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How Can I Know That I Am Really Saved? (Part 4)



How Can I Know That I Am Really Saved? - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the topic of how one can know if they are truly saved. He emphasizes the role of obedience in the Christian walk and cites various verses from the Bible to support his argument. Gregg also discusses the importance of practicing righteousness and love, rather than simply professing faith or performing good works. Ultimately, he concludes that true salvation is evidenced by a transformed life, characterized by obedience to God's commandments and a love for others.

Transcript

As many of you know, we have been looking at the book of 1 John, but not only the book of 1 John. We're taking certain topics that are suggested by the book of 1 John, and we are looking at what 1 John tells us about them and what the rest of Scripture says about them as well. And these are specifically topics related to how we know if we're really saved.

Now, there's a lot of people who apparently think they're saved and who may not really be. And that I say according to Jesus, because Jesus said in Matthew 7, 21-23, 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? Jesus said, Then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Now, this will be a rude awakening for, as he put it, many. Many will say to him in that day. Now, if there's ever a statement that Jesus makes that many people will be in a certain category, I always think, well, that increases the odds that maybe I'd be in that category.

If there are only a few that this apply to, I've got better odds of escaping this group. But if it's many, I need to be careful, very careful, to know that I'm not going to be in that group. And so, we want to look at that and say, well, how can I know that when I stand before Jesus, I won't be one of those who say, well, God, I did this, and I did that, and that, and I did those in your name, and certainly that should get me in.

And he'll say, well, really, not so. I never knew you. We didn't know each other.

We weren't acquainted with each other. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13, 5, Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. He's writing to a Christian church.

He says, test yourselves. Now, everyone to whom he wrote was a member of a church. In fact, they were a member of the true church, because there was only one church in Corinth in Paul's day, the one he started.

And therefore, it was the true church. They were members of the true Christian church. But Paul tells them, examine yourselves, test yourselves, to see if you're really a Christian or not.

It's not being a member of the church that tells you that. He says, do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are disqualified? That is, you fail that test. You test yourself.

If you fail the test, well then, Jesus Christ isn't in you. On the other hand, hopefully, you will pass the test and prove that Jesus is in you. Well, that's going to be important to know.

Many people live their lives not giving much consideration to the fact that they're going to stand before Jesus, and He's going to say, I know you, or I don't know you. And even among those who do realize that they're going to, many of them are counting on something, apparently, that's not a true indicator. Those who say, we prophesy in your name, we cast out demons in your name, well, that sounds pretty impressive to me.

If I did those things in Jesus' name, I'd figure, well, I'm in. But Jesus said, no, there's going to be a lot in the category who can actually say those things, and yet they aren't in. He'll say, I never knew you.

Depart from me. So, I guess we have to ask, can we really know? Can we know if we're really saved? The first epistle of John has been our guide in this series to look at four tests. I know I held up five fingers, but I was just trying to see if you were awake.

I don't have my motions choreographed and scripted, so I do absent-minded things. There are four tests by which John says we can know, really know, if we are really born again, if we have eternal life, and so forth. He tells us in 1 John 2, 3, by this we know that we know him.

Well, that's important. If we know that we know him, then he's not going to say, I don't know you. I never knew you.

John said, we know that we have passed from death unto life in 1 John 3, 14. In 1 John 4, 13, he says, by this we know that we abide in him. In 1 John 5, 13, he says that you may know that you have eternal life.

That's just a sampling of a larger number of statements in the book of 1 John where he insists that we can indeed know and not hope so, think so, maybe so, or be wrong. We can be right and know. He gives four tests.

We've gone over three of these in the previous lectures in this series. This is our final one. The first test was what we believe and confess about Jesus Christ and ourselves.

The second test is if we possess the Holy Spirit. The third test is if we love one another. And the fourth test is if we obey his commandments.

That's tonight. Obey his commandments. I thought we were talking about Christianity, not legalism.

What's this business about keeping his commandments? A lot of Christians don't have any concept of the role of keeping God's commandments in their Christian life because we've been told we're not under the law, right? If we're not under the law, then what's this talk about keeping commandments about? Well, we're not talking Old Testament here. We're talking New Testament. We're talking 1 John.

1 John 2, verses 3 through 5, John says, Now by this we know that we know him, 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 him. But whoso keeps his word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.

By this we know that we are in him. We know that we are in him. We know that we know him if we keep his commandments.

And we can equally know that we don't know him if we don't keep his commandments. He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar. The truth is not in him.

He doesn't know God. He thinks he does, he or she, but not so. This is the word of God.

It's a very important warning for us to have in mind. In the Gospel of John, John 8, verse 31, Jesus said, Well, it says, Now that's interesting. These Jews believed in him.

I was raised thinking that's all it takes, isn't it, just believing in him? Well, he said to those who believed in him, If you abide in my word, which means in my commandments, in what I tell you to do, then you are my disciples indeed. Disciples indeed, as opposed to in pretense, as opposed to in word only. I mean, obviously, many will say, Lord, Lord, which is an inference that they are his disciples.

But Jesus says, well, there are disciples of a sort, but then there's disciples indeed, the real thing. Well, who are they? They're the ones who continue in his word. They read what he says and they do it.

That's obedience to Jesus. In Matthew 28, 18 through 20, we're familiar with the Great Commission. Sometimes we miss one of the most important parts of it.

Jesus said, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Now, remember, authority means the right to rule. That's what authority means.

It means I'm the king. A king is a person who's in authority. Or anyone in any organization who's the top or has some responsibility and should be obeyed by those subordinate to him or her, that person is in authority.

Jesus said, all authority is given to me in heaven and earth. He's the top authority in the universe. Well, what's the outcome of that? Well, therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.

Now, Jesus had said in the verse we looked at in John 8, 31, If you continue in my words, you are my disciples. Well, how do you make disciples? Well, first of all, you baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to what? To observe all things that I've commanded you. Now, the word observe doesn't mean look at it, read it.

It means do it. To observe what I commanded you means to practice it, to obey it. And thus, we make disciples once they have been converted, once they have been baptized, once they've entered into the body of Christ, we continue the process of making them into disciples by teaching them to do what Jesus said, to obey him.

So, make disciples and teach them to observe all things I've commanded you. That is what Jesus said. That's Jesus' own understanding of what it means to be and to make disciples.

In Matthew 7, 24 through 27, this is how Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount. Now, the Sermon on the Mount, you know, is like the greatest specimen of the teachings of Christ probably in the entire Bible. I mean, it's a condensed summary, really, of essentially most of the moral teaching and spiritual teaching that Jesus gave about what Christians should do.

At the end of that sermon, he said, therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, what does them mean? It means obeys them. If he commands you to do something and you do it, that means you do what he said. You obey him.

So, the person who hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on a rock, or the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them, does not obey, will

be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell, and great was its fall. Now, here's an important thing to note.

Jesus assumed that there is going to be rain coming down and floods coming, that there's going to be storms, that the life of every person will be tested by bad weather. And he doesn't mean literal bad weather. The house is not literal and the weather is not literal.

He's talking about how you build your life, how you order your life so as to build within yourself stability, according to some blueprint that will give you a house that can endure every test, every trial, persecution, hardship, economic disaster, war, terrorism, whatever. How will you keep your faith? How can you hope to keep your faith when you don't know what the future holds, you don't know how big the storms will be? Well, there's a difference between those whose house stays up in the storm and the ones whose house goes down in the storm, that don't weather it. And that is, one hears the sayings of Jesus and does them.

The other person hears the same things, but doesn't do it. So, what do we learn? If you want to stand, and by the way, in the context, he might not even be thinking so much of the tests of life, because this information follows immediately after Jesus talks about, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, and I'll say, I never knew you. The storm he's maybe thinking of primarily is the day of judgment itself.

That's the ultimate test. There are tests in life as well, and you want to be able to stand through those. But there's the ultimate test, is when you stand before God on the day of judgment.

And he says, well, what does he say? Well, if your house falls, it's not a good sign. And if your house stands, that's definitely what you're going to want to happen, facing every challenge. Jesus said in Luke 6, 46, But why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say? Now, that's a rather searching question, because there's a lot of people who do say Lord, Lord.

In fact, I dare say that the word Lord is one that most Christians don't even know its meaning. Lord, isn't that kind of like a prefix to the word Jesus, Lord Jesus? Isn't it kind of a title of deity or something like that, or a religious status of something? No, the word Lord is the ordinary word for a master, someone who owns slaves. That's what a Lord was in biblical times.

That's what a Lord is still, where there's slavery in the world. There's a lot of slavery in the world still, and the owner of slaves is a Lord. And Jesus said, well, you call me Lord.

Doesn't that mean that you're supposed to be my servants? Well, why do you say that

then? Why do you call me that? And you don't do what I say. I'm not sure there's any good answer to that question. It's rather rhetorical, because what good answer could one give to the question? Well, I call you Lord, and don't do what you say, because I'm just not thinking very straight, I guess.

I guess I haven't really understood what I'm talking about when I say Lord, Lord. In fact, maybe you aren't my Lord at all, and I've just been pretending. That's really the honest answer I think many will have to give.

Peter, when he was standing before the Sanhedrin on one occasion, Acts 5, verse 32, he said, And we are witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. Why didn't he say those who believe in him? The Holy Spirit's given to every Christian. Why didn't he say the Holy Spirit's given to those who believe in him? Well, he could have, because that would be true also.

But in Peter's mind, in the minds of the early Christians, there was no substantial difference between believing in Jesus and obeying him, because, why? Because what you believe about him is that he is the Lord. Remember when we talked in our first lecture, what we confess about Christ tells us whether we're Christians or not. One of the things that says you have to confess is that he's Lord.

Paul said in Romans chapter 10, verses 9 and 10, If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we'll be saved. Okay, well, you won't be saved before that. You won't be saved without confessing that Jesus is Lord.

But when you confess him as Lord, if you believe it, of course you'll say, Okay, his wish is my command. He's my Lord. I'm his servant.

And that will show in what? In your obedience to him. The early Christians knew immediately what it meant to say Jesus is Lord. It meant we are his servants.

What do servants do? They obey him. Now, Peter's not saying that God gives his Holy Spirit to people because they obey him. What I think he's saying is this.

You want to know who has the Holy Spirit? Look for the people who are obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the group. They're the group that have the Holy Spirit.

They're the ones. They're the saved ones. And that certainly is agreeable.

What have we seen? We've seen John. We've seen Peter. We've seen Jesus.

This testimony, you know, is pretty widespread. Certainly Paul, though, wouldn't agree with that. Paul was the one who taught we're saved by grace, through faith, not of ourselves.

It's the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast, right? So, I mean, Paul, we would have to say, would probably not agree with these things, or would he? Well, Paul wrote the book of Romans. That's one of the few books, the authorship of which is not disputed by scholars. And at the beginning of Romans, in chapter 1, verse 5, and at the end of Romans, in chapter 16, verse 26, practically the last verse, everything in Romans is sandwiched between these two verses.

And he says in Romans 1, 5, Through him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name. And in chapter 16, verse 26, he says, The gospel is now made manifest, and by the prophetic scriptures, made known to all nations according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for the obedience to the faith. What? Obedience to the faith? I thought faith is something you believe.

Isn't the faith made up of propositions that aren't supposed to be signed on to, you know, there's one God, Jesus is his son, Jesus died on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead. These are propositions that Christians believe. I thought that's what faith was.

I believe these things. But Paul believed that the faith was something to be obeyed. His mission was to bring all nations into the obedience to the faith.

The faith means, of course, simply the Christian faith. And obeying it is what Paul defined as the duty of all people. According to scripture, who obeys Christ? I just wanted to give you some interesting, I thought, examples from scripture about who obeys Christ besides us.

We're supposed to, but who else does? Well, the elements do. In Mark 4, verse 41, it says, They feared exceedingly and said to one another, Who can this be that even the wind and the sea obey him? Now, I'll tell you what, if nature obeys him, who am I not to? If the wind and the sea obey him. Or how about this one? The demons.

In Mark 1, verse 27, it says, Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. The demons obey him? That's better than most Christians, isn't it? Demons must be better Christians than most Christians, because the demons obey him. And that's what Christians are supposed to do, right? The wind and the waves obey him.

The demons obey him. The apostles, even when they were facing death threats to back down from their testimony, they still obeyed him. It was on that occasion when the Sanhedrin told Peter, We're going to kill you if you don't stop preaching in the name of Jesus.

Then he said, well, in Acts 5.29, he says, But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than man. In other words, you can make as many

threats as you want to. We have one assignment, and we're not going AWOL from this assignment.

Our assignment is to obey God, and we're going to do that. And if you don't want us to, well, last I looked, you're just human. And God's more important than humans.

And we must obey God rather than mere humans. And so, even under threat of death, the apostles would not back down from this commitment. How about all the kingdoms of the earth? In Daniel 7.27, this is a prophecy about the Messiah.

It says, His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Kings, authorities, nations, presidents, dictators, all dominions, all nations will serve him and obey him. So, you know, we ought to start obeying him and avoid the rush.

You know, I mean, we ought to get in on the ground floor here, because all the world is going to obey him someday. And we're supposed to be the first fruits of that movement, of that tide. So, everyone who is saved obeys him.

In Hebrews 5.9, the writer says, And having been perfected, Jesus became the author of eternal salvation. To whom? To all who obey him. He's the author of salvation to those who obey him.

Dang, why didn't he say those who believe in him? Well, certainly there's enough places in the Bible that do say those who believe in him will be saved. But you have to see, it's not very wise to take only one set of scriptures and say, well, I can give you ten scriptures that say I'll be saved by believing in Christ. True, you probably can.

I can give you ten or more that say you'll be saved by obeying him. But what are we to do with that? Is there a contradiction? Of course not. The same people who said we're saved by obeying him are the ones who said we're saved by believing in him.

What's that mean? It means that when they said believe, they were not talking about something different than when they said obey. It's we, or in some of the traditions of Christianity, that have separated those concepts from each other. Certainly the biblical writers didn't.

But doesn't that place us under the law? I thought Paul said especially we're not under the law. Do you know, I was interested to find out as I was preparing this week, I thought the term we're not under the law would be found lots of times in the Bible. Well, it's only one passage actually uses that exact phrase, that we're not under the law.

Though there's another which says we're not under law. So, I mean, the exact phrase isn't always found for the concept. But the one phrase under the law is found one time in this passage.

Galatians 5, 18. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now, I grew up thinking, because I was raised in a particular church that didn't teach very clearly about these things.

I was raised thinking that not under the law meant I'm above the law. I'm not under the law, I'm above the law. Now, I would have never said I was above the law.

That's just the way I lived. That's just the way I kind of thought in the back of my mind. I'm not under the law, so the law can't touch me.

And doesn't that mean that I'm not beholden to the law? I don't have any obligation to keep the law? Anyone who told me to keep the law would have been viewed as a legalist. But Paul explains what he means here in Galatians 5, 22 through 23. He says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And he says, against such there is no law. Now, what's he saying here? We're not under the law. Why? Because we're producing the fruit of the Spirit, which means that what we're doing, there's no law against what we do if we're walking in the Spirit.

If we walk in the Spirit, what is in our life? Love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, etc. Now, that being so, the law can't touch us. Not because we're above the law, but because we're within the law.

In saying that we're not under the law, he's not suggesting that we are above the law. His phrase, not under the law, means that we are within the law. When we walk in the Spirit of God, the things that the Spirit of God compels us to do, the way we live our lives as spiritual people, is well within the perimeters of what the law says.

So we're not under any condemnation from the law, because we're not breaking it. We're within the boundaries. So the one place in the Bible that says we're not under the law is certainly not saying that we can ignore the standards of the law.

It's saying, no, we're not under the law because we already live well within its perimeters when we walk in the Spirit. Because against the things that the Spirit has us do, there is no law. So that's what not under the law means to Paul.

Now, this also has the phrase, not under law. This is from Romans 6. Lengthy passage, verses 14-18. Paul says, For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Shall we sin because we're not under law but under grace? You know, that is the unspoken assumption that a great number of people who would say they're Christians would make. Well, we're not under the law, so hey, party hardy. And God will just, you know, where sin abounds, grace abounds.

And, you know, I can magnify the grace of God by my exceeding disobedience because, you know, everyone will see how wonderful God is by how bad I am. And He forgives me, you know, what a wonderful grace that is. Well, that's not really what the Bible teaches at all.

Paul says, What? Shall we sin because we're not under the law but under grace? Certainly not. Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? Now, what's the point he's making here? What he's saying is this. You say you're under grace.

Well, if you're under grace, that means you're under the rule of grace as opposed to being under the rule of sin. Or, in this case, or under the rule of the law. Whoever you are obeying is who you're really under.

You show who your master is by your behavior. In Rome at that time, about half the population were slaves in the Roman Empire at that time. Historians tell us.

Now, slaves sometimes actually bore a brand on a visible part of their body that showed who their owner was. Just like cattle today would have a brand of their owner. Slaves sometimes were branded.

But sometimes they weren't. The ones that were branded usually who had run away and been caught again, and they were branded usually so they couldn't do it again. But lots of slaves didn't need to be branded because they did what they're supposed to do.

Now, if you saw a slave in the marketplace and you didn't know who owned him, you could easily find out. Just watch him longer if you find out who's giving him orders and who he's obeying, whose business he's going about. Because the one he yields himself to obey is the one whose slave he is.

And Paul is saying, oh, you think you can sin because you're under grace? Well, let me give you some news here. If you're sinning, you're not under grace. You are serving your real master, which is sin.

And sin and grace are not the same persons. But God, we thank that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

So a lot of people say, well, I'm not under the law. I'm free, free, free. Free? You're a slave of righteousness.

You still have a master. When I was a teenager, I was witnessing some hippie guy, and he said, well, why should I give up my freedom and follow Jesus? I said, freedom? You don't have any freedom. You don't have a choice of whether you're going to be free or a

slave.

You just get to decide whose slave you're going to be. You've got to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody because human beings are not made independent.

They're not made to just rule themselves. They will be ruled. Being ruled by God is certainly relatively a freedom compared to any other options.

And being a slave of righteousness is what a Christian is, and a slave obeys. That's the one thing a slave does. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.

He said. We saw that earlier. So being under grace means sin won't rule you.

It doesn't mean sin can rule you but you're saved anyway because you're under grace. No, because you're not under law, because you're under grace, sin will not rule you. Now you might say, but that's not quite true because I find that sin really does rule me.

Well, I don't think Paul's wrong. I think you can deduce something there. If sin is ruling you, if sin has dominion over you, then maybe you're not under grace yet.

Some people are not. And Paul indicates that those who are, are not under the dominion of sin. I'd rather have them afterwards because we're recording.

I'd be glad to take them as infinite comments afterwards. If I wasn't recording, I'd be glad to just interrupt. But I do want to cover this material as quick as I can.

Paul said in that same passage, shall we sin because we're not under the law? And he said, certainly not. It is not the correct conclusion to reach. He said, also you are that one's slaves whom you obey.

But now you can choose obedience leading to righteousness, he said. He said you obeyed from the heart and you became slaves of righteousness. All this talk in Paul, in Romans.

I thought Romans is that book about, you know, justification by faith alone. Well, it is. We are justified by faith alone.

But we have no, what faith means and what faith does when you have it. That's what we need to learn. Paul said, as we saw, sin shall not have dominion over you for you're not under the law but under grace.

He also said in Titus chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, for the grace of God that brings salvation. Okay, you're under that grace, Paul says, if you're saved. That grace that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and

worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age.

Grace teaches us that. When I was younger, I thought grace teaches me that I don't have to do anything in particular at all. I'm not under any law.

But grace teaches me. How does it do that? Well, because I receive grace, it becomes part of myself. I'm supposed to become a graceful person.

It says of Jesus in the Gospel of John chapter 1, we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And then it says, and we have received of his fullness. What was he full of? He's full of grace and truth.

And of his fullness, we have all received. So I'm supposed to be full of grace and truth also. Well, if I'm full of grace, if I'm under grace, grace has come into my life, what will it do? Well, among other things, it will teach me something.

Paul says it has appeared to all men, teaching us. Grace teaches us what? That I can get away with stuff? No, that I can't. Or that I shouldn't.

Or that I don't want to. Really, that's what it comes down to. If I'm really under grace, I don't want to live the way I lived before.

And if I still want to live that way, it's a good sign I'm not under grace. Because if I were, grace would be teaching me this. I'd have this internal lesson being taught to me by grace.

That the nine ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. John 13, Jesus said in verses 34 and 35, a new commandment I give to you. Now, commandments are meant to be obeyed.

That's what a commandment is about. He gives us this commandment to obey, that you love one another. As I have loved you, that you also love one another.

He said, by this, all will know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one for another. Now, of course, Jesus said earlier, if you continue in my words, then you're my disciples indeed. Now, he says, here's what the word is, love one another.

People will know that you're my disciples if you do that. Well, that shouldn't be so hard then. As a matter of fact, obeying the law is a real easy matter, if it only means that I have to love people.

That is the law of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9, verses 20 through 21, Paul's describing his own outreach methodologies. He says, to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews.

To those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under

the law. To those who are without law, meaning Gentiles who don't keep the Jewish law, I become as one without law. Notice this disclaimer though, not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ, that I might win those who are without law.

Here's his disclaimer. He says, when I'm with Gentiles who don't keep the Jewish law, I don't have to keep the Jewish law. I'm not under that law.

But you know what? Don't get the wrong impression. I'm not without law. I'm not lawless.

Do you know what the word iniquity means? The word iniquity literally means lawlessness. That's the literal meaning of the word iniquity. I'm not lawless.

I don't live in iniquity. I'm under the law to Christ. And what that means is, Christ is my Lord.

His word is my assignment. It's the law that I live under. In Galatians 6, Paul said, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Paul says, I'm not under the law of Moses, but I am under the law of Christ. And he gives instructions. Well, you need to fulfill the law of Christ.

How can you do that? Well, how about bear one another's burdens? Isn't that loving your neighbor as you love yourself? Your brother has a burden. You help him carry it. That's one aspect of fulfilling the law of Christ.

But it is a law. It's the law of the master. In Galatians 5.14, Paul said, for all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In Romans 13.10, he said kind of the same thing. He says, love does no harm to a neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Now, what's the law? The law essentially is that you do no harm to your neighbor. That you bear your neighbor's burdens.

That you love your neighbor as you love yourself. And doing that, that's all there is. That's the whole law.

That's all the law and the prophets. That's the fulfillment of the law. In James 1.25, it says, but he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it.

That's a good thing. He uses that expression, the law of liberty. In James 2.8, he says, if you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbors yourself.

I skipped that one. James identifies the royal law. That's the law of the king.

Royal means belonging to the king, right? It's our king's law. You shall love your

neighbors yourself. That's the law that Christians are to fulfill.

It's the law of liberty, he said. In fact, he said it again later in James 2.12. He said, so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. The law that we are under, why does he call it the law of liberty? Isn't that kind of like an oxymoron? Doesn't law suggest bondage? Doesn't law suggest servitude? Doesn't law suggest the impinging on my freedom? I have to obey laws? Well, the reason it's called the law of liberty is because it is the law of love.

If you love someone, it's easy to serve them. Now, maybe it's been a long time since any of you loved anyone like that, but if you're ever in love, when you're in love, you just want to just, you know, impoverish yourself for someone. You want to lay down your life for somebody.

You want to make sure that you do everything you can to protect them from any kind of unhappiness or harm. I mean, you can overdo that, but the point is loving someone makes you indisposed toward hurting them. It makes you want to serve them, to bear their burdens.

You see, it's not like God is expecting us to take on ourselves the burden of the law. He said, if you're a real Christian, something has happened inside of you. You already have something inside that's changed.

It's this thing called the love of God, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And therefore, doing the things that God wants are just what you would freely want to do when you're walking in that spirit. The answer is not to come under law.

The answer is to walk in the spirit. In 1 John, the book that we're looking at primarily here, it might not seem like it sometimes because we go all over the place to confirm what he says, but in 1 John 5, 2-3, John said, By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

It's not a burden. He doesn't burden us with His law. It's not a burden if you love.

If you love God, you'll want to please Him. If you love people, you'll want to serve them. Everything God wants us to do is not burdensome if you love.

The problem is, it's very burdensome if you're just religious. If you're just trying to fit into some moral standards of a religious organization, and you're not changed inside, it's going to be harder being a Christian than it was being a Jew. Because as a Jew, you're not allowed to commit adultery.

As a Christian, you're not even allowed to look at a woman with adultery. That's harder if you have no love. Somebody without the love of God in their heart will have a hard

enough time keeping the Jewish law.

Much worse, the Christian law. But see, the reason a man who's a Christian doesn't look at a woman to lust after her is because he loves her. Love and lust are opposites.

Lust is about me. Love is about someone else. If a man loves a woman, he will not lust after her.

Now, if it's his wife, of course it's his duty, and hers to cultivate a physical attraction and physical relationship. And we would expect that people would probably not normally even get married, unless there was already this interest and so forth. But lust, to have a sexual interest in the opposite sex, is not the same thing as lust.

Lust is when you have a selfish craving for your desires to be fulfilled at the expense of somebody else. And that's the natural way for the natural man to relate to women who are attractive to them. But if you love them, you don't do that.

And it's not a burden not to lust if you love people. If you find that you can't forgive your enemies, if you find that you can't not get angry at your brother, if you find that you can't stop lusting after women, your assignment is not to wrench up your willpower more and put yourself under a greater burden of law, it's to learn to love people. Now, what do you say, well, how do you do that? Walk in the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Well, how do you do that? Well, we'll get to that. But just know that the law, obeying Jesus, is not supposed to be a burden.

If you're born again, if you have the Spirit of God, if you have your heart changed, you love people, and you just want to do good by them. You don't want to hurt them. And, you know, love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

In Hebrews 8.10, God says, I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts. Now, what that means is that where in the Old Testament God made laws and handed them over through Moses to people who had no inclination inwardly to obey and just said, obey or die. Even with that hanging over their head, they didn't do real well.

But God says, I'm going to have to make a new covenant here. This old one is not getting good fruit. So, He says, I'm going to make a new covenant, and I'll write what I want.

I'll write it in their hearts. Now, this is, of course, a figure of speech. What it means is, I will put it in their hearts to obey my law.

I will change their hearts so their hearts are agreeable with my mind and with my law. I'll write it in their hearts means that I'm going to change their hearts so that they will be inclined to obey me. That is what John assumes.

John doesn't say, obey and you will be saved. He says, you know that you are saved if

you are obeying. You don't obey in order to get saved because you aren't saved by your works.

But you, if you really are born again, if you have that heart that God's written His laws on, it's visible. It's visible in your behavior because you want to obey God, and therefore you do. Now, how does this jibe with the doctrine that we are justified or made righteous by faith alone? Paul certainly insists upon that.

Romans 4, verses 3 through 5 is a pretty good statement of that fact. Paul says, for what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now, I want to say this.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You've got to have this going for you. You've got to have righteousness.

Well, fortunately, righteousness is a gift of God granted to those who have faith. Abraham believed, that's faith, and it was counted in for righteousness. He's in because of faith.

Same as us, Paul says. Now, Paul explains, now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. And therefore, he says, that's not how we're saved.

We're not saved by working for it because then it wouldn't be grace at all. It'd be God paying a debt that he owes us because we earned it. We don't earn it.

It's not by debt. It's by grace. But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, and the word justify means to declare him righteous, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

There's Paul's doctrine. It's a good doctrine. Paul appeals to it a number of times.

Even this verse, Genesis 15, 6, that he refers to here, Paul quotes it at least two or three times elsewhere in Scripture. Now, James, however, who is sometimes thought to be at odds with Paul on this, but is not at all. James has slightly different focus.

He says, what does it profit, brethren, in James 2, verses 14 through 20, what does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? A rhetorical question. What do you suppose James intends the answer to be? It's not really difficult to figure it out. This question is answered no.

That's what James is suggesting. It's a rhetorical question. He thinks the answer is obvious.

If a person says he has faith, notice he says he has faith. That's a little different than

having it. A person who says he has faith but there's no works to demonstrate it, does that person have a faith that's going to save him? Well, I don't think James thinks so.

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does that profit? Thus also, he says, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Now, don't let the strength of the word dead be lost upon you. Whenever biblical writers want to make the most negative statement about something they can, dead is about as bad as it gets.

Paul says, we were dead in trespasses and sins. He says, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. God said to Adam and Eve, the day you eat it, you will die.

I mean, that's like the worst thing that can be said. And a faith that doesn't produce any works, that's a dead faith. Now, the faith that we want is supposed to give us eternal life, right? Isn't salvation one of the things that we get? And salvation is eternal life.

Can a faith that is dead give you life? Life comes only from life, not from dead. There is no spiritual, spontaneous generation where non-living substance can bring forth life. You cannot receive spiritual life from a faith that is dead and a faith that has no works is dead.

But someone will say, James tells us, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works. That's reasonable.

James says, you believe that there is one God. Excellent. Even the demons believe and tremble.

Well, they do. But their faith doesn't have works. And that's true of many people who call themselves Christians too.

They believe too, the same way the demons do, apparently. Because only maybe not as much as the demons do because the demons' faith is 100% convinced. The demons know for sure that Jesus is Lord.

They know for sure there's a God. I mean, the faith that the demons have is absolute. But it lacks something, namely, works.

It doesn't change the way they live. They tremble. But do you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Now, Paul has told us that we're justified by faith alone.

That's true. James is telling us a little something about faith since that's an important thing. Want to be justified? All you need is faith.

But the faith produces works. You're not saved by the works. You're saved by the faith.

But if the faith is present, there will certainly be works. Here's how Paul actually puts it in Galatians 5.6. Paul, you know, the justification by faith guy. Paul says in Galatians 5.6, For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but what does? Faith working through love.

Or the King James says, faith that works through love. What matters to God is faith. Only faith.

Nothing but faith. All that will save you is your faith. Nothing more.

But it had better be a faith that works. A faith that produces something. Not a dead faith that doesn't reproduce anything.

If you have a living faith, that will save you. But it will also change you. And if your faith doesn't make a change in your life, if it doesn't make a difference to you, it doesn't make a difference to God either apparently.

Why should it? Why should God pay attention to your faith if you don't? You say you believe something and it doesn't change you? God's not fooled. God's not mocked. You think He's easy to fool? I don't think so.

He knows what He's looking for. He knows what the evidence is. And we're told too, so we know what the evidence is too.

God's looking for a faith that works. That's working through love. Now, a faith that isn't working through love is apparently the kind of faith James was talking about.

It's a dead faith, right? Faith without works. We're not talking about faith plus works. This is where I think many people make a mistake.

And I won't name particular groups, but lots of groups, I think, do make this mistake. They think, okay, well, sure, it's important to have faith. But you also can't be saved unless you do these works as well.

So in a sense, you're buying your salvation. Your down payment, your initial payment is faith. But you're going to get the rest as a result of your works.

That's not what Paul means. He's not saying you're saved by faith plus works. You're saved by a faith that works.

It's a specie of faith as opposed to another kind of specie of faith that doesn't produce anything. You have to have the kind of faith that changes who you are. And that will produce action.

That will produce change in the way you live. It's a faith that works through love. Jesus, according to Paul in Titus 2.14, Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from

every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people.

That sounds good. We all like that. But these people are said to be zealous for good works.

Why? Because if you have that faith, it produces a zeal for good works. Why? Because God comes into your life, and God is love. He that loves knows God.

He that loves not knows not God because God is love, 1 John told us in a previous lecture. Last time we looked at that. But if God is coming to me, my faith changes what I am from a person who is zealous to just look out for my own self and follow my own lusts into a person who is zealous for doing what God is happy with.

That's what good works means. Good works doesn't mean religiosity. Good works doesn't mean helping little ladies across the street to earn a merit badge for the Boy Scouts.

Good works means, what did James call it? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and you don't give them the things needful for the body, what does it profit? That's faith without works. The works we're talking about are works of love. It's faith that works through love.

If you don't have love, then you aren't a Christian. John made that very clear in the Scriptures we looked at last time in 1 John. It's the third test of being really saved, that we love another.

We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren, John said. Now, if I love you, well, it's got to be more than me just saying, oh, I love you, I feel so much fondness for you. Well, how about helping me out? Oh, well, you know, maybe someday, but right now I had some, I really wanted to spend this money on, I was looking to get, you know, something else that I had my eye on, you know, down at Circuit City.

But really, it's not just enough to say you love someone, if you love someone, you're zealous to do good works toward them and toward God, because you love Him. In Titus also, Paul said in chapter 3, verse 1, remind them to be subject, meaning remind the Christians, to be subject to rulers and authorities to obey, to be ready for every good work. And a few verses later, in Titus 3, verse 14, he said, and let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

Good works means helping people in need, meet urgent needs. That's good works. But to do it for the right reasons.

Remember, Paul said, if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, it profits me nothing. That is to say, well, wait a minute, why would anyone, why would

anyone bestow all their goods to feed the poor if they didn't have love? Well, there might be some reasons. It might be that it would make them look good in some people's eyes.

It may be entirely self-centered. It may be entirely they want people to know what they've done. But if you do it out of love, that means you're not looking to be recognized for what you do.

You do it because there's a need and you cannot stand to let that need go unmet because that person is something valuable to you, because you love them as Christ does. You love them as you love yourself. If you were in that kind of need, you'd never allow yourself to go in that kind of need if you had the power not to.

Well, if you love them like you love yourself, then you won't, you could not be content to do nothing for someone that you could help. That's doing good works, and that is what Paul said. Now, this is Paul.

We're not talking about some other teacher here. This is Paul. Zealous for good works, ready for every good work, learn to maintain good works.

Christianity is about doing good works, sounds like to me. 1 John, our book, 3-7, says, Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous.

He also said in 1 John 2-29, If you know that he, Jesus or God, is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him. Now, notice what's in these verses. Practices righteousness.

Righteousness is something that you practice, you do. Now, I thought I was justified by faith alone. God declares, Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.

True. He was righteous because of his faith, and you could tell, because he practiced righteousness. Don't be deceived.

He who practices righteousness, that's the one who really is. You say you're justified by faith, you say you're righteous by faith. I'll believe it.

If you're practicing righteousness, that's what John tells me. If you're practicing righteousness, then you're right. You are one of those who's righteous in God's sight.

Not because you practice, but the other way around. God has made you righteous by your faith, and it shows in practicing. It shows in your practice, it shows in your actions.

But do real Christians ever sin? I mean, we're talking here, obeying, practicing righteousness, being zealous for good works. Is there no sin in the life of a believer? Well, I think we all know better than that, and so does John. In 1 John 1.10, he says, If we

say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I didn't give that, I didn't put it on the PowerPoint slide, but also two verses earlier, in 1 John 1.8, he says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And then he says here in verse 10, If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. He also says, in 1 John 2.1, which is the next verse, actually, My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.

And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. So at least, if John knows that some people who should not sin, yet may sin, right? If anyone does sin, John is aware, he's realistic. People do sin.

And those that he's talking about are Christians who sin, because he says, We have an advocate. That's Jesus. Only Christians have that advocate.

So, Christians apparently sometimes do sin. The fact that you sin is not by itself, without any further context, is not an evidence that you're not a Christian. So how do we jive that with what we've been reading earlier? In 1 John 3.6, it says, Whoever abides in him does not sin.

Oh, wait a minute. I thought, if anyone sins, we have an advocate. But he says, Whoever abides in him does not sin.

And then he puts it the other way around. Whoever sins has neither seen him, nor known him. It sounds kind of absolute.

In fact, it sounds kind of contradictory to what we just saw a moment ago. How about this one? 1 John 3, verses 8-10. He who sins is of the devil.

For the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Which apparently means sin in the life of the believer, or in the life of human beings.

Whoever has been born of God does not sin. For his seed, that is God's seed, Christ, remains in him. And he cannot sin, because he's been born of God.

Well, that doesn't sound like me, because I can. I can sin. I can prove that.

I'm not going to, but I mean, from my history, I can prove that. And yet, that's what the Bible says. In this, the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.

How? Well, whoever does not practice righteousness isn't of God. So, he who sins is of the devil. Whoever has been born of God doesn't sin.

Whoever sins, you know, hasn't seen him or known him or whatever, I mean, that doesn't sound very encouraging, if I'm trying to decide if I'm one of those who's born of

God or not. In 1 John 5, 18, he says, We know that whoever is born of God does not sin. But he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

I like that last part, the wicked one not touching me, but it seems conditional. I have to keep myself. Now, there is a textual variation in this particular verse, because the Alexandrian text says, He who has been born of God keeps him, rather than himself.

And some feel like, you know, where it reads that, he who has been born of God is taken to be Jesus. So that we know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin, because Jesus, he who has been born of God, keeps him, the Christian. Jesus keeps the Christian, so that the wicked one does not touch him.

But the way it reads in the Alexandrian, or the Texas Receptus, followed by the King James and the New King James, it says, the person who is born of God keeps himself. And that is agreeable with other scripture. In Jude, it says, Keep yourself in the love of God.

At the very last verse of 1 John, chapter 5, it says, Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Keeping yourself is part of the Christian obligation. So, you know, I'm not sure which way this goes, but the main point here is that we know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin.

So we've got several verses, several times, John tells us that Christians do not sin. What could he possibly mean by that? He's been telling us that our obedience, our practicing righteousness, this is a proof we're saved. And now he says, and if you sin, you know, if you're born again, you don't sin.

But earlier he said, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And he said, if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father. I write to you so that you won't sin, but if anyone does, we have an advocate.

So how do we understand John's concept here? Actually, John is the only writer, and 1 John, I think, is the only book that says that Christians don't sin. And it needs to be, you know, it has to be understood in the context of the rest of 1 John and the rest of Scripture. And I think that we can understand this.

If I say to you, if you and I are getting acquainted, I find out what your name is and where you live, and so on, I say, what do you do? Now, I don't want you to give me a play-by-play of everything you've done since you woke up. Well, I get up about 6, I brush my teeth, I take a shower, I fix some coffee, sit down with the newspaper and read for a while. I turn on the radio, and sometimes I'll go for a walk.

And when I say, what do you do? I mean, what do you do for a living? What's your vocation? What is it you principally do? You could tell me every little thing you do, but that's not what I'm asking. If I say, what do you do? What is your vocation? Then there's

one thing, primarily, that most people would answer correctly, and they would understand the question. If someone asked John, well, what do Christians do? And what do Christians not do? What do Christians make a vocation of? And what do they not make a vocation of? Christians do not make a vocation of sinning.

These scriptures that say, whoever is born of God does not sin, and the similar scriptures we looked at in the earlier parts of 1 John, the tense of the Greek suggests continuing in sin, or sinning without interruption. You see, the Bible indicates that people who are not Christians sin all the time. That's their way of life.

It's not the way of life for a Christian. That's not what we do. Now, if you want to ask every little thing I do at every moment, well, there might be a few things I've done that were sin.

In fact, maybe even not so long ago. But it's not what I do. That's not my vocation.

I don't practice sin. I don't practice medicine. And I don't practice law.

And I don't practice sin. Because that's not my vocation. And so, that is what he means.

Now, James, one of the apostles, actually not one of the apostles, but James was one of the brothers of Jesus, and he was called an apostle, though he was not one of the twelve. In Galatians chapter 2, Paul referred to James, the brother of Jesus, as one of the apostles. In James 3, James says, For we all stumble in many things.

Now, I'm supposed to be walking in the spirit. But what happens if I stumble? Well, I'm about average if I stumble. We all do that.

We all stumble a lot. But stumbling, of course, is something you don't want to do. You know, when your kid has gotten to the stage where they can now walk, and you're calling your mom across the country, and she says, well, what's little Joey doing now? Well, he's walking now.

Well, does he never fall down? Well, yeah, sure. Oh, he's stumbling now. You know, what Johnny does now is he stumbles across the room.

No, he walks across the room. He stumbles sometimes. But that's not what he does for the most part.

He's walking. That's what his intention is. That's what he mostly does.

And occasionally, because of weakness or incompetence, he stumbles. And that is true of Christians, too. We don't practice sin.

If you practice sin, you're not a Christian. But if you stumble, you may be a Christian. In fact, it could well be said that a non-Christian doesn't stumble into sin.

They walk in it. When they sin, they're not stumbling. Stumbling is when you do something you don't want to do, isn't it? I mean, have you ever wanted to stumble when you're walking down the street? Have you ever wanted to trip over a crack and fall down? You don't want to do that.

That's an accident. That's what you didn't intend to do. You were careless.

You weren't paying attention. But what you intended to do was walk without stumbling. Sinners want to walk in sin.

When they stumble, they stumble into doing something right once in a while. But when we stumble, we stumble into sin. But we don't walk in it.

We don't live in it. Jesus said to his disciples in the garden, Matthew 26, verse 41, Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. He said, The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Now, this is very important. The flesh is weak. What was going on here in this story? Jesus was about to die.

His disciples should have been hanging in there with him in prayer. He said, Please, stay awake with me and pray with me for just an hour. They didn't.

They fell asleep. He woke them up. Hey, I said, Stay awake with me for an hour.

They fell asleep again. I mean, they're letting him down all the time. Now, did they want to stay awake? Probably.

But they were tired. And he said this about them. The spirit indeed is willing.

I know you want to stay awake. I know you're not trying to let me down. You're not trying to insult me in my hour of need by being bored and falling asleep and being unconcerned.

Your spirit isn't willing, but your flesh is getting you down. You're tired. Okay.

Now, this is how this is true of Christians. Their spirit is willing. You don't want to sin.

If you're making excuses for sin and you want to sin, then your spirit is not willing to obey God. Your spirit is unwilling. And it's not weakness of your flesh.

It's the strength of your flesh that's causing you to sin. But if you're a Christian, your spirit is willing to obey God. And because of that, you normally will.

But sometimes the flesh is weak. Sometimes we all stumble, as James said. Paul put it this way in Galatians 5, 17.

For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another. Your spirit may be willing, but the flesh may be unwilling or weak, so that you do not do the things you wish.

Why? Because what I wish is to obey God. My spirit is willing. But I don't always do what I wish.

Why? Because there's something else in me that's against the spirit. It's my flesh. And that sometimes has been known to be weak, right? And so that's the deal.

Christians sometimes do stumble into sin because the flesh can be weak. We don't always do what we wish. But the question is, what is it you wish? If you have no intention of obeying God, then your spirit is not willing.

What Jesus said is not true of you. John tells us, you do not practice sin. Why? Because God has changed your heart.

You want to obey God if you're saved. If you don't want to obey Him, well, you're not saved. In Romans 7, verses 15 through 17, Paul says, For what I'm doing I don't understand.

For what I will to do, which would be to obey God, that I do not practice. Well, he did generally, but he means not as much as he wanted to, of course. Paul usually did do the will of God.

We know he was an obedient Christian man. But the more obedient you are, the more sensitive you are to the times that you're not obedient. The more you love God, the more disappointed you are when you fall.

And Paul was very obedient. But whatever times he fell, which probably wasn't as often as I do, he saw that as like total failure. I don't practice.

I'm not practicing what I want to do. I'm doing what I hate. He said, If then I do what I will not to do, that means my spirit is willing, right? Because the thing I'm doing that I'm disappointed with is not what I will to do.

It's not my will to do that. There's my flesh. I don't do what I wish to do.

I agree with the law that it is good, but now it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Now, this is a troublesome verse to some people. And so is this one, which is a couple of verses later, verse 20.

Now, if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin who dwells in me. Boy, do some carnal believers love this verse. You know? It's not me.

Yeah, I'm living in sin, but it's not me. It's sin in me. Paul said it's not me doing it.

It's sin doing it. Well, what he's saying is the reason I know it's not me is because me is the person who doesn't want to do it. Me is the person who hates it.

If I'm doing what I hate, then I who hate it am not the one who's doing it. There's something else, another law in my members that brings me into bondage to the law of sin and death, he says. So that if you're using this as an excuse to sin, you say, yeah, I sin.

No big deal, because it's not really me. Paul didn't say it was not a big deal to him. If I'm doing what I will not to do, then I'm a true Christian.

I don't want to do it. I fall in weakness from time to time. And in that case, I'm getting tripped up by something else other than who I am at my core.

Who I am at my core is someone who wants to obey God, who hates falling, but falls anyway. Therefore, it's not me. It's whoever it is that's stumbling.

It's my own sin in my flesh that stumbles. Now, is there any solution to that? Yes, there is. The next chapter, Romans 8, verse 2. Paul says, For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Now, this doesn't mean he's made me free from obligations to do what's right. The law of sin and death in this context, following as it does immediately after chapter 7, is this law of nature in him, this law in his members that brings him into bondage to sin, he said. Well, he's made free from that by another law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ.

Christ has given me his Spirit, and that law, that power, sets me free from the other power in my flesh. Now, you might say, well, wait a minute, I thought all Christians have this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and yet we still fall. How can we be said to be made free from the law of sin and death? Isn't that, in fact, what Romans 7 says, is I'm not free from the law of sin and death? It's in my members.

It still makes me in bondage. Well, here's what Paul is saying, I believe. An illustration that I think has always worked well for me to understand this concept.

You've got two laws. Paul says there's the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. There's a law of sin and death.

One is stronger than the other. One overpowers the other. One makes you free from the other.

In nature, we might use illustrations from natural law. The law of gravity keeps me on the ground. It means I can't jump very high, and I can't lift heavy loads.

It works against me. Gravity works against me. It's always pulling me down.

Now, that's actually fortunate, but for the illustration, let's just go with it. Now, there are other laws that can overcome the law of gravity. The laws of aerodynamics.

I use them quite frequently, but I have to be in an airplane to do it because I don't have wings, but if you have the right kind of wings, the right kind of thrust, the right kind of momentum, the laws of aerodynamics lift me, and it's as if the law of gravity isn't even there. The laws of thermodynamic... not thermodynamic... the laws of aerodynamics make me free from the law of gravity, but only as long as I'm using them. The law of gravity doesn't really go away.

Just because I'm in an airplane, and gravity is defied, and the laws of aerodynamics make me free from the law of gravity, that doesn't mean that there's no more law of gravity. As long as I am in the airplane, as long as I'm exploiting the laws of aerodynamics, I am free from that gravity. If I step outside the door of the airplane when it's in midair, I find that when I'm not using the laws of aerodynamics anymore, gravity is just as strong as it ever was.

It doesn't go away. And Paul says that's how it is for the Christian life. The law of the spirit of life in Christ, if I walk in the spirit, if I, if we could say, exploit the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that makes me free from the law of sin and death, as long as I'm doing it.

If I'm not doing it, well, the law of sin and death is quite strong and quite present still. And so he says that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled. That's what I want.

I want to fulfill in my life the righteous requirements of the law. That means I want to be righteous. Well, it is fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

If I'm walking according to the spirit, it makes me free from that law so that the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in me if I walk in the spirit, when I'm walking in the spirit. But like any walking, you have to take individual steps, and you do stumble sometimes. Stumbling is by definition when you're not walking in the spirit.

You take a step, and it's not in the spirit, and you're down again. But you get back up because stumbling is not what you plan to do. Stumbling is not what you make a practice of doing.

It's what happens from time to time, but as soon as it happens, you know it happened, you hate the fact that it happened, and you resolve not to let that happen again if you have any ability to prevent it because it's not what you want. And so walking in the spirit is a daily moment-by-moment enterprise. You don't just have a crisis of sanctification.

Suddenly, there's no more law of sin and death in you. With apologies to any Wesleyans

who are here because they do believe that. They believe that the second work of grace is sanctification, the eradication of the sin nature.

I'm afraid I just don't find that in the Bible, and it doesn't seem to be agreeable with anyone's experience, including those who teach that doctrine, as they themselves have testified, Wesley being chief among them. Paul says, For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. That's people who aren't saved.

Their minds, they want to do the fleshly things. They're not stumbling into sin. They're chasing sin.

That's what they do. That's what they're about. But those who live according to the spirit mind the things of the spirit.

If you've got life, if you have received life, those who live according to the spirit, as you've received the spirit and you've received the life of God, well, then you mind the things of the spirit. That's your mind is desiring to do the spiritual thing. You don't always do the spiritual thing because you're careless, and you don't always walk in the spirit, and you stumble sometimes.

But in general, you walk in the spirit because you are minding the things of the spirit. If you are born again, that's one of the proofs of it. Galatians 5, 16 says, I say then walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

This is not a command. This is a prediction. If you are walking in the spirit, you are not at that moment fulfilling the deeds of the flesh because the law of the spirit of life in Christ while you're walking in the spirit makes you free from the law of sin and death.

But when you're not walking in the spirit, you do fulfill the lust of the flesh. So what's the assignment? Walk in the spirit because you have received the spirit. That's one of the proofs of your salvation according to 1 John.

We know that he abides in us, and we in him because he has given us of his spirit, 1 John says. So we close with 1 John 2, 17. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it that he who does the will of God abides forever.

You want to live forever? You will if you're one of those who does the will of God. It's what you do that shows whether you're one of those who will live forever. You will not live forever because you're doing the will of God.

You do the will of God because something has happened to you which one of the consequences is which you will live forever. Other consequences are that you love people, that you have it in your heart to do, to practice righteousness, that you have the spirit of God, that you believe in Christ. These are the tests that prove that a person is a true Christian.