

The Cross-Centered Life, Part 3

by Paul Washer

True faith is evidenced by a changed life, good works, and a new nature, and is the result of the work of God in regeneration.

Duration: 1:13:51

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Cross of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the purpose of the book of John, which is to provide a series of tests for believers to compare their lives against. These tests serve as a measure of assurance for those who have been born again. The preacher emphasizes the importance of reflecting on these tests and evaluating whether they are evident in one's life. He also highlights the concept of nature, using the analogy of a pig and a man, to illustrate how believers have been given a new nature through their faith in Christ. The sermon concludes with a reminder that although believers may struggle against their flesh and face temptations, they will ultimately grow, bear fruit, and be transformed throughout their lives.

Transcript

Well, praise the Lord. That was a tremendous blessing, the worship. It's a tremendous blessing for me to be here with you.

Let's open up our Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 2. Now, I'm going to go to different texts tonight, glance at them, and maybe get to my primary text. I don't know if I'll be able to do that tonight. Let me share with you what my purpose is before we even start.

There is a great deal of very dangerous teaching within the evangelical community, the Baptist community, Southern Baptist, on and on, regarding salvation by faith. Salvation by faith. Of course, our text is going to, we're going to at least start off in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, that talks about salvation by faith.

Well, to start off, let me say this. If anyone ever even begins to hint that salvation requires something more than faith, you need to run. You need to realize that is not true.

That is the greatest of heresy. It is the greatest of false teaching. Salvation is by faith alone.

It begins with faith. It ends with faith and nothing added to it. But now, here's what I want you to see.

Many people believe that that means that you believe in Jesus. You believe that he's the son of God or you at least acknowledge that he's the son of God and you acknowledge that he died on the cross and you acknowledge you're a sinner. And maybe even you, you pray a prayer and you ask him to come into your heart.

And in that way, you are told that you received him. And then it's done. And it doesn't matter if after that you're not changed at all.

You live like the devil. You return to the world. I've even heard some people say that a person can trust in Christ, later become an atheist, and is still going to heaven.

Now there's a second group that says something like this. No, all of that's not true. Because James teaches us that if you believe, you will also have works.

And there's truth in what they're saying, but they say this. If you truly believe, it means that you have made a firm decision. And you have exercised your will and you are determined.

And therefore, because you are determined and with the strength of your will, you truly have believed. Therefore, you're going to go ahead and do good works. And so good works are the evidence of salvation.

But that's not true either. What is true? Well, let's look at our passage here in Ephesians chapter 2. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God. Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Now here, when Paul begins to talk about faith or he begins to talk about grace, he almost becomes redundant. It seems like he just goes at length to say the same thing over and over again. We are justified by faith and not by works, because it's not by works that we're justified, but by faith.

He seems to repeat it over and over. Why? It is so important that we are saved by grace. It is grace.

It is God's gift. And that gift is received by faith, by believing in Christ, by looking to Christ, by trusting in Christ alone. And trusting in Christ alone is often explained this way.

I have thrown myself upon Christ. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. I claim no glory, no merit, no virtue of my own, but I trust in Christ.

I abandon all hope in everything else, and I trust in Christ. Like one old farmer one time told me, a very godly man, he said, I was raised in the church as a young boy. I was always considered a good man, but my soul was troubled.

I knew that I was not Christian. But I could not get my mind around what it meant to believe. And he said, I went into the barn, and I went up to the hayloft, and I was pacing back and forth, trying to wrestle this thing out.

And he said, I walked to the edge of the hayloft, and I stood with my toes hanging over the edge. And I said this to God, God, I am going to trust only, only, in who Your Son is and what He has done for me. And if that is not enough to save me, then I am going to hell because I refuse to trust in anything else.

Faith not only involves repenting from sin, it involves repenting from your good works. Repenting from any trust in any virtue or any merit. And trusting exclusively, only in the virtue and merit of the person of Christ

and His work.

In order to believe in Christ, you must literally become destitute of all hope in yourself. As a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle, a man or a young person filled with self-righteousness cannot get into heaven. It is an emptying, we could say.

You look at the Scriptures, the Spirit of God illuminating your mind, and you realize something of the holiness of God, and you see something of your radical depravity, and you realize that if salvation is 99.99999% God and the rest of it's you, you're going to hell. Because you can't fulfill perfectly even that last part. You see, it's not just sort of good people that get to heaven.

It's absolutely, perfectly righteous people. Now, I learned this from a friend, but I love doing it on the airplane. I'll pull out my Bible and be reading it and maybe start a discussion with someone.

And you know, sometimes they ask me the question, well, you know, I'll be reading and they'll go, well, what do I have to do to go to heaven? And I'll look up and I'll go, oh, that's easy. You just have to be absolutely, perfectly righteous from the moment of birth to death. And then I just go back reading.

And they'll go, you know, they'll go, what? What did you say? And I say, oh, I'm sorry. Did I not explain myself? Impeccability is a good word. You have to be absolutely without sin in person and deed from the moment of birth until the moment you die.

Go back to reading. And you'll see the person, they're kind of sitting there for a minute, you know, looking out the window and then they tap you on the shoulder. Hey.

Yes. That's not good. What do you mean? Well.

Nobody. Well, I'm not like that. You got a real problem, don't you? Well, what am I supposed to do? That's just it.

You can't do anything. Would you pass me the peanuts? The stewardess didn't give me any. I mean, the guy gets beside himself.

You know, that'd be a good lesson for preachers. People only get saved after they get beside themselves. When they have, they're emptied of all hope.

They have nothing. And they fall upon Christ. They fall upon Christ.

They collapse upon Christ. They believe. Not of works.

It is a gift. They believe. And they are justified.

They are saved. They are pardoned. The perfect righteousness of Christ is placed in their account because they believe.

But now here's the problem. You've got all kinds of people out there, don't you? Running around saying they believe. I mean, I could, well, I wouldn't dismiss you, but some of the older pastors could go with me tonight and we could all just visit all the bars in town.

We would find that most of the people in there believe. We could go to the prisons. They believe.

We could go to people who haven't darkened the doors of a church in ten years. They believe. So many people believe.

And if you question them, you will feel their rage and their judgment against you. So what is it? I mean, is it true that you just believe and live like the devil and you go to heaven? Or is it true that if you really believe, then by the strength of your will you will do things and by doing those things you will prove you believe? Absolutely not. Then what is it? It's a doctrine that has been completely lost in our time.

It's called the doctrine of regeneration. Being born again. Do you know what it really means? Well, before I tell you, let me tell you what it's been interpreted to mean.

Basically, you made a decision. Hour of decision. Did you make your decision? If you made your decision, you're born again.

And we've equated this magnificent work of God with just a person making a decision. And that's not what it is at all. Regeneration means this, that you have a dead sinner.

A sinner with a heart of a stone that cannot respond to God. Can a dead man respond to my voice? Absolutely not. So you have a sinner who cannot respond to God.

And now the philosopher tells me, and even some of my Christian brethren tell me, well, if he can't respond to God, he's not guilty. That's absurd. I mean, you're not going to judge a blind man because he can't read a book.

No, I would never judge a blind man because he can't read a book. But that's not what I'm talking about. Now listen to me very carefully.

When the Bible says and preachers say that a man cannot, a sinful, unregenerate man cannot respond to God, this is what we mean. He cannot respond to God because he will not respond to God. And he will not respond to God because he hates Him so much.

It's not that you have people there going, oh, I would love to respond, but I can't. They cannot because they will not. And they will not because they hate God.

And they hate God because their heart is corrupt and God is good. They will not come to the light because their deeds are evil. Let me give you an example.

Do you know Joseph in the Bible and his brothers? Brothers were always very angry with him. Well, it says in the Scriptures that Joseph's brothers could not speak a kind or peaceful word to him. Now listen to the language.

Joseph's brothers could not speak a kind word to him. Now, obviously, they all spoke the same language. The brothers, none of them were dumb in the sense that they could not speak.

Joseph could hear. So how can the Bible say that Joseph's brothers could not speak a peaceful or kind word to him? Well, it tells us because they hated him. Man is born radically depraved.

He is born hating God, hating righteousness. Now because of that, man, his moral corruption, he will not come to God. He will not because he hates Him so much.

Let me give you an example. A king comes down into the dungeon where there is a political prisoner who has done all sorts of horrible things. And the king looks at him and says, I am a merciful king.

I am a compassionate king. Throw open the doors of the cell. And they throw the doors open.

And he tells the political prisoner, Come out. You don't have to be in this prison. You do not have to die here.

I will set you free. Come out of the prison. All you have to do is acknowledge my sovereignty.

Come out of the prison. And the prisoner, even though he is in torment, even though he is in chains, even though he is being fed horrible food, he musters up all his strength, goes to the door, grabs the bars, and slams the door shut and says, I would rather rot in hell than bow my knee to you. That's what we mean when we say men cannot come to God.

They cannot come because they will not come. And they will not come because they hate Him. And they hate Him because He is good.

And they are not. Let's bring it into a modern illustration. In my counseling, I have come across men and women, maybe older in their years, in their seventies, and they haven't spoken to their spouse in 15 years.

And I go to the woman and I say, David, you must forgive him. And what is the response? I cannot! She really cannot. But it's not because she has some physical inability.

She cannot because of the hatred in her heart against Him. So when Jesus says, no man can come to Me, He's not saying that men are victims who want to come to God, but for some reason they just don't have the ability to do so. He's saying they will not come to the light because their deeds are evil.

So our question is, how does this person come to God? How is it that some of you are sitting here right now, very interested in the things of Christ, taking notes, studying your Bible. How is it? The power of God came into your life. The power of God, the Spirit of God, in the work of regeneration.

And He made you alive. And He took out your heart of stone that cannot, that will not respond to God. And He replaced it with a fleshly heart, a living heart.

He gave you a new heart with new affections. And when He opened up your eyes and for the first time in your life you looked at Christ, those new affections in you, that new heart recreated in the likeness of God and true righteousness and true holiness, saw Jesus Christ and fell irresistibly in love with Him. Has that happened to you? Has that happened to you? Now here's what happens.

The believer, the true believer, demonstrates, proves, that he or she is truly a believer by their works. But it's not because they have this strength of will to produce works. No, it's because they have been turned into new creatures by the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is all of God. It is all of God. Look what it says in 8 and 9. It says, for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

You cannot boast in your salvation. But guess what? If you truly have been saved, you're going to grow in holiness. You're going to grow in righteousness.

You're going to grow in maturity. And you're going to have good works. And you can't boast in that either.

Why? The reason you're acting differently, talking differently, thinking differently, is because God has done a work in you. The reason why you continue to grow and continue to mature is He who began a good work in you continues it and He will continue it until He perfects it on the day of Christ Jesus. You know, it's amazing that most people who believe something like this, well, I believe in Jesus and I live like the devil, but I believe in Jesus and I'm saved.

They forget that after verses 8 and 9 comes verse 10. Those who have been changed by grace. Those who have been saved by grace.

Those who have believed. Look what it says. They have become God's workmanship.

Now, it isn't just that at the moment you believe, God begins to work in you. No. God, if you have believed, God has recreated you.

Remember what it says, if any man be in Christ, He is a new creation. Now, listen to me. Listen to me, young people.

That is not exaggerated metaphor. That is not hyperbole. That is not some beautiful poetic statement that has no meaning.

It is literal. Literal. Any person who is truly in Christ, who has truly believed in Jesus Christ unto salvation, they have become a new creation.

A new creature. They have been born of God after His kind. You know, in Genesis, it says there were cattle and they gave birth to things after their kind and plants with seed after their kind.

And when God works the new birth in a person, they become a new creation after His kind, remade in His likeness, and they live a different way. Not out of the strength of their will or the force of some discipline. They live a different way simply because they really are a new creature.

They've been recreated in Christ and as a new creature, God now begins to work in them with His providence all the days of their life. Look what it says. For we are His workmanship.

God does not save someone and then leave them to themselves. Absolutely not. Now, no one would probably teach that, but most evangelicals practice that.

That God can save a person and that person never changes and that person can live in sin all the days of their life and God really does nothing and in the end, they go to heaven. That is as far from the New Testament as you can possibly get. If God has saved you, He has recreated you, and if He has recreated you, you have become His workmanship.

And look what it says. Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that you would walk in them. This is absolutely astounding.

God takes a sinner who according to Romans chapter 3 is useless. He has someone preach the gospel to that sinner even though he is dead and God-hating and would resist every attempt of God to save him. The Spirit of God comes and alivens that sinner, recreates that sinner, changes that sinner's heart, gives that sinner new affections and those new affections draw that sinner to Christ.

And that sinner repents and believes and is justified and God begins to work and work and work all the days of that new believer's life. Before the foundation of the world, God determined to call for Himself a people. Before the foundation of the world, He even prepared the works that He wanted them to do.

Not just as a collective church, but as individuals. If you're a believer, before the foundation of the world, God prepared works for you. That's exciting.

And then He is going to continue working in you all the days of your life to see that those works become a reality in you. Now, here's the question. Does this describe your Christianity? Does this describe your Christianity? Can you say, Brother Paul, on that day, I don't really know exactly everything that happened, but I knew I was different.

And I have continued in that since that day. I kind of want to give a lesson in ontology right now, but I don't think it would work. Ontology deals with nature.

The nature of a thing. If a thing has a certain nature, He will act according to that nature. A pig has the nature of a pig and does the things of a pig.

A man has the nature of a man and does the things of a man. An apple tree has the nature of an apple tree and bears the fruit of an apple tree. The sinner has the nature of a sinner and resists God on all counts.

The believer has been given a new nature. And although that believer must struggle against the flesh, that unredeemed aspect of himself, and although that believer will have to struggle against the world and will have to struggle against the temptations of the evil one, and although that believer's progress may be slow and that it will be three steps forward and two steps back, although that believer may fall, that believer will rise and that believer will grow, and that believer will bear fruit, and that believer will be transformed throughout the years of his life. Is that you? Is that you? Does that describe your life? Not only inwardly, the believer is different, but the believer has a new relationship with God in this.

God takes paternal care of that believer. Do you know God's discipline? Do you know when you walk outside His will, have you experienced His discipline? The convicting work of the Holy Spirit? Him dealing with your mind? Him dealing with your heart? Bringing individuals to rebuke you? Putting things in front of you to stop you? Turning you back around? Or can you just run wildly and freely into sin and God does nothing? If that is true, then God is not your Father. The point that I want to make with this text before I go on is this.

Throughout all of Scripture, faith is evidenced by a changed life. We can also say it this way. Faith is evidenced by good works.

We can also say it this way, and this is my favorite way to say it. Faith is evidenced by a changing life. It doesn't mean that the moment you believe in the salvation, that you are completely changed in all your activities and all your works and thoughts and deeds.

You have been changed in your nature, but it takes a long time for that to become a reality in every aspect of your life. So one of the greatest evidences that you are truly converted, that you have become His workmanship, is not that you are transformed in a moment, but that there is a noticeable, observable work of God in you, transforming you. Can you say that about yourself? Now, I want us to look just quickly.

Go over to 2 Corinthians 5. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is what? A new creature. A new creature.

Someone asked me to share my testimony, and I shared my testimony today about how I was in the library and I was invited to a party and I said I wasn't going to go and all of a sudden the person asked me why and I said, well, I'm going to follow Jesus Christ and right then it's like a light turned on in my head and I realized, yes, that's what I must do. I must follow Jesus Christ. And when I walked out of there, when I walked out of that library, I was a new person.

It wasn't that I sat there and went, okay, now I'm going to have to... okay, I need to stop doing this and I need to start doing the other thing and no, I can't do this anymore, but I can do this. No, that didn't even come into play. What came into play was my affections were different.

I wasn't longing to go out and party that night. I wasn't longing to go out and get drunk. I wasn't longing to go out and get in a fight or do something like that.

It wasn't that I was trying to force myself to do good. It's just that I was a new creature. When you go to an apple orchard, you don't go out there and see all these apple trees groaning, trying to bear fruit and trying to avoid bearing pears.

They want to bear apples. You don't see that, do you? No, because they're giving birth to fruit that's according to their nature. When you trusted in Christ, was there any realization in your heart that you had become different? That you had become a new creature? And as you began to supposedly walk with Christ, was there any evidence of new fruit bearing and new affections and new desires? Because he says here clearly, if any, if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature.

And new creatures do new things. Let me give you an example from Spurgeon. Let's say that I have a great big 500 pound pig in the back of the auditorium.

And I put a big plate of food, the finest food you can possibly find in the world, over here. And I put a big bucket of garbage over here. And I tell the man holding the pig, I say, Loose him and let him go! The pig takes off running straight down the aisle.

Now you don't have to be an Illinois farm boy like me to know where that pig's going to go. Is he going to go over here to this fine plate of food? Absolutely not. Where's he going? He's going to go to the garbage.

Why? He's a pig. That's what pigs do. He has the nature of a pig.

Pigs eat garbage. He's going to stick his head in that bucket. He's going to bury his face in that garbage.

He is going to eat. He's going to wiggle his tail. He's going to be happy.

But let's say that in one moment, I have the power, in one second, to transform that pig. While he's got his head buried in that can, I've got the power to transform him into a man. I give him the nature of a man.

What's going to happen? I'll tell you what's going to happen. He's going to throw his head out of that bucket. Why is that? Because there are certain things a man cannot eat.

The creature of a man cannot eat those things. So the very things that he was delighting in, when I change his nature and make it different, and change his affections, not only does he not delight in it, he can't stand

it. The things he was gulping down, he's now vomiting up.

And not only that, when he turns around the pig, he was never ashamed. But when this man turns around and sees you looking at him, he's ashamed. What's happened? Did the pig take up a new set of rules? Did he find a better diet on Food Network? None of that.

What happened? I changed his nature. And when I changed his nature, his affections, his desires changed. He no longer wanted what he wanted before.

Now he wants new things. If you're converted, I just described your conversion. I did.

All of us were sinners who desired the garbage and the filth of this world. Relished it. Loved it.

Gulped it down like it says in Job. We drank down iniquity like it was water. But then God extended His hand and transformed our nature.

That's the new birth. That's regeneration. That's what it means to be born again.

And with that new nature, our desires changed. Do you see that? And we begin to do new things. Look over it.

Let's just go on. Let's look at Galatians. Look at chapter 6, verse 15.

Paul says this, For neither is circumcision anything or uncircumcision, but a new creation. He's saying, some religious ritual, you prayed a prayer and asked Jesus to come in, is not evidence that you're converted. Do you know the great majority of evangelicals are not trusting in Christ? They're trusting in the sincerity of a decision they made.

And they're not looking unto Jesus. It's in their vocabulary. If you ask them on the street, how do you know you're saved? They say, well, you know, 15 years ago, I prayed and asked Jesus to come in.

Do you know what a sound, mature, theologically correct Christian would say? How do I know I'm saved? I am looking unto Christ. It's not just a past tense thing. It is a present tense, ongoing thing.

They may tell you, oh, 10 years ago, I was lost in my sin and someone preached the Gospel to me, and I saw Christ as the Savior. I saw my sin as filthy. I began to look upon Christ and Christ saved me.

And I continue looking on Christ to this day. Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling.

But sir, he is telling me that you believed in Christ and you were saved and your life was never changed. No, of course my life was changed. I can't explain it.

I became a new creature with new desires. And yes, I struggle with sin, but it's not like before. Before I could fall into sin and love it.

Now, if I fall into sin, I hate it and I hate myself. And I must come back to God. Is that a reality in your life? Young person, you can fool your parents.

You can play a religious game, but not with God. Has your heart been changed? Are you bearing the fruit of repentance and faith? Are you a new creature who lives a different way? Paul says a religious ritual doesn't mean anything. Are you a new creation? Can you honestly say to me tonight, Brother Paul, it's not

just that I prayed a prayer one time.

It's not just that I go to youth group. It's not just that I'm here. Brother Paul, I know.

I know I'm a new creature. I know it. Not just I know it in my heart of hearts.

It's obvious in my life. I can't drink down sin like before. When I do sin, for all Christians stumble in many ways.

Brother Paul, I loathe it. I don't know what's happened to me. I just know I have a different relationship with God.

I have a different relationship with sin. I'm not the same person I was before. Can you say that? A new creation.

I believe that's why the Gospel of John begins within the beginning. I believe there's a hint there of going back to Genesis. And John is talking about the coming Christ who will begin a new creation.

A new people. Not people who live for Him by the force of their will, but people who have been changed in their nature so that both their will and their desires are also changed. Is that you, young person? Is that you? Ask yourself.

Are you a wolf just trying to look like a sheep? Are you? Is it against your nature to read the Bible? Is it against your nature to pray? Is it against your nature to talk about Christ? Then your nature has not been changed. Now please understand, at times it's hard for me to pray. At times it's hard for me to read the Bible and things like that.

We all struggle. But if the Christian life is something that you must make yourself do all the time, and when you get it done, you're relieved, you have not been changed. If the Christian life is you just giving God His day or His hour or His Wednesday, you have not been changed.

Let's go on. Let's look in 1 Thessalonians for a second. 1 Thessalonians 1. Listen to what Paul said in verse 4 about the church in Thessalonica, the believers.

He said, He said, Knowing, brethren... Knowing. Not guessing. Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, His choice of you.

I know that God has chosen you. I know that you are God's people. Now that's a pretty amazing statement.

He's talking to a group of people who have confessed Christ, and he says, I know God's choice of you. Wow! Now notice he doesn't say, I know God's choice of you because two years ago when I was here, you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart. Let me stop there and share with you something that a pastor did.

A conservative southern Baptist pastor. And this will tell you. It happens everywhere.

Evangelical. It doesn't matter. There was a person in my town.

I went to school with him. Never knew him to confess Christ. I was a rather wicked rascal and I was even afraid of him.

He was bad news. Bad news. Later on in life, he graduated from high school.

He got into drugs big time. Horrible immorality. Stealing.

Everything. And it went on all his life. He's one or two years older than me.

I heard one day from a dear friend of mine that he died. And his funeral was in the First Baptist Church. And this is what the preacher did.

Now, the whole church was filled up with people who hadn't graced the doors of that church in 25 years. Any church. Almost all their life.

They filled up with his friends. Drug addicts. Thieves.

Drunkards. Promiscuous. Immoral.

And this is what that pastor said. We have before us today a wayward sheep that has finally gone home. Now, some of you would disagree with me and your judgment and your self-righteousness saying, how could he be a Christian? Well, folks, he didn't live like one, but I can tell you this.

I was there when he was nine years old. I was his pastor when he opened up his little heart and asked Jesus to come in. People ask me sometimes, when you preach, why are you so mad? So every person in that church thieves, immoral, promiscuous, drug addicts, on and on, walked out of there saying, well, I am saved too.

That's what kind of theology is going around today. And I do not want that kind of theology to damn your soul. If there is no evidence of Christianity, there is no Christianity.

Listen to what Paul says. Knowing brethren, beloved by God, His choice of you. I mean, this is a big statement.

How does Paul know that? He goes on in verse 5. For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. Now, Paul isn't saying that three years ago or so, I preached to you and you all started weeping and you made commitments and things happened, you burned magic books and everything else, and because of that moment, I know you're saved. No, he's not talking about just what happened at their conversion.

He's talking about what continued on after their conversion. He knew they were converted, not merely because of the day of their conversion and his observance of it. He knew of their conversion because they continued on in the Christian faith.

They continued giving evidence that they had been transformed into new creatures. Look what he says. First of all, go down to verse 9. How does he know? Because he observed with his own eyes that they turned to God from idols.

That the idols in their life had been smashed. And the remnants of idolatry that was in their life was being crushed day by day because God in the New Covenant and the Old Testament promises said this, I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. He knew they were truly converted because God had set them free from their idolatry.

Let me ask you a question. God set you free from your idolatry? Is He setting you free from your idolatry? Does He continue working in your life, pointing out things that you have made more important than Him? Does He go on crushing them and removing them from your life? And he said, you turned to God. They didn't just smash all their idols and they didn't just leave a lot of bad things behind.

They turned to God. They entered into a relationship with God. Do you see that? Do you have a relationship with God? And don't give me this quiet time stuff that by force of will, you go have your quiet time each day and you check it off as though it were some duty.

That does not mean you have a relationship with God. It means you're disciplined maybe, but it doesn't mean you have a relationship with God. Do you love Him? Is there a friendship? Is there a father-son, father-daughter relationship? Do you delight in Him? Do you feel His delight about you? Has He shed abroad His love in your heart? It goes on and he says this, how you turn to God from idols to do what? Paul's basically saying, I see you now serving the living and true God.

I can see it. I can see these changes. You know that America, American Christianity is just filled with cliches.

You know, don't judge me. You can't tell what's in my heart. I don't have to tell what's in your heart because your heart expresses itself in everything you do.

That's why Isaiah said, I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. He wasn't saying he hadn't brushed his teeth. His lips were unclean because his heart was unclean.

Jesus says out of the heart comes forth all these things. And Paul says, look, I see you. I saw you and I see you.

Doing what? Turning from idols. Turning to God. Serving the living and true God.

And look at this, and you're waiting. And to wait for His Son from heaven. Let me ask you a question.

Are you waiting for His Son? Are you longing for the coming of His Son? I think all preachers, wives, know that every once in a while you've just got to leave the man alone. He gets a very far away look in his eyes and he goes out into the woods or up on a hill. He just stands there looking up.

Lord, will this be the day? Lord, I'm tired. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

Come. My mother, she was dying of cancer and we were all called into the hospital room and they said, you know, we don't think she's going to make it much longer. And then I went somewhere, I think, to get something to eat or something.

My sister was sitting there. My mom wasn't supposed to come to again. She came to and ended up living for another four or five months.

But she woke up in the hospital room. She looked over at my sister and my sister loved and served my mom. She looked over at my sister Erica like this.

She saw Erica and she went, oh! And my sister goes, mom! What? She goes, it's just you. I thought I was going to open up my eyes this time and see Jesus. That really happened.

That's not just an evangelistic story. Do you wait for Him? I remember one time I did a very foolish thing. I had to do some work in the jungles of Peru.

My wife had to go back and finish some classes. So we decided, we were young and stupid, we decided that she would go back for three months and I would just go into the jungle. That's not wise when you're married.

You should never do something like that. But I remember coming out of the jungle for a reprieve and it was still probably a month and a half to go before I'd seen my wife. And I remember going into our little apartment.

The first thing I did is I went into our bedroom and I opened one of her drawers and found her favorite sweater. And I remember sitting there on the bed and hugging that sweater and just trying to catch a faint fragrance of her. I missed her so deeply, I thought my heart was going to rip out of my chest.

Is any of that a reality to you with regard to Christ? See, Paul knew that these people had been converted because they longed, they waited. Of course, they were probably under persecution and I have lived with the people in the middle of a war when people are dying and getting killed and you're stepping over dead bodies and there's blood on your shoes and you're scared to death. You really long for Christ to come at those moments.

But we should long for Him to come now. To come now. Do you long for that? Do you want to see Him, young person? Look what else Paul says.

He says this in verse 6. How did he know that they had become believers? You became imitators of us and of the Lord. Remember what I said last night? I mean, look at this. They became imitators of Christ.

I have a real bone to pick. With even those of us who claim to have some correct theology. I find it very, very amazing that in what I can see in the history of the church, you see where the reformers concentrated so deeply on truth and theology.

A group called the Anabaptists who were a strange group, but had many things worthy to be praised about them. They concentrated on imitating Christ. On being like Christ.

On following Him. It doesn't mean just believing. It means walking in His path.

Trying to be like Him. Observing Him in the Scripture. And seeking to imitate Him in every way.

And it seems like some of the reformers went astray and that their Christianity became all about truth. It became all about doctrine and creeds and confessions. The Anabaptists went further astray because it all became imitation and duty and it turned into warps and legalism.

What we need is both things, young person. That mind of yours should be filled with Scripture. You should know truth and know it systematically and accurately.

You should be greatly concerned with the great doctrines of the Christian faith. But you must follow Him and be an imitator of Him. Let me ask you a question.

When was the last time you thought about imitating Jesus? And I'm not talking about a what would Jesus do bracelet. Do you seek to look like Him? Act like Him? Talk like Him? Or do you imitate those of the

world? You see, Paul knew that these people had truly become converted because they became imitators of the Lord. You see, the Lord Jesus Christ, His teaching and His life contradicted everything in the Roman Empire.

Contradicted absolutely everything. And those who imitated Him contradicted absolutely everything. Why is it today that we think we can have the greatest impact upon the world by imitating the world? But let's get back to you.

Since your conversion, has there been any sense in you of desiring to imitate the Lord? To be like the Lord? Also, look at verse 7. You became an example. Look at this. This wasn't a faith in which they said, in my heart of hearts, I believe in Jesus no matter how I live.

No, they weren't saying this. They had become an example. They had set themselves to serve the living God, to imitate Jesus Christ, and their passion about imitating Christ was so great, they had become an example to other people and other churches.

Those around them could see that they were different. They were an example of someone who follows Christ. Let me ask you a question.

Are you? If someone looked at your life, would they say, they're an example? I mean, they're what a Christian is and does. These types of accolades are not reserved for missionaries and pastors. Every believer.

These were just believers. These weren't evangelists or well-known preachers. They were just believers.

And Paul said, I know you've become Christians because you've become examples to everybody who sees you. And I don't even have to talk about you. When I go places, people tell me about you.

Do people do that about you? When was the last time somebody remarked either positively or negatively about your godliness? Would your friends remark about, man, you're really growing in godliness. You're changing. Or would your enemies say of you, you're just a goody two-shoes.

You think you're better than everybody else. Or are you just like everybody else so you're not an example of really anything? Also, he says this in verse 3. He said, constantly bearing in mind. Look at this register of things that were occurring in these people.

Your work of faith. Your labor of love. And steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a question, young person. And I have to be careful here because your culture is a culture that tells you to play until you're in your late 20s. I mean, it's pathetic sometimes.

I counsel people and I find that 15-year-old boys living at home and their mother makes their bed and picks up their laundry. It's pathetic. And so in this culture, we come to think that well, I'm not supposed to do anything.

But if you're a Christian, it says one of the marks of your Christian faith is that you will have a work of faith and a labor of love. How are you laboring? You know one of the problems I have with youth groups? It's all about giving to you. Oh, they'll take you on some little mission trip.

But to actually have you work and work and work and instill in you the idea of laboring daily for Christ in your home, if you go to school, to join with the other laborers in the harvest, to be praying for souls, to be witnessing to people, to be thinking of ways even to earn money to support missionaries, to work, to labor. Do you have a labor of love? How do you sweat for Christ? Like I said, usually until someone's in their late twenties, they're always on the receiving end. It's wrong.

If you're a Christian, you should have a labor of love. You should have a ministry. You should.

Our culture has so come into the church that you can't tell where one begins and the other ends. Now, I want us to go for just a minute, one more passage. Tomorrow night we're going to look at 1 John, but I want you to go to 2 Peter.

I want you to see this. In verse 3 of 2 Peter chapter 1, Peter says, Seeing that His, God's divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these, He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Now, that's a lot of stuff. We can't talk about most of it, but we can say this. He's saying if you are a Christian, God has changed your nature and He has given you such spectacular and powerful promises that you have everything you need as a believer to grow in godliness, to grow in holiness, to grow in sanctification, to grow in your imitation of Christ.

You lack nothing. Everything has been prepared. If you are truly a believer and you have been born again, everything has been prepared for you so that you can grow and bear fruit.

Then he goes on. He says now, verse 5, for this very reason also, apply all diligence. In your faith, supply moral excellence.

And in your moral excellence, knowledge. And in your knowledge, self-control. And in your self-control, perseverance.

And in your perseverance, godliness. And in your godliness, brotherly kindness. And in your brotherly kindness, love.

Now, He has just given us a wonderful list of Christian virtues. Tonight, it would be very beneficial if you went back and you just looked at these. Because look what He says in verse 8. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, what is He saying? Let's look at the virtues just quickly again. Applying all diligence. Have faith.

You can see faith. They have faith in Christ. But they also possess a new moral excellence.

And they're growing in it. So the Christian, the true Christian, even the new Christian, possesses faith, but they're also growing in faith. Gradually, year after year, they're growing more and more in their dependence upon Christ.

The new Christian has the seeds of moral excellence in him. His character has been changed so that he can live in moral excellence. And he begins to live with a new kind of morality.

And throughout all the years of his life, he increases in these things. He becomes more and more like Christ. And in moral excellence, knowledge.

That the brand new Christian, just converted, has a tremendous amount of knowledge. Did you know that? He knows that God is holy. He knows that he's a sinner.

He knows Christ made an atonement for his sins. He knows that faith in Christ alone saves. He is trusted in Christ.

He has assurance through the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. He has a lot of knowledge. But those are just the beginnings.

One of the evidences of Christianity is not only that you have knowledge, but your life is marked by increasing in knowledge. You are growing in your knowledge of Christ. The rampant, widespread ignorance in the evangelical church is one of the great evidences of the lack of conversion of the great multitude.

And he said, in your knowledge, self-control. This is a big one. It's not just that you start knowing more and more about Jesus, or that you start knowing more and more theology, but that knowledge leads to self-control.

You're able to stand more against the temptations of the devil, against the workings of the flesh, against the dazzling entertainments of the world. You have more self-control. And we see that in Galatians.

It's the fruit of the Spirit. You're growing into that. You're growing into that.

And brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. Possibly, and we'll see this tomorrow night, possibly one of the at least greatest evidences that you have been born again, that you are Christian, is that you love other Christians. And you want to be with other Christians communing about Christ.

This is very dangerous for me to say this. Why? I don't want you to misunderstand me. It doesn't mean you get together with a bunch of youth in your church and talk about worldly stuff.

I mean, you may want to get together with a whole bunch of youth in your church because the youth in your church may be just as carnal as you are. That doesn't mean you're Christian. Let me ask you something.

Christian, professing Christian, when was the last time you just called up a friend and said, hey, can you come over? Why don't we just talk about Jesus a bit? I've seen some new things in the Word. Would you like to come over and just pray with me? Think about that. And then think about how many times you get together with the youth only to play video games or some other thing.

Be very careful. You can create a Christian culture that's not Christian. And he goes on, For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's amazing. Useless in Romans 3. That's what the reprobate, the lost, the unconverted are called. They're called useless.

They have altogether become useless. And unfruitful are what the lost are called by Jesus in chapter 7 of Matthew. He's saying, look, the evidence that you have truly been converted, that you are truly Christian, is that there are Christian virtues that have been birthed in you, and although they might be small and almost unrecognizable in the beginning, they start growing and increasing.

And by their increase in your life, they prove that you are truly Christian. But look what else he says in verse 9. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, now look what he says, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing of you.

What does that mean? He's saying, brothers, now you need to be diligent. You need to be careful. Be diligent to make certain that you really are saved.

You say, well, how can I be certain that I'm saved? How can I do this diligently? By examining your life in light of the Scriptures that teach the characteristics of a genuine Christian. And begin to ask yourself, are these characteristics realities in my life? Because if they're not, then I should be afraid. I need counsel.

Look what he says. He says, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing of you. This sounds strange to us.

For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble. For in this way, the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. It almost sounds like he's talking about works, but he's not.

What he's talking about is this. If these things are growing realities in your life, it's evidence that you have truly been converted. If these things are things that you're beginning to practice more and more, it doesn't mean that by practicing them, you earn heaven.

It means that in practicing them, you're demonstrating that you have become a new creature. Now, tomorrow night, we're going to go through the book of 1 John. Why? The book of 1 John is a forgotten book.

Many times it's preached and the entire purpose of the book is lost. But the purpose of the book is this. John gives us a series of tests.

And he tells us to compare our lives by these tests. And to the degree that our lives conform to the things that John has written, we can have assurance that we have been born again. And that's what we're going to talk about tomorrow night.

Tomorrow morning, we're going to go back to Romans 3. Now, you might be saying at this moment, you know, Brother Paul, after a sermon like that, shouldn't you be doing something? Well, yes, I should. And I'm going to do it right now. I'm going to ask you, are these things realities in your life? What you heard tonight, does it give you greater assurance that you have been born again? Or does it make you uneasy thinking, well, if what that preacher is saying is true, I don't even know if I'm saved.

Well, if that's the case, and you're disturbed and you're bothered, you go to one of your leaders or you go to Brother Askel. This is my promise to you. I'll stay up all night with you.

And so will these men. I'm not going to have you run down here, pray a prayer and send you back. But I will tell you this, we'll stay up with you all night.

We'll show you the Scriptures. We'll pray with you. And if something happens, we will not tell you you are saved.

We'll let God do that. We'll let you tell us that God has saved you. You see, as a preacher, I have no authority to tell you that you are saved.

And that's where a lot of preachers on the day of judgment are going to be greatly ashamed. They have assumed the place of the Holy Spirit. They have gotten people to pray prayers and after they've prayed those prayers, they have popishly declared them to be born again.

That is unwise. It is extremely dangerous. I have no authority to tell you you're saved.

I do have authority in the Scriptures to tell you how to be saved. I have authority to beg you to be saved. And I have authority to teach you the biblical principles whereby the Holy Spirit can give you assurance of your salvation.

Some of you tonight could enter into the Kingdom with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Some of you may be disturbed over your soul and you may remain disturbed for weeks and even months calling on the name of the Lord, seeking His face until He grants you assurance. Until He sheds abroad His love in your heart and you know that you have been converted.

So, no manipulation here. You know one time someone said to Spurgeon after he got through preaching a rousing evangelistic message. They said, Dr. Spurgeon, you should have struck while the iron was hot.

And Spurgeon said, Well, if God's the one heating up the iron, it'll stay hot. I don't want to manipulate you. We fear God too much and we love you too much to do that.

You're not cattle, you're not numbers, and we're not going to count your head. If you're concerned about your soul, you come to us. And if you say, you know, call Brother Paul, I'll come.

I'll be there. I'll come out of bed at three in the morning. I might not look like much, but I'll come out of bed at three in the morning.

Just have coffee ready. And so will every other man and woman here that's committed to the health of your soul. Alright.

Whoever's supposed to come, let them come. God bless.

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