

Assurance: Tests of True Faith

by Paul Washer

Paul Washer emphasizes the importance of true assurance of salvation through self-examination and a genuine relationship with Christ.

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Topics: "Assurance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding that we are stewards of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He criticizes the reductionist approach to the gospel that has become prevalent in the Evangelical Church in America. The speaker highlights the need for a holistic view of a person's life, rather than focusing solely on isolated moments of weakness or sin. He also points out the lack of emphasis on the theology of the gospel and the assurance of salvation in modern preaching.

Transcript

A word of introduction before Paul comes. We said a word about him the previous two nights when he's spoken, but Paul, again, is a native of Illinois and also went to school in Texas and then served in Lima, Peru as a missionary. He's the director of Heart Cry Missionary Society, which is based in the First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

He's married to Charo, who's Peruvian and Spanish and has two sons and has a third child, a daughter. God's blessed him with a daughter on the way. And so we're going to just have Paul now come and speak to us and invite him to read Scripture and pray before he speaks.

Let's open up our Bibles to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 13. Before we read, let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, I come before you in the name of your Son, and only in his name have boldness to approach your throne.

Father, where would we go if it were not for you, the Lamb of God slain for the sins of men? Father, I praise you and worship you and know that it is only in him, by grace, that I stand before you. Father, I pray that in this day you will illumine our hearts and our minds by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you'll teach us from your Word, that we be more than challenged, that we be changed, that you would be our great helper, that your will would be done, that you would be pleased with the endeavors that are accomplished in this place. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Before we go on to read our passage, let me summarize for many of you what we've been doing thus far in the last two nights. We need to understand, first of all, that above all things we are stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, in our day, that creates somewhat of a dilemma, because the evangelical church in America has gone through something of what I would call an evangelical reductionism or a Gospel reductionism.

We have taken the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and reduced it down to four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know. The America that I know is not Gospel-hardened. It's ignorant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And one of the reasons is not because of movies like *The Passion*, but because of preaching of conservative evangelicals. We are not preaching the Gospel. It is amazing to me that if you go into modern-day bookstores, you will find almost nothing written on the content of the theology of the Gospel or find anything written on how a person can biblically know that they have come to know Christ and Christ has come to know them.

But if you were to go back a hundred years ago, you would find that most of the books coming off of printing presses were dealing with one thing. What is the true Gospel? And how does one know that they truly come to know Him? So at the beginning on Friday night, I believe it was, we discussed how we have taken the Gospel and turned it into a few little questions. Do you know you're a sinner? If they say yes, would you like to go to heaven? If they say yes, pray this little prayer.

And if they do, we declare them saved. When the matter is not, do you know you're a sinner? The devil knows he's a sinner. The question is more.

It is not, do you know you're a sinner? But since you have heard the Gospel, has God so done a work in your heart that you've now come to hate the sin you once loved? And the question is not, do you want to go to heaven? Because as far as I know, most men do want to go to heaven. The only problem is they don't want God to be there when they get there. So the question is not, do you want to go to heaven? The question is, the God that you have ignored and warred against all your life, do you now desire Him? Desire fellowship with Him? Seek to know Him? Has He become precious to you? And again, I talked about modern day preaching that will say something like this.

You have a wonderful education, a wonderful life, a wonderful home, a wonderful family, and you just lack one little thing to make it complete, and that's Jesus Christ. That's blasphemy. Because you see, the Christian life is not Jesus coming in and making your already wonderful life more wonderful.

What you need to understand is if you have not Christ, you have nothing. All that you've accomplished is wrought. Because without Christ, there is no life.

And so it's not a question of does a person want to go to heaven or do they want their best life now? The question is this, do you want God? Do you see the beauty of His holiness and desire fellowship with Him? And then the question is not do you want to pray this little prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart? Because Revelation 3.20, if we follow the principles of hermeneutics that I was taught in seminary, has nothing to do with a sinner inviting Jesus into their heart. Jesus is knocking on the door of a church. Men are called upon to repent of their sins and believe the gospel.

And yes, men can cry out in prayer to God for salvation, but going through a superstitious, magical prayer will save no one. It is repentance and faith. Then last night we went through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I shared with you how I was preaching a while back in Europe and I was in a Germanic seminary and I pulled a book off the shelf because it said the gospel of Christ. And that wasn't John Stott's book. It was another book.

And I began to read through it to find out what the author was saying. And this is what the author said. God the Father looked down on the cross of His Son and He considered the suffering of His Son that was inflicted upon Him by the hands of Romans as payment for our sins.

That's heresy, even though most people in the pew don't recognize it is so. It's heresy. If you're saved here today, you're not saved because a group of Roman soldiers simply beat up Jesus Christ and nailed Him to a tree.

If you're saved, you're saved because on that tree, He bore the sins of God's people. And now listen very carefully. I choose my words.

He was crushed by His own Father under the full force of the wrath of God that justice might be satisfied and the wrath of God appeased. God is a just and holy God. God, being just and holy and loving, is also a God of wrath.

His hatred burns toward evil. And that is why the psalmist says He is angry every day. In order for God to still be just and yet forgive wicked men, justice must first be satisfied.

And that was done through the cross of Calvary, for God so loved the world, He gave His only Son. I didn't get time to mention this, but I want to mention this for just a moment. The idea of wrath and the holy hatred of God and the idea of the love of God.

When you hear news of some atrocity committed against a child, do you not burn with anger? Now, do you honestly think that God is neutral towards evil? And when I speak of evil, I'm not speaking just of the Holocaust or slavery. I'm talking about every evil, every infraction of His law makes Him angry. So these evangelists will tell you God's not an angry God.

Obviously, they're not reading the Bible because He is an angry God. He says so. He's angry every day.

But what you need to understand is He is also a God of love. And how does that work? God looks down upon the evil of men and He is angered with a righteous anger and He is ready to pour forth His wrath, His judgment and His condemnation. But the love of God restrains and holds back the justice of God.

It holds it back. And that's why Scripture is saying constantly, God says, I'm all day long holding out my hands to an obstinate people, waiting and longing. Love restrains the judgment of God.

And that is a wonderful thing. And it tells us much about the glories of the love of God. But at the same time, carnal men can come to presume upon the fact that God is a God of love and not a God of judgment.

But He's both. God will. And I plead with you to understand this.

God will judge the earth and He will do it in righteousness and He will come with wrath, even though today and all day long He restrains His judgment and cries out to men, whosoever will, let him come. But one

day. The invitation that is a wide invitation to every man on the face of the earth.

It will be closed. And judgment will come. And so men are called upon to do what? To repent of their sins.

To acknowledge their wicked ways and throw themselves upon Christ. As I shared last night, I know a missionary who can account for the testimonies of practically freezing to death in the Andes and burning up in the jungles. Fevers and sickness of being chased by terrorists, put at gunpoint several times, robbed, endangered and all this for the cause of Christ.

And yet if you were to ask that missionary, sir, if you died right now, where would you go? He would say heaven. But the answer would be unusual. He would say heaven and not because of any of those things, but for only one reason.

Two thousand years ago, the Son of God spilt His own blood for my soul. And so it's Christ and Christ alone. Now, today I'm going to touch on another place in which preaching has become quite superficial.

And it's the idea of biblical assurance, biblical assurance to the Christian. Now, I want you to realize something that when you combine two doctrines, you lose them both. When you try to mesh two things together, you usually end up losing them both.

Like you take muddy water and clean water and put them together and the water is not quite muddy and it's not quite clean. You've lost both things. Well, in the same way, I want to make a distinction today between what is called and I think improperly so, but we'll just go ahead and use the terminology what is called the doctrine of the security of the believer and the doctrine of assurance.

Many people have heard of the doctrine of security, but few people today talk about the doctrine of assurance. Now, what is that? Well, the doctrine of security is this. If a person has truly believed in Jesus Christ unto salvation, the same power and grace of God that brought them to salvation will keep them in salvation.

That God who began a work in you will finish it. It is the doctrine of the security of the believer. But there's also another doctrine called the doctrine of assurance that is basically not mentioned much anymore, and yet it was all the time 100 years ago.

And it's this. It is true that everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ is saved and kept saved by the power of God. That's the doctrine of security.

But the doctrine of assurance is this. How do you know that you've truly believed? How can you be assured that you have truly believed unto salvation? Yes, it is true that everyone who truly believes is saved and kept saved. But how can you be sure you've really believed? Now, this becomes very important.

Why? If we were to dismiss this church and especially in Alabama, where I now live, if you were to dismiss church, you will find that every person on the face of the earth, in most places at least, are saved, at least in the south of the United States. Everyone is saved. We could have gone to taverns last night and found a lot of good, saved Southern Baptists.

You'll find them everywhere. So obviously, some of these people are not saved. So that's got to bring us to the question, how can a person know that they truly believe? Now, let me say one other thing, one other

vicious attack, and then we will go on to building things up.

And it's this. Modern day pastoral counseling on assurance. A young person or an old person comes to the pastor, says, Pastor, I just don't know if I'm saved.

Which is very rare today. But someone says, I just I don't know if I'm saved. And the pastor will sometimes say, now, I know you're a pastor and I know he doesn't do this.

But in most churches, this is what would happen. Well, let me ask you a question, the pastor says. Was there ever a point in time in your life when you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart? The person says, well, yeah.

OK, were you sincere? Well, I, I think so. Yes, I think I was sincere. Well, you're saved.

You just you just need to stop listening to the devil or we have these evangelists and I've heard them with my own ears. People come forward in a meeting. They counsel them for a few minutes, get them to raise their hand, and then they tell them things like, now you need to write the date on the back of your Bible.

And if the devil ever bothers you about salvation, you just open up there and show him this day when you ask Jesus to come into your heart. That is the biggest bunch of superstition I've ever heard in my life. That with writing it on a tomato stake and putting it out in the garden somewhere so you can walk outside and look at it and prove that you're saved.

That's just I was I was in London. I would say that's poppycock. I mean, it's just it's just absolutely ridiculous what we've done.

And then you look at the fact. Just look at the fact one state convention of ours is lamenting the fact that found out that 40 to 60 percent of all Southern Baptists never attend church. And so what they've decided is we just need to improve discipleship.

No, we don't. Now, we do need to improve discipleship, but that's not why 40 to 60 percent of the Southern Baptists in a particular state are not in church. They're not in church because they were never born again, because they were superfish superficially led to the Lord by someone saying who loves Jesus in a vacation Bible school.

And they raised their hand and that was enough. Or some evangelist got about 40 of them one night to walk down an aisle and then he went to the next church and bragged about how many people got saved. But when the pastor started holding meetings on Sunday, not one of them showed up.

It's our superficial evangelism and we've got to stop it. We've just got to stop it. And we have got to start teaching biblical assurance.

Now, let's go to Second Corinthians, chapter 13, verse five. We're going to go here for just a second and then jump over into First John. But we all know about the church in Corinth.

It was famous or infamous or whatever else you want to say. I mean, these characters, many of them were not acting like Christians. Now, Paul looks at this group of people and he says, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.

Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test? And what Paul is doing here is he's looking at a church that was filled with a lot of people acting carnally, acting like lost people. And so he comes to them and he does not say what I have heard countless parents say to their teenager who, after praying a prayer when they were little, becomes viciously rebellious.

And they say something like this. Now, Johnny, you're saved. You need to start acting like it.

Now, what Paul would say to your son is this. You made the profession of faith in your younger years. You were baptized following the Lord in obedience.

But at this moment, you're living in a way that may demonstrate that you never truly came to know him. And what Paul is doing here to this church in Corinth, he's saying, examine yourselves, test yourselves. You are not living like Christians.

If Christ dwells in you, you shall not live this way. But maybe Christ does not dwell in you because of the way you're living. And you must examine yourself.

Biblical assurance. How do you know you're saved? How can you have assurance? By examining your life according to what the Scriptures declare a Christian truly is. You go to the word of the pastor yesterday was speaking about how the ancients used to talk about a confessional evidence, ethical evidence and social evidence, confessional evidence that you confess Christ, that you confess him.

Now, what have we done to that? We've reduced it. We've tore that verse totally apart. You believe in your heart and confess with your mouth.

We've turned it into nothing. We've basically taken that verse in Romans chapter 10 that says, if you believe in your heart and you confess with your mouth, we've turned it into if you pray this prayer, that's not at all what that text is teaching. The text is teaching this, that if you believe with all your heart, part of the evidence is that you will be a confessional person.

You will identify yourself publicly with Jesus Christ. It's not if you repeat these words, you'll be saved. Let me give you an idea.

We're in Rome and we're working on we're all carpenters, let's say, and we're in Rome and we're out there building and it's lunchtime and we're all taking a break. And all of a sudden we hear a drum boom, boom, boom. And we happen to be confessing Christians, most of us.

We hear boom, boom. We become very afraid because we look on the horizon and here come a group of soldiers carrying an altar. And that altar is an altar to Caesar and has a fire on it and has a little bit of incense and they stop right in front of all us craftsmen and they want to determine our loyalty.

And the only thing that we have to do is go up there, take a little bit of incense, throw it on the fire and confess Caesar is Lord. Now comes the test of whether or not you've truly been born again. Because some people who confess him will walk up and grab the incense and throw it in the fire and say Caesar is Lord and deny Christ.

And some will go up, grab the incense, throw it in the fire. No, they will just stand there and say Jesus Christ is Lord and they will die. And then another will come up and say, no, Jesus Christ is Lord and they

will die.

And then another one will come. You see how we've taken a verse and reduced it down to nothing. Well, I repeated the prayer.

How many people, how many people out there right now are not trusting in Jesus Christ? They're trusting in a decision. It is wrong to say hour of decision, because I meet so many people who are not trusting in Christ, but they're trusting in a decision they made at one time in their life. So how do we know? Well, I said it's a confessional test if you'll confess Christ as a standard of life.

But we know that confession is not enough because John MacArthur said one time he said, you know what your confession of faith is worth? Absolutely zero. Because Jesus said on that day, many will call me Lord, Lord. It's not just confession, but it's also it's also ethical, bearing fruit, bearing fruit.

Jesus said you will know Christians by their fruit. As soon as someone says that, I always see someone in the congregation and they're just thinking they're going, judge not lest ye be judged. And I always go and twist not scripture lest ye be like Satan, because that's exactly what you're doing.

The only verse most people ever memorize and that out of context. Judge not lest ye be judged means don't be a Pharisee. Who with hatred, jealousy and religious animosity in your heart, you criticize everyone in hopes of tearing them down so you can step on their broken bodies and achieve a greater renown than your religion.

Because the same Jesus who said, judge not lest ye be judged, says you will know them by their fruit, you will know them by their fruit. And Paul, the apostle, said, test yourself. Do you know what's sad? In many churches.

If a pastor, a sincere, godly pastor saw a teenager or an adult that had been baptized and confessed Christ in the church, but had now gone wayward and was living in rebellion and walking in darkness. If that pastor went to that young person and said, I fear for your soul, you may not be saved. Come, let us talk together.

Let us examine ourselves in light of Scripture. I want to help you. He'd be called on the carpet, maybe put out of the church.

Isn't that sad? Because a religious lie is dangerous and it encrusts the heart. And we have a religious lie in believing, well, every one of us is saved. We all prayed that prayer.

Now, we don't live like it. But how do you know that you've truly believed in Jesus Christ? Paul says here, test yourselves, examine yourselves. Kind of a Hebrew parallelism, even though he's writing in Greek.

The idea is that a Jew will say something and then in order to emphasize, he'll repeat it again a little bit differently in order to give added emphasis. That's what Paul's doing here. He's saying, examine yourselves, test yourselves.

Now, test yourselves in light of what? Paul also told the church in Corinth, you judge yourselves by yourselves and that's not wise. So if we're going to test ourselves to see if we truly are Christian, we shouldn't compare ourselves to other people who call themselves Christians. Why? Many call themselves Christians who are not Christians.

So it's not wise to compare ourselves to them. And then there are other Christians who are truly Christian, but are giving exceedingly great public gifts or have made great progress in sanctification. And we shouldn't compare ourselves to them because we might come under false condemnation.

To what should we compare ourselves? How should we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith? Well, fortunately, God's thought of that. Go to first John chapter five, first John, chapter five, verse 13. John and John, his gospel, chapter 20, verse 31, he tells us why he wrote his gospel.

He wrote the gospel so that everyone who reads the gospel might be saved, that they would know that Jesus is the Christ. That's why he wrote his gospel. And now John also tells us why he wrote this epistle.

He says these things, what are these things? First John. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. The purpose of First John and all through Southern Baptist history, First John was the main tool of godly pastors.

To help people come to a biblical understanding of salvation, to know whether or not they were genuinely saved or they had a false faith. Now, there's a few things I want to look at here. First of all, he's writing to people who have confessed faith in Christ.

And he's saying, I'm writing to you who believe you've said you've confessed Christ as Lord and Savior. I'm writing these things so that by listening to what I tell you, you'll be able to know whether you truly believe or not. Now, let me say something that's very important.

There is kind of an independent fundamentalist idea out there. It's wrong. That if you ever doubt, if you doubt your salvation, you're lost.

I have heard that so many times. Well, if you doubt your salvation, you're lost. No, that's not biblical.

It's not historical. It's not Baptist. And furthermore, it's not evangelical, as you study the evangelical community since the Reformation.

A true believer can go through times of doubt. A true believer can struggle with assurance. One of the things that we pray for and study Scripture about and cry out for grace is that we might have assurance, the sound conviction, the solid foundational assurance that truly we've come to believe.

So if you doubt your salvation sometimes, don't think that's a sign of lostness necessarily, because all true believers can go through that, especially sometimes. I don't have time to teach on this aspect, but sometimes in discipline, God will pull away assurance from a true believer so that they may fear and seek Him. OK, what you need to be afraid of is not if sometimes you doubt your salvation, what you need to be afraid of is if you live like the world, act like the world, talk like the world, have the same desires the world has, and you never doubt your salvation.

That's when you ought to be afraid. Now, John gives us a series of tests from first John on. Now, we don't have time to go through all of them, and some of them are repetitive, but I want to go through some of the major tests that John gives us in order that we may examine our lives in light of them and come to a biblical assurance of salvation.

The first test is found in John, first John, chapter one, verse five. This is the message we have heard from him and announced to you that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. Now, I want you to have

to understand this before we get to the test.

It says God is light. Now, what does that mean? Well, you know, the common interpretation and a correct one, I believe, John writes in a way that what he says sometimes can have multiple interpretations. And he does it so often, I think he does it on purpose.

But it does mean God is light, God is holy. There's no shadow in him. There's no unholiness.

He's not immoral. God is absolute, pure. Now, but in the context of first John, I think he's saying something a bit more, a bit more than that.

You see, false teachers, the roots of Gnosticism, which was one of the greatest enemies of the early church, seems to have come into this church. And one of the main doctrines that they had was God is esoteric, dark. You can't really know who he is and you can't really know who he is.

You can't really know his will. But John comes back and says God is light. And I believe that what God, what John is saying here is this.

God is not esoteric. He's not hidden. He's not dark.

But what God is, is this. God is a God of revelation. He's a God of light.

God has revealed to us who he is and he's revealed to us his will. He has told us who he is and he has shown us what he desires or what his will is. He's not a dark God.

He's a known God. We know who he is and we know what he wants. We know his will.

He's revealed it to us, not only through Old Testament scripture and the law and the Decalogue, but once and for all in the greatest way, through his son. Now, you're going to go on now and see why this is important. Here's the first test of a true believer.

If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. Now, modern day interpretation has put a twist on this.

It's amazing. It's why it's good to read books older than a hundred years. And I'm amazed that in modern interpretation, specifically, specifically in among Baptists, not so much among Southern Baptists, but among other Baptists, it's this idea that what John is talking about is not whether you're a Christian or not.

But whether you're a Christian who has fellowship with God or a Christian who doesn't have fellowship with God. And that is not what this is teaching at all. Not at all.

And history backs me up on this. The main thrust of interpretation here, when John says, if we say we have fellowship with him, what the person is saying, if we say we're a Christian, if we say we're truly a Christian, born again, child of God, that's the thrust of the whole epistle. And that's the majority interpretation of our greatest historical interpreters throughout history.

John is saying, if we say we're a Christian, but walk in darkness, we lie when we say we're a Christian. He says in verse seven, but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. Now, I want you to see the connection

here.

If you're out of fellowship, the blood of Jesus doesn't cleanse you from your sin. That right there is evidence to tell you that when he says, if we say we have fellowship, we're saying if we say we're Christians. Now, the first test is this.

A true Christian will walk in the light. Now, what does that mean to walk in the light? Remember our definition prior, God is light. It means he has revealed to us who he is and he has revealed to us his will.

What John is saying is this, if we say we are a Christian and yet we walk in a way that contradicts what God has revealed about himself and what he has revealed about his will, we lie when we say we're a Christian. But a true Christian will walk in a way that conforms to the character God has revealed about himself and will walk in a way that is conformed to the will or law of God. Now, let's look at the word walk for a minute.

The Greek word peripateo, pateo means to walk, peripateo means to kind of walk around. And what John is talking about is not if you walk in the light in church buildings, he's saying in every manner of your life, every manner of your life conforms to what God has told us about himself and what God has revealed about his will through his law and teaching. Now, here's something very important about the word walk.

It's present tense. It's talking about a habitual style of life and not a moment in time. Now, why is that important? I'm going to tell you.

When I say that the first evidence that you're a true believer is that you walk in the light, you're probably sitting there and go, well, you know, I do, but I don't perfectly. And sometimes I sin and I can walk out of the light and well, I get convicted about it. And I get convicted of the Holy Spirit.

I have to repent. And so am I lost because I don't walk in the light perfectly. That's where it's so wonderful to understand what John's saying.

John is saying that the true Christian is not saying the true Christian will be perfect, but he's saying as a style of life, when you look at the true Christian, his whole gamut of life, his style of life over a period of time, when you look at him and observe his life, you will see the characteristic of his life is that he is truly seeking, truly walking, living, conformed to what God has revealed about his character and conformed to what God has revealed about his law. Now, let me give you an example. Let's say I follow.

Let's say that I just want to destroy this church and I want to really get the pastor kicked out. OK, and I've got to choose between two tools, snapshot camera and a video camera. I'm going to choose the snapshot camera.

Why? Because here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to follow him around everywhere. And then one day it's going to happen, he's going to get mad.

Something's going to happen. He's going to kick a dog. He's going to he's going to lose his temper.

He's going to be selfish. Something is going to happen. And I'm going to wait for that moment.

And the moment he does it, click, then I'm going to blow it up and I'm going to put it up here on the wall. And I'm going to say, look at this man. He can't be your pastor.

He's a sinner. He's a vile man. Look at that face.

Right. But see what I'm doing, I'm not giving you an accurate description of his life. I have taken a snapshot picture of a moment of weakness, a moment when he gives in to the flesh, a moment when he sins.

But that is not an accurate picture. An accurate picture would be to follow him around with a camera 24 hours a day for about five years. Now, if someone followed you around and I don't care, I'm going to be real smart right now.

I don't really care about your heart or what you feel or your emotions or how you sing hymns or how much you come to church. My only question is this. If someone followed you around 24 hours a day for a year with a video camera, would they see a person whose style of life was that of and not what they said with their mouth? I mean, look at their life.

And you could say after looking at that for a year, you could say, you know. The style of that person's life, the trend of their life, you can see that they're a person who honestly seeks to walk in a way that is conformed to the character of God and they honestly seek to walk in a way that conforms to the will of God as revealed in Scripture, because if they can't see that, you need to be afraid. There is this absolutely absurd idea that a person can actually be saved and not be changed and not continue to change.

And yet all the promises of the new covenant in the Old Testament, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel and all the promises of Paul, the apostle, is that he who began a good work and every believer will finish it. And that there is no such thing as a continuously carnal Christian. That's the invention of a seminary out West and praise God, it wasn't Southern Baptist.

One man started a doctrine, the carnal Christian, and it has literally destroyed the doctrine of assurance. The idea that a person can live in continuous carnality without discipline, without repentance, without God working in their life for years and years and years, not grow, not care about the things of God, but bless God, they're saved is an absolute lie. It's a lie.

Because he who began a good work in you will finish it. I use this illustration. Someone asked me about it last night.

Let's say I showed up here late and I'm dressed like this. This is about as good as I get. And I'm dressed like this.

I show up late. Pastor's angry with me. You know, how dare you come in here late? What are you thinking about? Don't you appreciate you get to preach here? So, Pastor, hold it.

I was coming on the highway, had a flat tire. I was changing the tire. The lug nut came out of my hand.

It rolled into the middle of the street. I wasn't thinking. I ran out there.

I grabbed the lug nut. When I stood up, there was a 30 ton logging truck going 120 miles an hour and it was like five feet in front of me. It ran me over.

And so I'm late. I mean, I'm just late. Now, having studied something of logic, I'm sure your pastor is going to figure out the following.

There are two options. One, I am a magnificent liar. Or two, I'm absolutely out of my mind.

And I must say, well, why can't you believe me? He said it's absolutely impossible. You are either a liar or you are terribly disturbed because it is impossible to have an encounter with a logging truck weighing 30 tons going 120 miles an hour and not be changed. So my question is, how is it that all these Christians are running around having encounter with God and they're not changed? Has God become somewhat more impotent than a logging truck? And this is the fault of preaching.

It's the fault of false preaching, bad preaching, even among conservatives, bad, faulty preaching. It's not true and people are going to hell and we're responsible for it. My dear friend, I come from a very large Southern Baptist Church and we are all about winning the world and having conferences and doing everything.

But I want you to know something, just a little bit something. Pastoral care seems to people don't respect it quite much anymore. Everyone wants to be a mover and shaker.

The greatest thing you can be on the face of the earth is a pastor. And the job of a pastor, a lot of pastors have big visions and I'm convinced they use the sheep to fulfill their vision. The vision has to be the sheep caring for the souls.

Pastors wrote journal after journal in the old days about their responsibility to care for the souls of their congregation. You hear pastors weeping out at night under trees going, I don't think it's well with many of the people in my congregation. They still not come to know the Lord, even though they've attended for years.

We don't hear that kind of language anymore. Why? Because we're all about some kind of strategy. It's going to make our church grow so that they'll put us in some paper somewhere.

We need to care for people. And the biggest part of pastoral care is the pastor sometimes knocking on your door and saying, I've observed your life or maybe the life of your child, and I'm afraid it may not be well with your soul. Will you meet with me? Now question congregation.

Will you realize that you've got a gem of a pastor on your hands or will you kick him out on his ear? Well, I'll tell you, the answer will determine just how many saved people are in this church. Carnal men will take offense at it, carnal, wicked, lost church people will take offense at it. But a true Christian will go, my goodness, look what we've got here.

Leadership that cares about our souls, even though it could cost them like Leonard Ravenhill used to say, now you understand why I preach in a lot of Baptist churches once. Now, let's go to the next test. And this is a beloved test.

John, first John, chapter one, verse eight, if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. After the first test, some objectors will always say, well, you know, I think that's legalism.

He's talking about sinless perfection. I've already explained that I haven't. But this verse even proves it more so.

The second test of whether or not you're a true Christian is not. Are you sinless? But one of the greatest evidences that you're a true Christian is that you recognize the sin in your life and it brings you to repentance and confession. One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is not sinless perfection like Wesley used to talk about.

No, the greatest evidence that a person has come to know the Lord, that their heart of stone has been removed and replaced with a heart of flesh that can respond to divine stimuli. One of the greatest evidences that a person has become a Christian is that they're sensitive about their sin and broken over it and open for rebuke and correction. I'm going to tell you something, and every time I've said this, pastors just kind of look at me like, boy, is that true? Everywhere I go, let's say that there's a preacher up here and he's preaching and he's really preaching and God begins to move.

Now, I've seen this happen and most men have. God begins to move. And I mean, you might be preaching on marriage or something, but people just begin to start weeping.

And there's this just sensitivity. It seems like God's doing an unusual work in the church and people are broken about their sin and people are coming forward and repenting of things. It's just a work of the Holy Spirit.

It never fails that this is the case. When that happens, the most godly, most devoted, most dedicated people in the church are the ones coming forward, weeping over their sins. And the most carnal, cold, unconcerned, once a week attending church member who never really serves the Lord is sitting back there cold as a stone as though they had not one sin to account for.

What are you seeing? You're seeing the difference between saved men and lost men. One of the greatest evidences of having been born again is that you're sensitive to sin. And if growing in maturity.

Open to correction. I was sharing with a bunch of young guys, street preaching and stuff that came last night and I was talking to them and I said, now you want to understand something as you grow in authority, as God begins to give you more and more authority in the pulpit or more and more authority in leadership, you need to be sensitive to build around you more and more men that will hold you accountable. And will not be a respecter of person, men that will say after a sermon, I was telling them last night, I preached a sermon, this was years ago, man, I was just ripping and roaring and I came down out of the pulpit and a dear brother of mine, an older man came up to me and said, Paul, you preach the truth tonight and you preached it in the flesh and you need to get on your knees right now and ask God to forgive you.

That was that was a turning point in my life. By God's grace, I did what he said, and then when I got a chance, I asked the church to forgive me. If I had hardened my heart.

That might not only have ruined the rest of my years of ministry, but it might have proven I was lost. Listen to me, I plead with you, I plead with you. Are you open to rebuke? Don't you know, are you open to it? What if a man of God, what does he have to gain? He has a lot to gain by tickling your ears.

He has a lot to gain by making you feel good about him. One of the reasons parents don't discipline their children is not because they love them, but because they want their children to like them. The reason why preachers do not confront their congregations is because they want their congregations to like them.

But don't you understand your best friend is the one who tells you the most truth? And if a pastor or a leader, a deacon or someone, a godly man or woman or even a child comes to you and points out a wrong, how you respond to that may be the evidence of whether or not you're saved. Will you be open to it? Had a young guy come to me one time after I preached and he said, I think you're arrogant. And I said, young man, that may be.

He said, in what you said, I thought you were arrogant. I said, OK. And now that's really not the question, is it? The question is, what I said.

Was it true? Because if it's true, you don't have an excuse just because the deliverer was arrogant. See, what a lot of church people will do when a pastor has to deal with an issue, this is what will happen, since usually the pastor stands alone, which he should not. Leadership should always be with him.

Pastor stands alone, says something that's true to the congregation and people who don't like it, they don't open their Bibles and say, Pastor, I have a disagreement theologically with you. No, they turn it into a personality battle and they attack the messenger. But they never open their Bible and confront the truth.

They just use the excuse, I don't like the way he said it doesn't matter the way he said it, is it true? And if it is true, repent. Repent. So one of the greatest evidences, God doesn't say He looks to the one who is perfect.

He says He looks to the one who's broken and contrite and trembles at His word. One of the greatest evidences, like I say, is poverty of spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn. They're sensitive, not over just the sins of a nation as though they were a prophet. No, they're sensitive over their own sin.

Does that describe your life? Let me ask you a question. Just personal question, you don't have to answer me. When was the last time you wept over your sin? Scary, isn't it? Another test.

Chapter two, verse three. By this, we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. The one who says I've come to know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.

Now, folks, just look at the language for a moment. This is not a radical higher criticism, textual criticism, interpretation. Just listen to what he's saying.

He says, if one says I have come to know him and does not keep his commandments, he's a liar. He's a liar. Now, listen to what it's actually saying.

And never forget, this is John the Beloved. Now, what's he saying? Is he saying that if you're truly a Christian, you'll keep the commandments of God always? No, absolutely not. Again, he's talking about style of life.

Let me put it to you this way. Someone comes to me and says, Brother Paul, I have a new relationship with God. I say, well, do you have a new relationship with sin? Because if you don't have a new relationship with sin, you don't have a new relationship with God.

Brother Paul, I have a new relationship with God. Well, do you have a new relationship with God's commandments? Because if you don't have a new relationship with God's commandments, you don't have

a new relationship with God. And that's what he's saying here.

He's saying this, that the genuine believer will have a new relationship with the commandments of God. And what will they be? Well, let me use my own life. Prior to being converted at the University of Texas, prior to my conversion, I didn't care about Scripture.

I didn't study it. I didn't feel like I need to know it. It wasn't a part of my life on a practical basis at all.

I didn't seek to obey it and I didn't press on into the promises. And if I broke the commandments, I hardly even knew it. And when I did know it, I didn't care.

When I became a Christian, that book, I need to know this book, what has God commanded? And there began a pilgrimage of wanting to know the commandments of God, of pressing in to obey the commandments of God and of being broken when I failed the commandments of God. You know, I taught the other day, there's no such thing as atheism. It's true.

Scripture does not acknowledge atheism. Also, Scripture does not say that all men know there is a God. Scripture says all men know enough about the true God to know they hate him.

The one thing that there is out there is a practical atheist and many people who congregate on Sunday morning are just that. Let me ask you a question. What kind of relationship do you have with God's word and God's commandments? Is that the principal source of direction for your life? Are you going to Scripture to find out how should I be as a man? How should my character be? How should I raise a family? How should I husband a wife on and on and on? Is the Scriptures the basis of your life? Are you growing in your knowledge of the Scriptures? Are you pressing in to obey them more? When you break the Scriptures, do you repent? And are you brought to conviction of sin? What's going on? Or do you live like a practical atheist? You go to church on Sunday, but absolutely nothing in your life is directed by the word of God.

One of the most frightening things Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount is he says this, then I will say, I never knew you, you workers of lawlessness. Now, what that really means, because in the context, he's talking about people who profess his name. He's saying on Judgment Day, he will look at people and say, depart from me.

I never knew you, those of you who claim to be my disciples, but you lived as though I never gave you a law to obey. Did I just describe your life? You call yourself a Christian, you attend church, but you live as though God never gave you a commandment to obey. You live as though he never gave you wisdom to follow.

You live as though he never gave you precepts. Your marriage is based on what's right in your own eyes, the way you raise your children, based on what's right in your own eyes, your business based on what's right on your own eyes, you follow your own morality, your rule to yourself. You're basically a good guy.

But are you biblical? Where is the scripture in your life? First test, do we walk in the light as a style of life? Conforming to the nature and will of God's second test, are we sensitive toward our sin? Does it bring us to brokenness, contrition, repentance and confession? Third, do we have a new relationship with the commandments of God? Fourth, verse six of chapter two, the one who says he abides in him ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked. Do you walk like Jesus walked? You said, oh, no, I got you there, preacher. No one does that, really.

Do you understand what he's saying? The best way to teach this passage is I'm going to give you an illustration from my childhood. OK, when I was a little boy, some of you will remember this type of lifestyle. Those of you who are older, I lived on a cattle ranch and my father would come up at about five thirty five, five thirty every morning since I could remember.

And he would first Bible verse I ever, ever memorized. He would say this. He'd walk into my room.

He'd say, Paul, boy, get up. No rest for the wicked. That's what he would say every morning.

And it was back in the time when he said, get you better be up before he got up. You jumped out of that bed when your dad said, get up, you better get up. And I would get up and then we would go out, we'd feed the horses and feed the cattle.

Now, in Illinois, we'd have snows like you do here, and sometimes we'd get up. Now, my dad was a really big man, very strong. I was scared of him.

I mean, intimidating fellow. But like a little boy, I wanted to be just like him. Well, my dad would grab a bucket here and a bucket here, and he would just take the biggest steps you ever imagined, walk out across that feedlot in the snow.

Now, as a little boy, and some of you, I hope, can remember doing the same thing. I would grab a bucket, grab a bucket, and then I'd try to put my foot in the footprint of my dad. I couldn't walk like him.

The buckets were slopping all over the place. I looked really silly, even strange, and I fell down in feedlots, which is not a good thing to do. And I would get all muddy.

Someone would have laughed. But no one would have doubted that little boy wants to be just like his dad. He can't.

He's stretching out farther than he can walk. He looks kind of foolish and he's making a mess. But there's no doubt this boy wants to be like his dad.

When someone looks at your Christian life, do they say, well, I guess if you got real specific, there might be some things you could pretty much pick apart. But there's one thing about this person. They really want to be like Christ.

You can see it. You can see it. Their goal is to be like Jesus Christ.

Can they say that about you? And all you're falling down, slopping around and making a mess, would be able to look at you and say, this person wants to be like Christ. Now, we'll do one more test, even though there are many, many others, but we only have time. Maybe we'll continue this tonight.

I don't know. One of the greatest tests we're going to finish with is found in verse nine of chapter two. Well, let's start in eight.

He says, on the other hand, I'm writing a new commandment to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. What's he talking about? He's talking about sanctification. You can see progress in these believers lives.

Darkness is passing away. True light is shining. Old things are disappearing.

New things are coming. That's why it's very important. I used to tell people, boy, when God saved me, he changed me.

Now I tell them when God saved me, he began a process of change in me. Now, he did change me, but he continues transforming. We ought to all wear T-shirts that say, I'm sorry for the trouble, but under construction type thing.

Now, in verse nine, he says, the one who says he's in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness. Until now, the one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. A man who has mentored me for years always tells me this.

Paul, in the new covenant, love is not something. Love is the thing. It's everything.

The true test of discipleship, all the commandments summed up in this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus cleared up the thing on the neighbor for us, didn't he? It's to be just everyone.

But this is even more specific. One of the greatest tests that you are truly Christian is the love you have for your brothers. Now, brother here is not a reference to the poor, even though we should love the poor.

It's not a reference to someone from another race because there's no such thing as someone from another race. To say someone is from another race is racist. There's only one race, human rights.

That's it. And there's really not any color. It's just some people have more pigment than others.

There's not loving someone from another race when it says love your brother. It's talking about loving other Christians. Now, sometimes you hear this guy, you know, I'm not going to go to church because it's full of hypocrites.

I got beat up one time because I looked at the guy and I said, well, if it's full of hypocrites, then you better get saved because you're going to be in hell with those hypocrites all the days of your life. But some people will say, I'm not going to church, it's full of hypocrites. I can worship God in my bass boat.

Really? Deer stand. Amazing. It's only one problem.

God never commanded you to do that. He commanded you to fellowship with him and worship him and serve him in the context of a bunch of broken people. And I will I will give you that the church is full of hypocrites, but that's because it's full of lost people.

It's full of lost people because, well, we really don't preach the gospel like we ought to. We really don't deal with the doctrine of assurance like we ought to. And we most certainly do not practice compassionate, loving church discipline.

So since all those marks of a truly true church are gone, yeah, the church is full of a lot of lost hypocrites. But the fact of the matter is the church is also filled in part with God's people. And one of the greatest evidences.

That someone is a Christian is they will love other Christians. Now, I'm going to finish up by, you know, that passage in Scripture where Jesus says I was in prison and you didn't visit me and I was hungry and you didn't feed me and I was naked and you didn't clothe me. And so people use that verse as a basis for

prison ministry, as a basis for feeding the poor, as a basis for clothing people.

And we ought to feed the poor. We ought to have prison ministries and we ought to clothe people. But that has absolutely nothing to do with what Jesus is saying.

I mean, it's unbelievable you can turn a verse into a cliché that means nothing. That's not what Jesus is saying. He's not saying I'm the pedophile that was in prison and you didn't come and minister to me.

What is Jesus saying? I understood this when I began to move in the realm of the third world. Many people in America wish I had stayed in the third world. But in Peru, one of the most terrifying prisons in the Western Hemisphere, if not the most, is found in Peru.

And you get thrown in prison, OK? You get thrown in prison and they don't give you food. And they don't give you clothes and they don't give you water in prison. So when you're thrown in prison, if someone from the outside doesn't come and give you food every day or every other day and water and clothing, you are going to be hungry, thirsty, naked and sick.

Now, what is Jesus talking about? I was in prison. He's not talking about a prison ministry. He's saying this.

Let's say we're back in, you know, two thousand years ago. We're meeting in a little house church. All right.

And there's a few of us up here that are leaders. And all of a sudden the door is broken in. And there stand some Roman soldiers and they grab the pastor and they take him off to prison.

Now, the next night, all of us get together, the rest of us leaders, we get together, we got to pray, we got to we got to do something. Why? Well, our pastor is going to starve to death, he's going to die of thirst, he's going to die naked, cold and sick. We got to do something.

There's only one thing to do. Draw straws. One of us has to go and take him food and water.

And clothing, you say, well, what's the problem? Well, when you walk up there and say. I'm here to see Pastor Riddle, you're going to jail, too. Now we got two pastors in there.

Then the next day. I've come to see. You see.

What Jesus is saying is this. On the Day of Judgment, it's not that you're saved by your works of love, but your works of love are the evidence that you've truly come to know Him. And one of the greatest manifestations that you're truly Christian is that you're actively involved in practical and sacrificial service.

My dear friend, what they say about companies, they should not say about the church, but they do. You know, in every company, it is a standard rule in marketing, insurance, doesn't matter what it is, factory floor workers, that 20% of the people do 80% of the work. And 80% of the people do nothing.

That fact is well known in the church. One of the evidences that a person is lost, even the term reprobate turned over, it says in Romans chapter three, they are useless to God. They've altogether become useless.

Let me ask you a question. Are you is your life marked by practical and what I mean, practical, I mean, real. Is your life marked by practical, sacrificial, loving service to the saints of God? If it's not, you ought to be afraid.

Isn't it amazing? Most people think themselves well into Christianity because they attend church on Sunday. You know the thing, oh, let's not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. You need to read the rest of the thing because there's a reason for assembling yourselves together.

He's not talking about Sunday morning meetings. And that's all because in Sunday morning meetings you receive. It's also assembling yourselves together to minister to one another in love, to serve one another, to be there for one another, to care for one another.

And again, and we're going to end here. But this is why I go back to the fact that we're the wealthiest, most protected Christians on the face of the earth. And yet 75% of all our books that come out of all these bookstores of ours are written about how empty we are.

And the reason why we're empty is the reason Jesus never was. I have food to eat that you know not of. And my food is to do the will of my father who sent me.

That's what you got to ask yourself. Now, I've given you tests and I've given them to you. And these are from Scripture, and I hope you'll compare your life to them.

Are you in the faith? Do you truly believe? And you know, I'm a debater from long back, so I know the attitude of some when they hit that door. I just don't agree with what he said. OK, you're Christian and you don't agree with what I've said.

You've got a responsibility then if you're truly Christian and you don't agree with what I've said. If you're truly Christian, you have to come to me today in love and open up Scripture and show me where I'm wrong. And if I don't see it, you need to call the leadership of the church in and show me and them where I'm wrong.

Because if you're truly a Christian and you allow someone like me to preach false doctrine in your church, then you're either a very disobedient Christian or you're not a Christian. You see, I gotcha. You can't walk out that door and just go, that guy, just who does he think he is? Well, I absolutely think I'm just about nothing.

I'm living proof that God still speaks through rocks and donkeys. But then again, that's not the point. The question is, what I said, is it true? Think about it.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. Let's pray.

Father, I come before you in the name of your son. Lord, help us and we will be helped. Work in the heart of your people, transforming lives.

Oh, God, that they may come whosoever will. That they may believe. That they may know eternal life.

In Jesus name, Amen.

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