biblical definitions. And as long as a person is believing in this biblical manner, he is a believer. And as long as a person is a believer, then he enjoys the security that a believer has.

I do not believe in the security of the unbeliever, even if he used to be one. The person who was once a believer and is now an unbeliever cannot appeal to the security of the believer because he's not a believer. A believer believes, and he doesn't only believe, but he believes with that faith that produces change in the life, that produces works in the life.

One who has not that faith is not a believer and has no security, even if at one time earlier in their life they were a believer. In other words, I don't believe in unconditional eternal security. And the reason I don't is because I don't find any reference at all in the Scripture to such a doctrine.

I find it in the church I was raised in and in many churches that I encounter, in some radio programs I listen to, but it's not really there in the Bible. Salvation is conditioned on faith, and continuing to be saved is conditioned on continuing in that same faith. If a person does not continue in the faith, they do not continue to be saved.

I'll give you a few scriptures on that now, though if I were teaching specifically on this doctrine of eternal security, I'd give you a lot more. I'll just give you a few to make this point. Colossians 1, 21 through 23, Paul says, And you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in his sight, if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.

Now, you are a partaker of Christ. God has made you part of the body of Christ to be holy and blameless. And this is your birthright.

This is your destiny, if indeed you continue in the faith, and if you are not moved away from it. There are people who don't continue, and there are people who are moved away from the faith, and therefore these conditions have not been met in their case, and it cannot be said that such people are saved, though many such people have been told that they are unconditionally secure, and therefore they have an assurance of salvation, an assurance of a salvation that is an imaginary salvation. They are not saved.

Under biblical definitions, they are not saved people, but they are quite sure they are, because they have been misled with false teaching on this matter, it appears to me. In Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 14, the writer of Hebrews, some people think it's Paul, some think it's someone else. Hebrews 3.14, the writer says, For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence, which is faith, steadfast to the end.

If you hold on to your faith to the end, you are a partaker of Christ. You partake of Christ as long as you hold the faith. Your faith connects you to Christ.

Paul told the Galatians that when they ceased to be justified by faith, and they started trying to be justified by the law, that they had fallen from grace and were estranged from Christ, Paul said. That is a possible condition to fall into, not one that I recommend. In Romans chapter 11 and verse 22, under the figure of the olive tree and the branches that were grafted in, the branches that were cut off, I hope you are familiar with the passage, we don't have time to take the whole context in detail, but in Romans 11.22, Paul says, Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God on those who fell, severity, but toward you goodness.

If you continue in his goodness, otherwise you also will be cut off. Now, the persons who are being addressed are saved. Paul affirms that they have been grafted in by faith,

whereas some branches have been cut off for their unbelief.

The cut off branches are unbelievers, they're lost. The grafted branches have faith, they're saved. The life of the tree, the root and the fatness of the olive tree is in them, they share in the life of the tree.

But he says, you can be cut off. If the natural branches got cut off when they ceased to believe, you can be cut off too if you don't continue to believe. They were cut off, that's the severity of God, don't ignore that.

Consider the severity of God and the goodness, toward you goodness, if you continue in his goodness. Again, the presumption of unconditional security is one thing, probably more than anything else in our time, that will lead people who think themselves to be Christians to end up in hell, because they did not heed the teaching of scripture, but they heeded the doctrines of man, and believed and presumed that there is such a thing as an unconditional salvation, unconditional security. Now, I consider that false doctrine.

Now, having said that there are all these presumptions that lead people to have a false assurance of salvation, can we really know for sure if we are saved? Well, yes, we can. As I mentioned earlier, 1 John 5.13 says, These things I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. It is obviously possible to know if you are a participant.

There is something called eternal life. This life is in his Son. He that has the Son has life.

He that has not the Son of God has not life. If you are participating in the Son, then you have the life. And you can know that you are doing so.

But, those who know they are saved also must know that their salvation is conditional. God makes promises and he sets conditions for them. The assurance of salvation is certainly taken to be a reality in Romans chapter 5, in the opening verses where Paul says, Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

How could we have that unless we knew we were saved? We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. This rejoicing in the hope of being glorified with the glory of God, to appear with him in glory at his coming, this hope is not just wishful thinking.

It is a solid, firm foundation. It is an anchor to the soul, it says in Hebrews chapter 6, which enters into that which is within the veil and holds on. It is a hope that is really a knowledge that this is what we expect to happen, because we are saved.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope. Now, perseverance. We

know that we are saved.

Paul is writing that he knows he is saved, and his readers can know they are saved. But one of the ways that they know they are saved has to do with their perseverance. In tribulation, for example.

You know, tribulation and suffering are very, very useful for sorting out the true Christians from the false Christians. I believe that God uses suffering to turn back the fearful and the unbelieving, and to sort out between the true and the false believers. It was Origen, I believe, who said that the same sunlight that melts wax will harden clay.

Tribulations, like the heat of the sun, affect people. People are affected by sufferings, by afflictions. But if a person's heart is soft toward God, those afflictions melt the heart.

If the person's heart is hard toward God, those afflictions harden the heart. And God allows Christians to be tested. And I have seen some very discouraging things in the last few years.

People that I thought were true Christians, but who had not been very much tested. And in some cases, I thought for years that they were true Christians, and yet their lives had never been put to the test. But when their lives were put to the test, they hardened against God.

They became bitter against God. They became cynical against God. They thought, well, you know, I've served God.

How come God hasn't done better by me? How come God hasn't, you know, showed up and done what I thought he was supposed to do for me? And so forth and so on. And then they become resentful toward God because he hasn't done what they want him to do. And because of that, they're being tested by God's withholding the blessing they're asking or sending a trial in its place.

And that trial will sort out the wheat from the chaff. And a true Christian, when those trials come, will melt and will roll back on God and say, God, you're my only hope. You're the only thing, the only strength I have.

There's nothing for it but for me to just get nearer to you because I can't live without you. And these trials make it even harder to live. But they don't make me want to live without you.

They make it seem the more stupid and foolish and impossible to live without you. Trials will always drive a Christian. I don't know if I should say will always because it is through trials that some people actually backslide from being Christians.

But let's put it this way. A person whose heart is the Lord's will be drawn nearer to God

in times of trial. A person whose heart is not the Lord's will often be hardened against God in trial.

But the indication that we're saved, Paul says, we glory in tribulations and we persevere. And it develops character that our suffering actually improves us. And so Paul indicated these people can know they're saved.

But that doesn't mean they're unconditionally saved. They're saved by faith. We're justified by faith.

And we have access to this grace through faith, he says in verse 2. We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Well, as long as we have faith, then, this faith gives us access into this grace. And this grace is the means by which we stand.

But what if we stop having faith? What if we renounce the faith? What if we decide not to follow Christ anymore? Not to believe in him anymore? Well, then what? Well, obviously, none of these things remain true. They are true as long as we are in the faith. As long as we're drawing on the grace of God through faith.

That's how salvation comes to us. That's how salvation continues to come to us. Peter said in 1 Peter 1 and verse 5 that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

There is a salvation at the end that we're hoping in. And we're being kept by the power of God for that salvation. But it's through faith, Peter said.

1 Peter 1 and verse 5. We are kept through faith, by the power of God, through faith. As long as we have the faith, we have the salvation. And we're kept secure.

As long as, if we depart from the faith, then we are not kept secure. Now, when we talk about faith, remember, I'm not just talking about saying you have faith. We're talking about having the evidence of real faith.

That there's reliable proofs of genuine salvation. There are reliable tests that you can look at in your own life and say, do I pass these tests? If so, then I am saved according to scripture. If I do not pass these tests, then according to the same scripture, I am not saved.

Are you willing to take the test? I'm sure that many of you are, because many of you have known for years that you're saved, and your assurance is true and valid and genuine. Others, however, I know, there are people I know who, if they took the test, they'd fail it, although they're quite sure they're saved prior to taking the test. The Bible gives the test.

These tests do not create salvation. There are four things that are given in the book of 1

John that are tests of salvation. And he said, by this we know that we are saved, because we passed this test, and we know it because we passed this one, this one, this one.

But these things are not the means of salvation. It's not by passing these tests that we become saved. These are the things that accompany salvation.

The writer of Hebrews talks about certain people who backslide in Hebrews chapter 6, a well-known chapter, well-known passage I won't read, because he talks about the horrible state of those who have known God well and have fallen away and are no longer even in a state of heart that they're capable of repenting, and they're fit to be burned. However, in verse 9, the writer says, But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. There are people who backslide.

However, the writer has more confidence in the particular readers that he's writing to that they will not be among those who do. He trusts. He has confidence that he will see in their lives what he says are the things that accompany salvation.

There are things that accompany salvation. If you have salvation, these things will be there, too. They do not save you.

But salvation does not come without these things in its train. Salvation does not come alone. It brings with it these accompaniments.

What are they? Well, we'll get them from 1 John, but we'll get every one of them from other parts of Scripture, too. It's just that 1 John is a book devoted to true assurance of salvation, and it does give us four tests, and these tests are spread throughout the book repeatedly. I'll just take them in the order that makes sense to my mind to take them.

John kind of mixes them all together in various passages in different recurrences of them. But let's talk about the things that accompany salvation. These four things must all four be present for your assurance of salvation to have credibility.

All four of these have to be present. Now, when John speaks of them, sometimes he only speaks of one at a time, and he speaks sometimes in a way as if it's the only one. But it's clear from reading this whole book that all four of them are treated as if they are the only one.

All four of them are essential. And the lack of these four, he always says, proves we're not saved. So this is like clear-cut stuff.

The first. What is the first thing that accompanies salvation? Confession of Christ as Lord. Confessing that Christ is Lord.

Confessing him before men to be Lord. In other words, by your words and by your

actions, you advertise to the world that you do not belong to the world, but you belong to Christ. He is your Lord.

You are his slave. You wear his brand. And that brand is seen not so much in some kind of uniform you wear, or badge, or the Bible you carry, or the bumper sticker on your car.

That brand is your way of life. That your life is seen to be submitted to the Lordship of Jesus, and your words proclaim that this is so. You're not secretive about it.

You don't have a secret faith. You have an advertised faith, but it's not falsely advertised. It's a true faith that testifies by your life and by your words.

Jesus said, and we'll get to 1 John on this eventually, but let me give you a well-known passage where Jesus said this. In Matthew chapter 10, verses 32 and 33, Jesus said, Therefore, whoever confesses me before men, him I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven. What will he confess? He'll confess that you're one of his.

Because you are, if you confess him before men. But he that denies me before men, him I will deny before my Father which is in heaven. And denial of Christ is not merely verbal.

It is verbal at its most basic level. But denial of Christ can occur other ways, too. A person might be confessing Christ with his mouth at the same time denying Christ in a way that matters more than what he says.

That's what Paul says in the book of Titus. In Titus chapter 1, verse 16, he says, They profess to know God. So they've got the verbal confession there.

They profess to know God, but in their works they deny him. Now, you can't get away with denying him, whether it's in your works or your words. Confessing Christ and denying Christ are a matter of what you say and what you do.

And a true Christian will confess Christ with his mouth and with his life. He will not be ashamed to do so. The person who is ashamed of Christ, Jesus said, he'll be ashamed of them on the day of judgment.

That doesn't sound very good for them. If Jesus is going to be ashamed of me on the day of judgment, I have no reason to be assured that I'm saved. Why would he? On what basis could I be saved? If he's my only hope, his commendation is my whole hope of salvation.

For me to go and stand before the throne of God and for Jesus to say, I'm ashamed of you. I don't know. That doesn't sound like a very promising situation to me.

To deny me before the father, if he denies me, there's nothing left to commend me. To confess Christ before men is not a condition of salvation. However, it is something that people who have true faith will do.

Paul speaks of it almost as if it is a condition for salvation. But I don't know that I understand him quite that way. In Romans chapter 10 and verses 9 and 10, he says, if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus or that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.

For with the heart, one believes under righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. I admit that Paul makes confession sound like it is a condition for salvation, but I believe that his mind is this. It's like in some places baptism is treated almost like it's a condition for salvation in a few verses.

But as I understand it in the early church, true faith was recognized as existing when a person would verbally confess Christ and would be baptized. And these things were the proof that faith existed. They were so inseparable from faith that they didn't really separate them in their discussion of the things either.

But there are no doubt people who receive Christ on their deathbed never have opportunity to confess him before men because they never see anyone. But they're not going to go to hell just because they didn't have a chance to confess him. Confession is more a result of the kind of faith that saves.

And Peter, first John, many times indicates that salvation depends on a right confession of Christ. Obviously, a right confession depends on a right belief about Christ. What you believe is what you will sincerely confess.

In first John 2, verses 22 and 23, it says, who is a liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is anti Christ who denies the father and the son. Whoever denies the son does not have the father either.

He who acknowledges the son has the father also. Who acknowledges, who confesses Christ, that person has the father also. In first John 4, verses 2 and 3, John says, by this, you know, the spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is that spirit of anti Christ, which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world. And in the same chapter, first John 4, verse 15 says, whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God abides in him and he in God.

So that person is saved also. And this is not so much a statement about confessing, but it's about believing the right things, which follows with confession. Whoever first John 5, 1, whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

Now, confessing that Jesus is the Christ, confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh, confessing that Jesus is Lord, confessing that that Jesus is the son of God. Now, these are the things the Bible says that those who confess these things are true Christians. Now, of

course, that's not the only test.

It's the first test. Those who confess these things and pass the other three tests are true Christians, as we shall see. After all, if you pass the other three tests but denied that Jesus was the Christ, failing that one test would be enough to fail all.

These four things all in here in the same Christian experience with those who are saved. The second is the test of obedience or righteousness. Righteousness of conduct is obedience.

Now, I know that we are aware, especially since the Reformation, of something called imputed righteousness. We are aware that by faith, because of our faith, God counts us righteous on the moment we have faith. This is an imputed righteousness that is really what saves us.

That is what justification is. But once we have been imputed righteous, we live righteously. Once your heart has been declared righteous, it is.

You see, salvation is a miracle of transformation. Salvation is not a set of laws and rules and religious ordinances that a person must bring themselves under in order to be on good terms with God. Churches sometimes mistakenly teach it this way.

Certainly Islam and Judaism and other religions represent it that way, that you have to keep the rules and keep these laws and you'll be in. The Bible teaches salvation very differently than that. You are not saved by keeping rules.

You are saved by getting a transformed heart, which is a gift from God. If you put your faith in Christ, truly and wholly, God gives you this new heart. In Jeremiah, chapter 31, God talks about this in verses 31 through 33, where he says, I'm going to write my law in their hearts.

In Ezekiel, chapter 36, verse 25, God says, I'm going to take out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. And I'm going to put my spirit in you and make you walk in my ways. You see, this salvation is something that God does.

It's not something we do by obeying or keeping rules or submitting to standards. We don't save ourselves this way and we can't. Salvation is a work of God and it's a work of supernatural transformation of the heart.

Those who have had that transformation are born again, are saved. Those who have not had that transformation, but may attend church and keep all the rules and fit into the patterns, are very frustrated people, but they're not born again. Some people very close to me, I think, fit into this category.

And I'm not trying to be their judge, but there are people I know who have backslidden,

who surprised me tremendously. I certainly never thought they would backslide. They seem to be solid Christians for years and years and years and very pious and very obedient to Scripture.

But it became clear that this obedience was an obedience of terror. It was an obedience of servile fear. It was not an obedience that came from the heart.

One such person was talking to someone I know. And this person backslid after 25 years of seemingly walking with God. And they're in the world, they're away from Christ now.

And they said, you know, the years I spent as a Christian, I felt like I was in a cave. And now I've come out of it. I feel like I've come out into the light.

Well, that testimony really confuses me. Because my testimony would be just the opposite. When I'm not close to Christ, I feel like I'm in the dark.

When I'm close to Christ, I feel like I'm in the light. And certainly that is agreeable with what the Scripture teaches as normative. For someone to say, well, the time I spent as a Christian, I felt like I was in a dark hole.

But now that I'm not a Christian, I feel like I've come out in the light. I think, how can this be? And I know the answer. It's just hard to admit it.

This person certainly must have looked like a Christian because they conformed to outward standards, but they had no heart for it. I'll tell you what, that would be a dark cave. To have imposed rules of religiosity and keep those rules for decade after decade and have never any heart for it at all.

That would be a horrible thing. Jesus said, come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I'll give you rest. And most people think he's talking about the burden of sin.

I think he's talking about the burden of legalism. The Jews of his time that he's speaking to were burdened by Phariseic interpretations of salvation and legalism. And Jesus said the Pharisees bind heavy burdens on men's backs, but won't lift a finger to alleviate these people.

Legalism is a horrible burden. And Christianity does not recommend or endorse legalism in any way. According to Christianity, you must follow the dictates of your heart.

But if you are a Christian, your heart will dictate obedience to God. And if your heart does not dictate obedience to God, you're not a Christian yet. You might be fitting in to the church.

You might be doing everything externally that you know the Bible says you should do. But if it is not in your heart to obey God. Then your heart needs to be replaced by one

that does want to do that.

And that's what God says he does when he regenerates people. One of the surest proofs that a person is born again is that they have this new heart and they are obedient from the heart. Paul said in Romans chapter six, you were slaves of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart.

That form of doctrine to which you were delivered. Obedience is the surest sign of salvation. But not just obedience, but obedience with joy.

In First John, chapter five, it says in verse. Two and three. By this, we know the love of another.

Just look at verse three, first on five, three. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. Do you have two questions for you? Do you keep God's commandments? Is it your way of life to do what God said? Do you govern your life by all things that Jesus commanded? That's the first question.

If your answer is yes. The next question I ask, is that burdensome to you? Do you feel like you're burdened? Do you feel like you're in a cave? Do you feel like you're oppressed with shackles of religiosity? Then you need to get saved. Because the heart that loves God keeps his commandments and does not find them burdensome.

Indeed, find it burdensome to do anything else. I am capable of disobeying God and I have proven it many times in my life. But I cannot do it without feeling a crushing burden.

I feel the crushing burden when I'm tempted. I feel the crushing burden when I succumb to the temptation. And I feel the most excruciating burden after I've succumbed.

It is burdensome to disobey God. The way of the transgressor is hard. But to the person who has a reborn heart, obeying the commandments of God is a delight.

Not always easy. But something doesn't have to be easy to be delightful. If you've ever run a marathon, I haven't.

But I would imagine, maybe the marathon doesn't apply to marathons, but some kind of races that aren't so quite exhausting. One that really gets you exhilarated, you know, to excel in athletic events, in the Olympics. You know, that takes training, that takes hardship, that takes imposition of a burden on oneself of a certain kind.

But because you love it, because the goal that's set before you is a goal you embrace and love, you don't find it burdensome. I mean, yeah, it's hard, but it's a joy to do it. It's an exhilaration.

I love to teach. I don't know if you ever got that impression about me or not, but I love to teach. If I don't lose my voice, I can teach all day long and never be tired of doing so.

I find it exhilarating. But some people just find it a burden to talk about the things of God and to obey God. That's a very sad thing.

The best proof of regeneration is that your heart wants and loves to obey God. Yes, it's hard sometimes. Other times it's not hard, but even when it's hard, it's not burdensome.

It's not a grief, but it's a joy. And to the believer, disobedience is a grief. In 1 John 2, verses 3 through 5, John said, Now by this we know that we know him.

Now, this is a statement about assurance and salvation. To know God is eternal life. How do I know if I know him or not? How do I know that I don't just know about him? Churches are full of people who know all about Jesus, but I'm not so sure that churches are full of people who know Jesus.

And I won't be the judge of individuals, but my observation of the religious scene in general would tell me that our country is full of people who've got detailed knowledge about Jesus, but not very many who seem to know God and do exploits and be strong. And this is how we can know which category we're in. By this we know that we know him.

Oh, I want to know. How can I know? Well, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar.

And the truth is not in that person doesn't know him. You can say, you know it, but if you don't obey his commandments, you don't know him. Period.

You're lying if you say you do. But whoever keeps his word, truly, the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in him.

Certainly to be saved, we must be in him. We must know him. How do I know if I'm in him? How do I know if I know him? Well, do I keep his commandments? And we know from what we already saw in 1 John 5, 3, that he means we keep his commandments without it being burdensome to us.

Lots of Pharisees kept God's commandments, but they're not saved. And John would certainly not indicate that they were. They kept them without joy.

They kept them burdened by him. He's talking about the spontaneous, inevitable obedience that flows from a regenerated heart. A miraculously replaced heart.

Some have heard me use this illustration before. I like it. So I give it a lot.

I got it from a Puritan writer named William Law. He said when the Bible says that

Christians don't sin, he means that the same way as we would mean it if we said that a miser doesn't waste money. Now, it may not be the case universally that you that a miser would never waste money.

He might be tricked into it. He might have an unguarded moment and he might waste some money. But if he's a miser, he does not want to waste money.

The very fact that he is a miser defines him as one who will not purposefully waste money in a moment of weakness or being mistaken or deceived. He might do it. But if he does, the fact that he's a miser makes him regret that he has wasted any money and makes him resolve he will never do that again if he can help it.

He's going to do everything he can to avoid it because it is against his nature to waste money. He might do what is against his nature, but he'll feel that he's done something against his nature. It'll never feel right.

Now, there are people who believe, and I'm not interested right now in debating this point with him, that, you know, true Christians don't sin at all. John's words are often taken to mean that, but that's not the way I personally understand them. But I do understand them to mean that the heart that is God's cannot live in sin.

The heart that is God's is spoiled for sin. If you want to enjoy sin, don't get saved, because if you really get saved, you won't enjoy sin. You can be religious and enjoy sin.

There's a lot of people who are religious church members, professing Christians, who enjoy sin, but they're not saved. I say that on the authority of the Word of God. They're not saved.

People who are saved habitually obey God. They may fall out of weakness, but they'll get up again. James said in many things, we all stumble.

He included himself. Yeah, we stumble, but there's a difference between stumbling into sin and walking in sin. Stumbling is a mistake.

Stumbling is something for which you are determined to recover as quickly as possible. Walking is a deliberate course. Christians do not walk in sin.

You may find one that stumbles into sin once in a while, but that person will get back on his feet. If he's a righteous man, he falls seven times, but he doesn't stay down, according to Proverbs. Another verse on this in 1 John is 1 John 3, actually verses 6 through 10.

John said, whoever abides in him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen him or known him. Obviously, that person isn't saved if they haven't seen or known Christ, if they're living in sin.

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. Some people say, well, I'm righteous by faith.

I'm not righteous by keeping laws. I'm justified by faith. I'm righteous.

Well, John says, well, if you're righteous, here's how you can know. You'll be practicing righteousness. He that practices righteousness is righteous.

But he who does not is not. He says, he that sins is of the devil. For the devil has sinned from the beginning.

And for this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy in your life the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin. The same thing again for his seed remains in him.

And he cannot sin because he's been born of God. Now, I know Christians who can sin. So we're not talking about absolute impossibility of sinning.

We're talking about here. You if you have Jesus living in you, if God's seed is in you, you cannot live in sin. You can't do it because of what's in you.

If that was not in you, you could do it. But what is in you renders it impossible. And obedience to God as a general pattern of life is inevitable.

If you're born again. Chapter five and verse three. First, John says, for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments.

And his command is not burdensome. Now, in Romans six, we read a moment ago, verse 15, where Paul said, what shall we sin since we're not under the law, but under grace? Paul's answer to that is very important. He not only says, certainly not, but he goes on and explains why.

Certainly not. In Romans six, 15. What then shall we sin because we're not under the law, but under grace? Certainly not.

Do you not know that to whom you present yourself slaves to obey? You are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness. But God, we think that though you were slave of sin, you obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. Now, it says, having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Now. If you say you're saved by grace, but you think you can live in sin, you're missing something very essential. And that is the one you obey is the one that is your master.

Right now, being saved means that Jesus is your Lord. That means master. If he's your master, you'll obey him.

If you say, well, I'm saved by grace, but I'm obeying sin. Paul says, no, you may be obeying sin, but you're not saved by grace if you are, because sin is then your master. If sin is your master, Jesus isn't.

If Jesus isn't, then you're not saved. You demonstrate by your actions who your master is. If you saw a slave in the marketplace in Rome in Paul's day and you didn't recognize him.

And, you know, I wonder who I wonder who slave that is. All you have to do is watch him long enough. You'd see who's given him orders and who's bidding he's carried out.

And, you know, instantly who's slave he is, because his obedience to his master is the proof of who owns him. If you live in sin, that is proof that sin owns you. If you serve Christ and obey him, that's proof that he owns you.

He's your Lord. So obedience or righteousness is a test of salvation. Third test that John gives us is love.

This actually comes from Jesus. And John repeats it. Jesus to his disciples in John, chapter 13 and verse 34, says a new commandment.

I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all will know that you are my disciples. If you have loved one for another, if you are his disciple, you're a Christian and saved.

If you're not a disciple, you're not. How do you know? How does anyone know whether you are disciple? Well, she said, if you have loved one for another, then all men will know, including you, that you're a disciple. It is the sure test.

Now, love is not really something different than the previous. It's a different angle. But when we talk about obedience and righteousness, we're really talking about love there, too.

Because all that Christ ever commanded is to love. And every specific commandment he gave about behavior is simply a corollary of the command to love. Because all that he commands us to do is loving.

He said, as you would, that men would do to you, do that to them likewise. This is all the law and the prophets. This is the whole thing.

The whole bag of instruction is this, this, just love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you do that, that is the fruit of the spirit of God, the proof that you're a disciple and that you have the spirit of Christ in you. John says this a number of times in his epistle.

These verses are very well known, I'm sure, to you. I'll just give you a few of them without much comment. John, 1 John 3, verses 10 and following, he says, In this, the

children of God and the children of the devil are manifested.

That is, you can know who's a child of God and who's not. Who's a child of God and who's a child of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. That's the message. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life.

That's assurance of salvation, isn't it? We know that we've passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother has not passed from death to life. He abides in death.

He stays in the category of death. He hasn't passed over into life yet. He that doesn't love abides or remains in death.

But he that hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. This is a surefire guarantee.

If you hate someone, well, you don't have eternal life in you. I'm not making this up. It's what the Apostle John said.

If you don't love your brother, you haven't passed yet from death into life. Love for the brethren is a test of salvation. Now you might say, but there are some people who have trouble loving.

Trouble loving is one thing. Obeying God is sometimes difficult. I said it's not burdensome, but it's difficult.

It takes commitment. It takes energy. It takes perseverance in resisting temptation.

Likewise, loving certain people is sometimes difficult. But if you are a Christian, you are determined to love that person. Well, how do you love someone? Well, John talks about that too.

He says in verse 16 of 1 John 3, By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Jesus in the upper room in John 15 said, Greater love has no man than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends. How do I know if I love somebody or not? By having warm, fuzzy feelings about them? If so, then there's a lot of people I probably don't love.

Because a lot of people don't warm my heart to see them. There's a lot of people who just are not pleasant. I don't like them very much.

Liking people, by the way, is not a virtue. You like eggplant or you don't like eggplant. That's depending on how it suits you.

How pleasant do you find it? You like onions on your hamburger or you don't like onions on your hamburger. You like the work of certain musicians or you don't like it. That has nothing to do with virtue.

That has to do with taste. There's many personalities that you don't like, but other people like them. It's just taste.

And because of certain people's behavior, I'm sure there's behaviors you don't like. And for that reason you find it difficult to like certain people. That means they don't suit you.

You don't find them pleasant. That's not a sin. You don't have to find them pleasant.

I seriously doubt when Jesus said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do, that He was saying, I find these people very pleasant. I like these folks. These are the kind of people I really like to hang around with.

No, that's not what He was saying. He was saying, I love these people. I'm laying down my life for these people.

I don't like what they're doing. I'm not enjoying these people at all. To say I don't like something means I don't enjoy it.

And of course there's people I don't like, but there's no one that I know of that I would not lay my life down for. I don't say that as some kind of a casual flip thing. I made that comment to somebody back 25 years ago, and they were astonished.

I was astonished that they were astonished. I remember saying 25 years ago, I can't think of anyone I know, including my enemies, that I would not lay my life down for right now. I was talking to another Christian.

I thought they'd say, yeah, me too. And they were astonished. I thought, what's so astonishing? It's not exceptional.

It's what love is. It's what the Holy Spirit puts in your heart to do. And I think there's a lot of people that you might think you don't love, but if push came to shove, you'd take the bullet for them.

Sometimes I'm not real happy with my kids, but there's no question about it, I'd take the bullet for them any moment, without a second thought. Or for anyone I know, really. I mean, would you fall on the grenade for people who offend you? Probably you would.

Well, you would if you're a Christian. You would, because that's what Christians do. They lay down their life.

But you know, laying down your life doesn't always mean you die, physically. You have an opportunity to lay down your life every day, many times a day, without dying. By laying down your prerogatives, laying down your privileges, that's what it means.

And he points that out in verse 17. But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in that person? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

How do we have assurance before God? Assurance of salvation? By the fact that we love. We don't shut up our bowels of compassion from those in need. We do lay down our lives for the brethren.

And we would. In the ultimate test, we would lay down our lives for them, and that's not even open to question. In 1 John 4, 7 and 8, Beloved, let us love one another.

For love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But he that does not love does not know God. Because God is love.

Does a person know God or doesn't he? Easy. Does he love? Does he not love? He that doesn't love doesn't know God. A lot of religious people don't have any love for God or for man.

They're sour, bitter, unforgiving, spiteful people, and they're not saved. But they're members in good standing of the church. They might even be deacons or elders or pastors.

But without love, they are nothing. Paul said, I could speak with tongues of men and angels. I could prophesy and predict all kinds of things.

I could even get my body to be burned or give all my goods to the poor. But if I don't have love, it really is nothing. I'm not even a Christian.

I'm just a loud noise. And it profits me nothing at all. In 1 John 4, 20, and then reading on into the very beginning of chapter 5, John says, If someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar.

It's that simple. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from him that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who has begotten of him.

What he means by that is, if you love somebody, you'll love their kids. Why? Because the

kids are loved by the one you love. Love me, love my dog.

You love me, love my kids. You might not like my kids, or you might like them just fine. But whether you like them or not, if you love me, you'll love my kids.

Whoever loves the one who begot loves those that have begotten of him. I love everybody's kids. But I think I do because I love everybody that I don't know of anyone I don't love.

But God, some people say they love God, but they don't love God's kids. John says, no, that never happens. That never happens.

No one loves God if they don't love his kids also. One other test that John gives us in 1 John is, well, the witness of the Holy Spirit. Now this has more than one aspect.

In 1 John 3, 24, John said, Now, he who keeps his commandments abides in him and he in him. And by this we know that he abides in us. Okay? Assurance of salvation.

By this we know that he abides in us. By the Spirit whom he has given us. And he says something very similar to that in the next chapter, chapter 4, verse 13.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us. Because he has given us of his Spirit. If we possess the Holy Spirit, we are saved.

Now, how do we know we possess the Holy Spirit? Well, among other things, it says in Romans chapter 8 and verse 16, The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. The Holy Spirit is a revealer of what we would not otherwise know. That's why we look to the scriptures for information and for truth.

Because we would not ordinarily know about God the things that God has revealed through his Spirit in the world. When Jesus said to the disciples, Who do you say I am? And Peter said, You're the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responded and said, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonathan.

Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father which is in heaven has revealed it to you. It's a revealed thing. You've had it revealed to you.

Now, had flesh and blood not told Peter that Jesus was the Christ? Yes. His own brother Andrew, years earlier, had said, We have found the Christ. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.

Yeah, he had been told by his brother that Jesus was the Christ, and he came to look and check. But today, Jesus says, You don't depend on the testimony of flesh and blood. My Father has revealed this to you.

That's why you're blessed. When the Holy Spirit comes and makes Jesus real and

testifies to you and reveals the reality of Christ to you, this is a witness that you cannot mistake. You don't have to tell such a person, you know, from a Bible verse, This Bible verse says you're saved.

Do you know you're saved? Well, I think so. Not think so, are you? You have to know so. Well, I hope so.

Not hope so. Well, no. The Holy Spirit is self-announcing.

When he comes in, he bears witness. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the spirit of the believer that they are the child of God. And when that witness is born, it is heard internally.

And the believer knows that he's a child of God because the spirit of sonship has been given to him, crying out, Abba, Father. There's an internal revelation of Christ. I don't know how to explain this for the simple reason that it is a revelation of the Holy Spirit.

And flesh and blood can't reveal it to you. And I'm flesh and blood. So only the spirit can actually reveal it to you.

But if you're a born-again Christian, you know what I'm talking about. You may not know everything about it, because I have known people who I'm sure are true Christians, who have wondered whether they actually had this particular aspect of what we're talking about. They were just not sure if the spirit bore witness with them, because they kind of expect that to feel a certain way, or to have a certain kind of mysteriousness about it, a certain sort of a spookiness about it, and they haven't ever had anything really spooky happen to them.

I was prayed for when I was 16 to be baptized in the spirit. I had someone lay hands on me. I expected certain supernatural things to happen to me, and they didn't happen.

I thought I would speak in tongues. I didn't speak in tongues. I expected other things to happen.

I didn't feel the things I thought I would feel. And I was about ready to leave that place saying, I guess it didn't happen, I guess I don't have the Holy Spirit. But you know what, as I left, I realized there was something there.

There was something that changed. There was some internal readjustment that had taken place. There was that still small voice saying, you know, God is in me.

God is directing me. God is in my life. And it was something that wasn't just a matter of doctrine to me.

It was something that was revealed. And I know that the Holy Spirit bore witness with me about it. In 1 John 5.10 it says, He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in

himself.

Certainly this is the witness of the Holy Spirit that's being talked about here. So the person who is born of God knows Christ other than by hearsay. Because the Holy Spirit comes and reveals him to him.

This is the promise Jesus made in John chapter 14. I'll try to get this through quickly because we're near the time that I've set for myself to quit. In John chapter 14 verses 21 and 23.

In verse 21 Jesus said, He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. And in verse 23 Jesus said, If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come and make our home with him.

And Jesus and the Father with the Holy Spirit come and make their home with the believer. And Jesus reveals himself to the believer. That is, I don't know what you picture that to mean.

And I fear that in saying it, again I'm not making clear enough that this isn't necessarily something real mystical. Isn't necessarily something sensational. There's not necessarily goose bumps associated with it.

But what it is is that you know. That you know. That there's no doubt.

That you are his. And that he is real. And that he is your Lord.

And that you belong to him. You know that. Because some, the Holy Spirit has told you so.

You might not have heard it in so many words as you might expect from this that you would. You know, here's some kind of voice inside. But you, the witness is there in the form of an absolute unshakable confidence.

That Jesus Christ is real. And you don't have to be convinced by words, by other people. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1.12, which we, actually 2 Timothy 1.12, which we sang tonight.

I know whom I believe. And I'm persuaded that he's able to keep what I've committed to him against that day. I know the one I believe in.

I don't just believe. I know. You could no more convince me that Christianity is a myth.

Than you could convince me that I have no parents. And that all the contact I believe I've had with my parents has been a dream. There's nothing less real about Christ in my life than the reality of my own parents in my life.

That is, that's not an exaggeration. Because the Holy Spirit bears witness. The Holy Spirit reveals.

And then you know. Now, I just want to real quickly go over a few points that, under the general heading, What if you have no assurance at all? We've been talking about how people have a false assurance sometimes. And how we can have a, we can recognize true assurance of salvation.

How we can test that. But what about the person who says, hey, I don't have a false assurance or a true assurance. I got no assurance at all.

And it's not that I'm a non-Christian here. I have been seeking God. I have said the sinner's prayer.

I've been baptized. I've stayed in fellowship. I've attempted to conform myself to what Christian duty is.

I've tried to make myself love Christ more. But I don't feel like I love him more. I just don't feel like I've really made contact with God.

I'm very much aware of people in this state. Because there's some people that I know. And I've known for years.

They're fairly close to me. That this is their testimony. They say we tried.

We have sought God. We've instituted morning devotions. Rose up early.

We've fasted. We've prayed. And God never showed up.

And we don't feel that we've experienced what you're talking about. And it perplexes me. It really does.

But I have counsel. I have biblical counsel for them. I don't know why they haven't experienced it.

But there is good biblical counsel for you. If you say, I've done everything I know to do. I've done all the things that Bill Graham said to do.

I've done everything my pastor said to do. I've done everything I think Jesus said to do. And Paul.

But I just don't have that breakthrough. I've never really had the veil removed and had God revealed in my soul. And I just don't have any assurance at all.

That I really know God in a saving way. What would you do? What should you do? I've got some counsel for you. First of all, persevere in seeking God.

If God doesn't show up right away, you're being tested. It says in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 6. Without faith it's impossible to please God. Those who would come to God must first believe that he is.

And also must believe that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He will reward those who diligently seek him. But diligence means persistence.

Diligence means effort. Diligence means determination. And you don't seek for God for two, three years.

Five, ten years. Even twenty and thirty years and just say, well, I guess I'll give up now. Well, I mean, you might.

That's not the right thing to do. If you're a dying man without water in the desert. And you're hoping every time you cross over the next sand dune that you're going to see an oasis.

And you get to the crest of the next sand dune and it's no oasis. Not even a mirage. Nothing, just sand.

What do you say? Well, I guess I'll give up after the next time. No, you never give up. You're dying.

You can't live without water. You've got to keep pressing on. And you'll press on if you die doing it.

You don't just stop and say, well, I guess, you know, I put in the effort. I've done my thing. Did what I was supposed to do.

I looked for the water and it wasn't there. So I'm just going to give up. No, you keep pressing on.

If you do give up, then you didn't pass the test. I don't know why God shows up so readily in some people's cases and is so slow to show up in other cases. But there are a number of things that could be part of that explanation, which I'm going to suggest to you.

In addition to the statement in Hebrews, chapter 11, verse six, that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek and those who want to come to God must believe that. It says in Hebrews 10. Verses 35 and 36.

Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward for you have need of endurance so that after you've done the will of God, you may receive the promise. I talked to a Christian not long ago. Said I prayed the prayer.

I've done the thing I did. I did everything that I was supposed to. And God didn't show

up.

I guess he doesn't keep his promises. Well, wait a minute. The Bible didn't say how soon he has to keep them.

We have this idea of instantaneous salvation on demand. That all you have to do is feel the urge during an evangelistic meeting, come down, say the prayer. And God somehow has to just honor that and say, OK, from now on, I give you everything I've got.

You know, in many of the revivals of the past, Finney's and others, people were under conviction. Desiring to be saved for weeks before they actually broke through to God. And they'd sit on the they'd have these special benches for people who were wanting to be saved.

But they were under conviction and they weren't saved. And they wouldn't just go there and say, no, just say this prayer and you'll be, you know, the conviction can go away. No, they had to wait for that person to break through with God.

Now, is that biblical? I don't know that it's unbiblical. What I do know is there's nothing particularly biblical that says as soon as you say the prayer, you instantly get it. Because sometimes you can say a prayer and there's other things God's waiting for in terms of surrender in your life.

And he knows the shallowness of the prayer. And he's under no obligation to honor shallow prayers. If you want God to hear your prayer and to reveal himself to you, try some of these things.

Repent of all known sin and ask God to convict you of any unknown sin. If he doesn't, then maybe all is clear between you and God. But another thing is, forgive everybody that you may not have forgiven.

Jesus has made it very clear five times in his teaching. If you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you. If you feel like you've sought God but you're not saved, it may be because you're not.

It may be because God is not forgiving you. Because you're not forgiving somebody that he said you've got to forgive. Repent of known sin, forgive anyone.

I mean, you've got to get the barriers away because God is there. And if you're not reaching him, something is standing there between you and him. And you've got to find it.

You've got to surrender all to him. I believe a lot of people say shallow prayers without any full surrender. Jesus is the conquering Lord.

And he does not accept us on our terms but on his. And his terms are absolute surrender

of all. It says in Luke chapter 14 and verse 33, unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple.

You surrender it all to Christ, everything. He said if you don't take up your cross and follow me, you can't be my disciple. He said if you don't come hating your father and mother and wife and children and your own life also, you cannot be my disciple.

Maybe those are some areas where surrender has not been made. It's not just so easy as saying a quaint and glib little prayer that's prefabricated and fed you line by line like the vows of a couple at a wedding fed by the preacher. Prayer, the Bible nowhere says you get saved by saying a prayer.

Do you know that? There's nothing in the Bible that says, say the sinner's prayer and you'll be saved. It doesn't say that anywhere. It says, believe.

It says, repent. It says, follow me. The things that people are invited to do were not to say a prayer.

Prayer has its place, of course, a very essential place in the Christian life. And repentance often is accompanied by a prayer of repentance. But the point is that surrendering to Christ is a whole life motion.

It's not just a verbal transaction. Okay, another thing, very important, is burn your bridges. I just heard a wonderful wedding sermon yesterday where the preacher was saying that when Cortes came and brought his ships over to, I don't think it was the mainland of the United States, I think it was in South America, or maybe it was Haiti, I forget exactly where, but that he dropped his men off and then he burned the ships so that the men would know they're not going home, they've got to conquer here.

This is their new home. They've got to conquer the inhabitants. And the burning of the ships guaranteed that these men would be determined to make the best of this side of the ocean because that's where they're going to be stuck.

Sometimes people want to come to Christ, but they want to leave the bridges. They like to leave their ships in the harbor. And they want to make sure that there's an escape route in case, you know, following Jesus ends up being a little more costly than what they counted on, or they might even change their mind later on.

You don't follow Christ on those terms. If you have reserves like that and say, well, Christ, I'm going to try Jesus. I'm going to try Jesus with the implication that if it doesn't work out for me, I'm going to try something else.

Well, then your trial of Jesus will never find him. He doesn't present himself to people on those terms. It's his terms.

Absolute surrender. You burn your bridges. You burn the ships.

You say there's no turning back. No turning back. Then, of course, beg God.

Beg for his mercy. Beg for him to give you the Holy Spirit. And don't quit.

As some people say, well, there's not much faith if you ask once and you don't get it and you keep asking again. Aren't you supposed to just trust that the first time you asked worked? I don't think so. I don't think that's what the Bible teaches.

I see Jesus saying, you've got to keep on knocking. You've got to keep on asking. In Luke, chapter 11, verses 9 through 13.

Jesus said, so I say to you, ask and it will be given to you. This in the Greek, as I understand it, is an imperfect, ongoing test. Keep asking.

Keep seeking and you'll find. Keep knocking and it'll eventually be open to you for everyone who asks, receives. He who seeks finds to him that knocks.

We have there's a promise of God. God does not default on his promises. If the door has not opened for you, then keep knocking because there's a guarantee from Christ.

If you keep knocking, the door is going to open. If you keep seeking, you're going to find. You say, but I've been seeking and seeking and I haven't found.

Keep seeking. If you think that you've kept seeking and you haven't found, therefore, that's an argument for stopping seeking. Jesus says, no.

That's an argument for keeping seeking. The fact that you haven't found yet means that you have not sought all the way to the end of the seeking process. You haven't knocked all the way until the door opens.

And I'm not faulting you for that. I mean, we do get discouraged. But I'm saying if you find that you haven't had the door open and you haven't found yet, that's not an excuse for giving up.

It is an argument for perseverance. You have need of patience that after you've done the will of God, you may receive the promise. Jesus continues.

If a son asked for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? If he asked for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asked for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, but who ask and keep on asking? I don't know why. When I asked the first time, I was filled with the spirit and I knew other people that that happened with. But I've seen other people who prayed and prayed and it didn't happen the first time.

I don't know why. But that certainly isn't any good argument for giving up. The Syrophenician woman is an example of persistence in faith.

She was a woman who had a demon possessed daughter. She was following Jesus and Lord, help my daughter. He paid no attention to her.

He ignored her. He seems rude and is totally ignoring her request. But she didn't give up.

And he tried to rebuff her. He said, I'm not even sent to your people. You're a Gentile.

I'm not sent to him but the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You're a Gentile. You're not one of the people I'm sent to.

He tried to see if her faith would cave in and it didn't. And she said, listen, even the dogs get the crumbs from the table. And he said, oh, a woman great is your faith.

Be unto you according to your faith. She didn't get what she wanted right off. Jesus tested her.

He tested her persistence. How long he dragged it on, we don't know. Might have been only two, three minutes.

Might have been 15. Might have been a half hour. It might have been all day long.

We don't know how long he ignored her. But it wasn't that he didn't care. Her persistence in faith was being tested.

And when she passed the test, Jesus glowed with happiness. Oh, woman, great is your faith. That's great, man.

You get what you want. Your faith, according to your faith, be unto you. Jacob wrestling with God is another example.

Because Jacob said God couldn't prevail against him. And God had to cripple the guy. But Jacob said, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.

And you've got to have that kind of persistence with God. Say, God, I thought that when I say these prayers, when I do these things, I'm supposed to have some kind of encounter with you that I haven't had. And I'm not going to let you off.

You're not going to put me off like that. I'm going to hang in there. I'm going to pursue you.

I'm not going to let you go until I get the blessing I'm after. And that is not audacious. That is God honoring faith.

If you have not gotten the blessing yet, Then you need to keep asking and keep

knocking and keep persisting. And you've got to take God as word. The Bible says, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Do not lean on your own understanding. If God says that you will find if you keep diligently seeking, then you will. And it's possible even that you have found him more than you realize at this point.

But that's not even any excuse to stop seeking for more. We all need to find more of God. I think we all need to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It says in Galatians chapter 6. This is the last scripture I'll give you because we're out of time tonight. In Galatians chapter 6, with reference to, I think, this idea. Verses 7 through 9 says, Do not be deceived.

God is not mocked. Whatever man sows, that he will also reap. If you knock, it will be opened.

If you sow, you will reap. However, you don't always sow the right seeds, perhaps. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.

But he who sows to the spirit will of the spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good. For in due season, we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Some people have trials of physical affliction. Some have trials of losing loved ones. Some have trials of dire poverty.

Some have trials of being in the midst of war. And all kinds of horrible afflictions and trials come on people. Some people don't have any of these, but the trial they have is God seems aloof.

God seems to not be answering. And they're doing everything they're supposed to do, but God just doesn't seem to be opening the door. That is your trial, if that's you.

You may not have the trial of being born with, you know, eyes that can't see. Or being born, you know, paralyzed or something. I mean, that may not be your trial.

Maybe your trial is that God has not yet showed up. God has not yet manifested himself in the way that you believe he has promised. No matter what your trial is, whether it's severe pain or severe disappointment, losing heart is never the right response.

We will reap if we do not lose heart. And I feel so badly for people I've talked to who say they've sought God, and they've done all they can, and they just haven't found God. I feel so badly, because I want them to know God like I do.

And like Christians do. But my counsel is, don't lose heart, whatever you do. Giving up is never the smart thing to do when it comes to God.

And you will have assurance when God gives that assurance. And you can test it by those tests that we were talking about tonight, that John gives us and other scriptures give us. And it's very, very important that you get that assurance.

But I don't want you to go home with that assurance, but without the real product. I don't want you to go home with assurance that you have the article, but you don't have the article. If you aren't saved, I don't want you to go home thinking you're saved.

But if you are saved, I want you to be able to know how to test that genuinely and have the true assurance of that. And of course, if you're not saved, I'd be glad to pray with you, or others here would be glad to pray with you. That doesn't mean that there's any magic in someone praying with you, but there is power in God, and there's possibilities for you to go home saved and knowing it.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for this evening, and for your word, and for the way that it clears up and corrects the way we might otherwise be prone to think about things. I pray, right now I pray especially for two kinds of people, those who have a false assurance of salvation and are not really right with you, and those who have no assurance of salvation at all, although they wish to, and they wish to be saved, but they just don't have that assurance.

I pray for them, Father, that you'd open their eyes to see you, that those who have a false assurance would see their need and their true state, and those who really do love you, and really are pursuing after you, and are seeking you, but do not feel that they've found you. I pray for them, Father, that you will first give them the heart to persevere, and second, that you will reward their diligent search. Father, I pray that we will never cease to be diligent in our search for you, no matter whether we have found what we think we're looking for or not in you.

We pray that we might always be seeking to go on, as Paul said, not thinking that we've arrived, not thinking that we're perfect, but this thing we do, forgetting the things that are behind, and looking toward the things that are before we press on to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Help us to press on, Father, and help us in this age which is very discouraging, in this age where darkness is creeping in, and is really taking territory rapidly from the culture in which we live, taking it from us. Father, I pray that you'll help us to press in the more.

The kingdom of God suffers violent. Help us to be violent people who will take it by force, Father, rather than wimpy people who will give up because it gets hard. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. [♪ music playing ♪♪.]