

'Here Am I, Send Me'

by Stuart Olyott

The sermon explores the complexities of assurance in faith, addressing both doubts among true believers and false confidence in those who are not genuinely saved.

Duration: 55:49

Scripture: Matthew 6:12, Matthew 6:14, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 John 3:14

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Authenticity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by referencing the story of Noah and the ark, highlighting that out of the eight people in the ark, one was not a very spiritual person. The speaker then discusses the format of the seminar, explaining that it will be more informal with a talk and some questions. They also mention some logistical details such as the microphones and late arrivals. The speaker corrects a mistake from a previous session, clarifying that Noah preached for over a hundred years. The speaker then addresses the audience, suggesting that some may be questioning whether they are genuine Christians or counterfeits. They emphasize the existence of counterfeit Christians and the need for self-reflection. The sermon concludes by outlining the structure of the talk, which will present three points, with the third point leading towards finding answers to the question of when a Christian is not a Christian.

Transcript

Now, there are a few introductory things for me to say. One is that the microphones may go up and down, so please don't let that disturb you. Not everyone's found it easy to park, so folk will be coming in at different times.

Please don't let that disturb you. And there are one or two other extra things to say. First of all, I have a correction.

You know what I'm going to say. Those of you who were there Monday evening and were attentive, you will know that Noah's wife didn't look back. What I should have said was that Noah preached a hundred years or more.

At the end of the hundred years, there were only eight in the ark, including himself, and one of them was not a very spiritual person. And if the internet had been around today, he's the one who would have switched on the pornographic website. The second introductory comment is about these seminars.

Now, for me, a seminar means someone standing at the front, giving an introductory talk, and then there's guided discussion of prearranged questions. That's obviously not going to be the way it is this afternoon. So, we're going to have a slightly more informal approach.

It's not a preaching service. It's not a discussion. There is a talk.

There will be some questions. And that's the form that it's going to take. So, I don't know whether that's strictly a seminar.

That's roughly what's going to happen. Please remember that the clock is exactly 19 minutes fast. So, if you're looking at it, and you think this is going on a long time, please deduct 19.

Now, I'm quite a little unsure as to why you might be here. I suspect that some of you are here because you realize that wherever there's a good banknote, there's a counterfeit. I go to Sri Lanka quite a lot.

There's such a thing as Sri Lankan rupees. But nobody counterfeits them because it's not a very good currency. But wherever you get a really good currency, you get a counterfeit.

And maybe some of you are asking yourself, am I the real thing, or am I a counterfeit? And you know enough of the New Testament to know that there are such things as counterfeit Christians. Maybe that's what's brought you here this afternoon. I hope you'll find some help.

Some of you are here because you have assurance problems. You're not really sure whether you're a Christian. You think you are.

You may even believe yourself to be. Then you have these moments, these empty moments, sometimes for a long time, and you're not really sure whether you're a child of God or not. Maybe that's why you're here.

And some of you are here simply because you've had bad experiences. All of us have had these. My closest friend at college became a minister of a very large church indeed, and then just disappeared off the face of the map.

He was surfing the internet a few months ago. For some reason or other he found me there and emailed me from a distant land saying that he no longer made any Christian profession at all. And he felt free.

And he'd like me to know that. There's a man who preached the Gospel and many dozens, maybe many hundreds of people have been converted through his preaching. Today he drives a sports car around as a rich businessman in a distant country and makes no Christian profession at all.

Do you know people like that? Who walked well and they don't walk at all today? Who were a great influence on you spiritually? And today they make no Christian profession at all? Isn't it a fact that many people that you went to university with, if you did, who were in your Christian union, no longer walk with the Lord at all? Isn't it a fact that many Christian union presidents, I think nearly half of them, ten years later are not making any Christian profession? We all know people like that. Maybe it's that problem that's brought you here this afternoon. Those are serious problems and we'll deal with them.

And some of you are here, of course, because it's a dull day. Well, I hope you'll get some help. I really do believe that.

And some of you are here by loyalty. You think, I don't know if anybody else will support the meeting, so I'll go along. Well, I hope you'll get a blessing as well.

So, welcome to everybody as we talk about this serious question. When is a Christian, in inverted commas, when is a Christian not a Christian? Now, ladies and gentlemen, young people, there is an answer to this question. The problem is, is trying to say so much that at the end of the day I'll have said nothing.

So, I think we'll do what the Boy Scouts do. If someone's lost and you want to show them the way, they draw an arrow in the ground. How many strokes do you need to draw the arrow in the ground? Three, thank you.

So, you do one like this, and then you do exactly the opposite thing, and that's already fairly clear which direction you should take. But just to make it abundantly clear, you put the middle piece in as well. And that's what we're going to do this afternoon.

There'll be a first point, which is a bit like this. There'll be a second point, which is the opposite of that. It's the same thing the other way round.

And then there'll be a third point, which, hopefully, everything will be pointing you, at least in the right direction, and if you haven't found the answer, at least you'll be in a position to find it before this meeting is ended. When is a Christian not a Christian? Well, number one is our first point. Some people are not sure that they're Christians when they really are.

So that's where we're starting. Some people are not sure that they're Christians when they really are. Now, how could such a thing like that happen? How could it be that someone who's a true child of God, who has God's spirit in them, who's come to Christ and embraced him, and is a true believer, might actually still be unsure that that's what they are? Well, there are all sorts of reasons for that, and I'm going to give you four.

The first one is that because of the preaching which goes on in certain churches, and the Christian conversation which follows that preaching, and the sort of ideas which then percolate down amongst the church members and the other people who attend that church. In many churches in the United Kingdom and beyond, but many, many churches in the United Kingdom, the idea that you can be sure is regarded with a bit of suspicion. Someone will come to you and say, you're too cocksure for words.

You don't seem to understand the deceit of your heart. Don't you realise you can be sure of things which aren't really true of you at all? You must be a very shallow sort of person. If you don't understand how wicked the human heart is, you could be deceiving yourself to stand up and say you're a Christian, and to say that you're sure that you're a Christian is just going too far.

It's what they call presumption. Would you open the Bible to Romans chapter 5, please? Because although there are hundreds of churches which say only shallow people are sure, really spiritual people have much more suspicion than that. Churches that teach that, churches that believe that, are a long way away from the New Testament.

Now if you look carefully at the believers of the Bible, you'll notice all sorts of things. Did they have trouble? Yeah, lots of it. Did they agonise over their own sin? Certainly.

Did the believers of the Bible have opposition? The answer is obvious. Did they have their ups and downs? Now let's be honest, did they have their ups and downs? Did they have emotional highs and emotional lows? Did they? Yeah, they did. Did they doubt their salvation? There's a few nods and a few shakes here.

I don't mind people who do this, and I don't mind people who do this. It's these people I can't understand. Did they doubt their salvation? The answer is they did not.

So although they had trouble and hostility and depression, and they wanted sometimes to dance, and they had every other experience that you could think about, they did not doubt their salvation. Romans 5, Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, says Paul, speaking on behalf of Christians. It's a pretty robust, certain language, isn't it? Would you like to come to Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20? I won't be giving an exposition of the verse, but just look at the end of the verse.

It's a remarkable thing for a man to say. The verse reads, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God. But then the wonderful sentence, who loved me, who loved me, and gave himself for me. That's the language of certainty.

It's wonderful, isn't it? Fancy being able to walk through life as a mortal woman, a mortal man, and to be able to say, the Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me. If you're not convinced, come to 2 Timothy, chapter 4. 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 7. Wouldn't you like to be able to say this in your dying moments? 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 7. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day. And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

That's language which you just don't find in human books. Come to the very end of their life, they know, he knows, where he's going next. There's not a shadow of doubt in his thinking, in his speaking, in his writing.

One more, just to make the point. 1 John, chapter 3, verse 14. We'll be looking at this verse later, but we'll look just at the first part of it.

1 John, chapter 3, verse 14. We know that we have passed from death to life. Well, when you see a snake, stamp on it.

And when you hear this teaching which says, only shallow people think that they can be sure, but really deep people who understand how wicked the human heart is, really deep people know that you can never really be sure. Those people who sort of make spirituality measured in terms of how much you doubt your salvation, don't stamp on them, please, but stamp on that notion, because it is categorically wrong. And as I once heard a preacher say, if you think I'm being dogmatic, it's because I am.

So some people are not sure that they're Christians when they really are, and the reason they're not sure is they just don't believe you can be. Some people, here's a second one, some people who are really Christians are not sure that they're Christians when they really are, because they still haven't really got hold of the truth of justification by faith. Let me explain.

There are people in the chapel today who honestly believe that on the days they read the Bible and pray well, they are more acceptable to God than on the days they forget to read the Bible and don't pray well. They honestly believe that. They honestly believe that they are more in with God on the days they have a good quiet time, and not quite so in with God on the days they have a bad quiet time, because they still not got rid of this idea completely that our acceptance with God is somehow linked to our works.

If you're a Christian, did you know that when you woke up this morning, there was not a cloud between you and God? Did you know that? Not a cloud. Did you know, as a Christian, that when you woke up this morning, there is nothing, nothing between. Why? Because all the sanctions that your sin should call down upon you, in all their horror and infinity, fell upon the Son of God.

All of them. And Christ's perfect righteousness, which was fleshed out in the very place of our failures, namely on this planet, Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed, that is, put to the account of the believer, and the believer is considered to be as righteous as Christ is, and because Christ is God, you are considered to be as righteous as God is Himself. If you don't think that's wonderful, there's something wrong with you.

And that is the finality of the work of Christ. And that's what makes the Gospel a Gospel. That it's not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but of His own mercy He has saved us.

And we are as free, and as forgiven, and as pardoned, and as accepted, unhesitatingly accepted, as Christ is Himself, because of His great work. But some people still haven't got hold of that. And they're put off by their failures and their sins.

And they would shoot Luther, if he came into this chapel this afternoon and said what he said. Do you know what he said? Sin boldly. What do you think of that? What he didn't mean was, he didn't mean you Christians just go out and sin because you're saved anyway, and you live as you like.

That's what we call antinomianism. It's a ridiculous label for something which is really wrong. He didn't mean that.

But what he did mean was this. You're a sinner. You're a sinner.

You've sinned today. You're sinning now. You're sinning in listening.

I'm sinning in speaking. But don't let it rob you of your peace, because the great atonement of Christ is more than enough to cover all your sins and all the sins of everybody else who ever put their faith in Him. And you're perfectly right with God because of the finished work of Christ.

So sin boldly, he meant. Don't let it rob you of your comfort. The third reason why some people who are not sure that they're Christians when they really are is because of testimonies.

Have you got a testimony? Well, pretty quiet then, wasn't it? Have you got a testimony? Well, don't tell me. We don't want to hear them now, but... If we're Christians, we have a testimony. In some churches, when you're baptized, they ask you to give your testimony.

Some churches don't insist on that. In all churches, hopefully, represented here, when you become a church member, you're asked at least to give your testimony to the officers of the church, or some of them. But every... Did you notice the word? Every testimony is different.

Every testimony is different. My father was a soldier. We live most of our early life near military bases.

How do they wake the soldiers up? Some of us have been in the barrack rooms when the soldiers have woken up. It's not a very nice experience. Some of the older men here will remember this.

In comes the sergeant, or sometimes even just the lance corporal, with the biggest boots you've ever seen, and a great stick in his hand, and he walks down the barrack room and bangs all the tin lockers and even tips up a few beds if necessary, and people wake up! And if they don't, they're in... Well, it's a bit of a painful experience. That's what Christ did with the apostle Paul, isn't it? Or the jailer in Philippi. But my mother didn't wake me up like that.

She was the wife of a soldier. She brought me a cup of tea. That was much more effective, by the way.

Especially if your dithering hand wobbled it a little bit and it went down your chest. I'm a married man now, and my wife has a much better method than that. How do you wake your wife or husband up? With a kiss, don't you? Don't you? Huh.

I can't lip-read, but I think someone said elbow. But it makes the point! People are woken up in different ways. In the Bible, there's someone who is just like a flower, and the sun shines on the flower, and the flower opens as quietly as that.

And who would that be, do you think? That's Lydia, isn't it? And it's in the same chapter that you have the jailer, who's woken up by an earthquake. Every testimony has something in common. There's enough of a sense of sin to convince you that you need a Saviour.

And there's enough understanding of the Gospel to convince you that Jesus Christ is the Saviour you need. And so you flee from your sin to the Saviour of sinners. But don't think that any testimony is the same as any other testimony.

And some of you think, listen to his testimony, mine isn't anything like that. And some of you from Christian homes, you say, I can't even remember a time when I became a Christian. Perhaps I'm not one at all.

When probably what has happened is that the Spirit of God came into your young life long before your character was formed, and you've gone through childhood and adolescence, and into adulthood, not even able to remember a time when you didn't love the Lord Jesus Christ. The point is, where is your faith this afternoon? Stop worrying about the road, start thinking about the destination. Have you embraced Jesus Christ? Do you trust him now? So there's all different ways why people who are not sure that they're Christians, but really are, why they're not sure, these are some of the reasons why they're not sure.

And there's a fourth one. Some people mix up faith and strong faith. Or they mix up spiritual immaturity with spiritual maturity.

Let me explain. You go to the prayer meeting, I hope you do, and then somebody prays, and it's one of those prayers where you feel heaven is drawing near. Is there someone in your church who prays like that? And you feel that when you pray it's not like that at all? Then you look at somebody else, sometimes even somebody your own age, and you look at their life, and it's so pure and wholesome, and so filled with integrity, there's such honesty and wholesomeness about them, that you think, I'm not like that.

I'm just not like that, I'm not in the same league. And then you think, well maybe I'm not a Christian at all. Can you see what you're doing? You're mixing up spiritual immaturity with spiritual maturity.

The fact that you're not like these other people should certainly grieve you, should certainly break your heart. But it shouldn't necessarily lead you to the conclusion that you're not a Christian at all. I'd like you to turn to one of my favourite verses in the Bible.

I'm not sure if we're allowed to have favourites. And if I'm wrong on this, I'm sorry, but it's in Romans. Chapter 4, verse 5. The end of the verse.

The word justify means to put right with God. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly. Isn't that fantastic? He justifies the ungodly.

And because you see so much ungodliness in your life, and you fall so often, and you finish this sin, and then the next day you do it again, and you finish with it, and you have a measure of victory, but a few weeks later you do it again, and you finish with it, and then a few months later you find that you've fallen into it again. Some of you are drawing the conclusion that you're not Christians at all, because you're looking at the ungodliness of your life. But God justifies the ungodly.

And the fact that you're a poor specimen of a Christian does not necessarily mean that you're not a Christian at all. Otherwise no child would be a human. You don't have to grow up, do you, to be a human being.

So that was one side of our first part of the arrow. Some people are not sure that they're Christians when they really are. Now we're going to get more closely to our subject.

Some people are sure that they're Christians when they really aren't. Every New Testament book almost tells you that. Some people are sure that they are Christians when they really aren't.

Let's go through a number of different possibilities here. Some people are sure that they're Christians because they've made a profession of faith. The Gospel's been preached, they've been moved by it, and now they say that they're Christians because they've made a decision, or spoken to the preacher, or maybe even prayed with the preacher, but they say that they're Christians, they say that they are, and because they say that they are, they believe themselves to be so.

That's not good enough. Matthew chapter 7, verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord. Who said that? Well, Jesus said it. There's a lot of picture language in that chapter, but not in that verse.

And this is not a parable. This is a straightforward prediction of the Last Judgment. When some people who say, Lord, Lord, will be turned away.

The fact that you've made a profession of faith proves nothing at all. Come to 2 Corinthians, please. The very beginning of the letter and then near the end.

2 Corinthians, chapter 1. How does the letter open? Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So who's he writing to? He's

writing to Corinthians, who claim to be Christians. But now look what he says in chapter 13, verse 5. Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.

Prove yourselves. Now isn't that strange? He greets them as Christians, talks to them as Christians, but does not end the letter before he says to them, now just make sure you are. Examine yourselves to see whether you really are the genuine article.

Because he knew, as the Scripture teaches, that a profession of faith in and of itself proves nothing. Some people are sure that they're Christians when they really aren't. They're self-deceived.

And the reason that they're self-deceived is because they think that this is an evidence of being a Christian, or that's an evidence of being a Christian, or perhaps that is, and they're wrong about the evidences. So let's go back to Matthew 7. Very solemn, isn't it? Matthew, chapter 7. Verse 21. Let's try and honestly imagine this.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Some people think because they're spiritually gifted, they must be Christians. Now you may not like what I'm going to say next, but you need to know it. Not every genuine experience of the Holy Spirit is a saving experience.

Not every genuine experience of the Holy Spirit is a saving experience. And your failure to grasp that will mean that you don't understand vast tracts of the New Testament. Was Judas spiritually gifted? Who gifted him? Did Judas cast out demons? Did Judas heal the sick? Did Judas preach in Christ's name? He did.

Many, says Jesus. Think of them. Someone who prophesies in Christ's name.

He can speak the word of God directly revealed to him, and he's in your church. Cast out demons in Christ's name. Demons go, evil is scattered as this man speaks in the name of Jesus.

All sorts of wonderful things are happening in the church. It does not follow that that man is a Christian. Now think of somebody who preaches, and there are conversions.

He baptizes the converts. He sees them grow in grace. He shepherds the young Christians.

He teaches them accurately the meaning of the word of God. Think of that. People go to him for advice, and he gives it.

And it's sound. It doesn't follow that he's a Christian. It just doesn't follow.

But the reason he believes he's a Christian is because he's wrong about the evidences. He believes that spiritual giftedness somehow in and of itself is a proof that you're a child of God. It is not.

I hope this is frightening. Now some people are sure that they're Christians when they really aren't because they believe this book. But I know somebody else who believes this book.

James tells us about him. And who would that be? If you want to talk about the plenary, verbal, inerrance, and inspiration, infallibility of Scripture, the devil will agree with you. But there's nobody stupid enough to believe the devil's a Christian.

Just believing the truth is not a proof. For years I knew a man. He was a very fine man.

A man I respected enormously. He was a great reader of theology. He was chairman of a movement on Merseyside which existed so that the great doctrines of grace should be preached.

He encouraged younger ministers like me to get on and preach the gospel in all its fullness. For ten years he did that. And then he was converted to his amazement because he had applied his tremendously intelligent mind to the meaning of Scripture.

And the Bible is not like any other book, but you can read it like any other book. And he could understand great tracts of it. He could even talk to you about realms of Christian experience because the Bible talks about them and he'd applied his mind to it.

But then at last he was converted, thank God. Would you have said to him, you're not a Christian? You would never have dreamed of saying it. But he wasn't.

He's the sort of fellow who would have said like many others, when I open the Bible, sometimes a verse just leaps out of the page and gets hold of me. It seems just to get hold of me and shake me and change me and sweeten me or humiliate me. But sometimes when I read the Bible, parts of it just get hold of me and won't leave me alone.

And then they conclude, because I'm having that experience, I must be a Christian. But it doesn't follow. Can you see what's happening there? What's wrong with that? Those people are getting their assurance not from the Bible's meaning, but from the phenomenon of their own experience as they read the Bible.

But there's more than that. Some people are sure that they're Christians when they're really not. Because they've had conviction of sin.

They've broken the law of God. And they know they have. They feel condemned by every part of God's requirements.

Their hearts ache. It brings them sometimes to actual despair. Do you know that sometimes true Christians have less conviction of sin than false ones? If you think it out, it's obvious.

Because in a true Christian's experience, you're convinced of your sin and it weighs on you. And it weighs on you until at last you flee to a saviour. And what do you get when you come to the saviour? You get pardon, so you get relief.

But what happens if you're a false Christian and all that's happening to you is you're convinced of sin and the weight gets heavier and heavier and heavier and heavier but you never flee to Christ. You may go down to depths of conviction and depression and suicidal tendencies and even suicide itself because of conviction of sin and go into a comfortless eternity. And the same is true of what people think of the world.

Some people say, I see nothing in this world. I'm going to downshift. That's the trend in some parts of the London suburbs.

I'll have a simpler lifestyle. I'll live on less money. My wife will stop going out to work.

We'll only have one car instead of five and so on. We'll downshift. I'm fed up with this world.

Foreign holidays don't satisfy me. Loads of money doesn't satisfy me. Health farms don't satisfy me.

I'll just go with a simpler lifestyle. I really am fed up with it. This world has got nothing for me.

It doesn't offer me anything at all. And sometimes these people are good church-going people and everyone thinks they must really be Christians. But that's because the people concerned haven't been reading Philippians recently.

Please come to Philippians. Chapter 3, verse 7. This is Christian disillusionment. Philippians 3, verse 7. But what things were gained to me, those I have counted loss for Christ.

But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him not having my own righteousness which is from the law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness which is from God by faith that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. And what's happened there is that he's so enraptured with Christ that the new affection dries out the old one. That's why he's fed up with the world.

And just to be fed up with the world in and of itself proves nothing about a person's spiritual condition. So the arrow is beginning to come together, isn't it? Some people are not sure that they're Christians when they really are and some people are sure that they're Christians when they really aren't. So now we'd better put in the central stem so that we really are clearly pointing in the right direction.

The third point and the central stem is that you can know for certain whether you are a true Christian or not. And I'm very glad to be able to tell you that. You can know for certain.

I can't know for certain whether you're a true Christian. You can't know for certain whether I'm a true Christian. But you can know for certain whether you're a true Christian or not.

It happens like this. I look at the scripture and I look at myself. Is the picture of a Christian in the Bible a picture of me? Now the picture of a Christian in the Bible is like this.

The Christian man or woman, first of all, has faith in Jesus Christ. Now you know whether you have faith. Faith is knowing.

You know whether you know the gospel. Don't you? It's in the top of your head. You know whether you know the gospel.

Faith is believing. You know whether you believe the gospel. You don't need anything outside of that.

You know whether you believe it or not. And faith is trusting. You know whether you trust Jesus only or not.

And if you don't, then there's an easy way to help you. People have often come to me in my ministry and said, I know the gospel and I believe it to be true but I don't really know whether I trust Jesus Christ or not.

My first question to them is always, do you pray? Always they say yes.

I say, well God is holy. We talk about that for a few minutes. And you are not.

And we talk about that for a few minutes. Tell me, why should God who is holy listen to a person like you? Sometimes the person says, well I'm so needy. Then I know I'm talking to a non-Christian.

And sometimes they say, but pastor my heart is so much in it. I cry out to God from the depths of my heart. Then I know I'm talking to a non-Christian.

Sometimes they say, I love Christians and I go to church and I read my Bible and then I know I'm talking to a non-Christian. Because can you see what all those answers have in common? They're trusting in something in themselves, ultimately. But sometimes, very often I'm glad to say, people say, well pastor it's like this.

God is holy, I'm a sinner. I've got no right to approach God at all. If it were not for the Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for people like me. He's alive to save people like me. He's in heaven to speak up for people like me.

And if it wasn't for Christ, my prayers would never be heard. Then I know that I'm talking to a Christian because what do they depend on for their approach to God? Jesus only. No one's helped them perhaps before to see it for themselves.

But now they know, not only that they know the gospel and believe it, but now that they know, they know that they actually trust the Son of God. I hope that'll help you if you're in any doubt. Do you pray? Why should a holy God listen to you? What are you really like, honestly? Why should he let you into his presence? Why should he? And if you say, because of him.

That's Christian language. So that's one mark of a Christian. So we look at the Christian in the New Testament and we look at ourselves.

Is the picture of a Christian in the New Testament a picture of me? And then as we go through the New Testament, in particular, the whole Bible of course, we find that Christians have a certain attitude to sin. They find it inside them. It's not just something which is stuck onto them.

They find it inside them. And as much as they declare war on it, as much as they hate it, as much as they weep over it, as much as they make up their mind never to do it again, it's still inside them. And they can't shake it off.

And it troubles them. Now I want to stress that it's not the only emotion that Christians have. But it is an emotion that every Christian has.

They detest sin and don't want to be living in it anymore. And are grieved by the fact that they can't get rid of it completely. And after years of Christian life, they suddenly say, but I never knew that was sinful.

And years later they say, but I never knew that was. And they become more and more sensitive in certain areas. I'm glad to say they become less and less sensitive in other areas where there are man-made rules.

But they have a certain attitude to sin. So what do you think of sin? And if you're one of those people in the chapel and you say, I've heard all this before and you're too polite to yawn, but inside you're yawning now as I talk about sin. You are not a Christian, are you? Because you don't have a Christian heart which is repulsed by everything which is ungodly.

So I look at the picture of a Christian and I look at myself. Is the picture of a Christian in God's holy word a picture of me? So there's faith and there's this attitude to sin and there's brotherly love. That's why we read 1 John 3, 14.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. I was given a book when I was a young man. It had a chapter, How to Know Whether You're in Love.

I suppose men need to be told those sort of things. Do you seek her good and welfare? Is that what's on your heart? Do you sacrifice for her? So you promise to take her shopping but it clashes with your football match. Do you defend her reputation? Do you long to be with her? These are all some of the tests which are given.

Do you seek the good of the people of God? Really? Sacrificially putting yourself out for them? Do you defend their reputation or are you one of these people who runs down Christians? Curl up your lip when you're cynical about them. Do you long to be with them? And most important, do you forgive them? You can only forgive people if you have been truly wronged. If you say, but he never meant to do that, you're not forgiving them.

But if you say, he meant to do that and it hurt me deeply but I forgive him, that's forgiveness. Here is a very, very unpreached text. Please come to Matthew chapter 6. Our Lord teaches the Christian how to pray.

Matthew chapter 6, verse 12. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Then our Lord goes on.

It's the only part of the prayer he comments on, that part, isn't it? He teaches the whole prayer but he doesn't comment on any of it except that part. Verse 14. If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And if the weeks have gone by and the months have gone by and you're still holding a grudge against a fellow Christian, it's probably because you aren't one. Probably.

And if you're sitting that side of the chapel, I'm not picking on anyone in particular, this is just an illustration. If you're sitting on that side of the chapel because they're sitting on that side of the chapel and it's always like that and you've studied that it should be like that so when they go out of the door you come in it and you just never meet, it's probably because you're not a Christian. It is just not conceivable that anyone who's been to the cross of Christ and had millions and millions of sins against an infinite God all wiped out and forgotten should then nurse grudges in his or her heart against someone who he claims is a fellow Christian.

It's just not conceivable, is it? So assurance comes as I look at the picture of a Christian in the Bible and I look at the picture of my own life. Do I have faith in Jesus Christ? Am I deeply troubled by sin? Do I love the brethren? But somebody says, you're not saying much about the Holy Spirit here. Well, I haven't got to the end yet but we're near there now.

But please come to Romans 8, verse 16. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And there's something almost similar in Galatians 4, verse 6. And somebody says, you're telling us, look at the Bible, look at yourself, if the picture matches then you know you're a Christian.

But this verse and the one in Galatians 4 tells us about the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. What's the relationship between what you're saying and the work of the Holy Spirit? Well, something like this. Who wrote the book? The Holy Spirit.

Do you think that he would bypass that book which he inspired and completely leave it to one side, although it gives a very good picture of a Christian? Do you think that he would completely put it aside as he gave you assurance of your faith? What happens is this. I read the picture of a Christian in the Bible. I look at my own life.

And then something is just born in on me. As I read the Scriptures and look at my own life, and suddenly I become aware that what I'm reading about is me. And the conviction is born in on me with an irresistible conviction.

I can't escape the fact that what the Scriptures say about Christians is true of me. And it becomes bigger than I am, this conviction. It's born in on me by a dimension that I can't explain.

And I become convinced. What's the explanation for that? It's the work of the Spirit. And the Spirit is using the book that he inspired and bearing witness with my spirit that I am a child of God.

Besides, I wouldn't even know anything about that inner witness of the Spirit if it wasn't written in the book. Word. Spirit.

Do you think I've become sure that I'm a Christian by the Word alone? No. Do I become sure I'm a Christian by the Spirit alone? No. I didn't become a Christian like that in the first place.

I became a Christian in the first place as the Word was opened. And then the meaning of the Word impressed itself upon my heart in a way that I could not resist. And Word and Spirit combined together to make me a Christian.

And every other spiritual experience is of that dimension. So what it means is this, in practice. The more I'm exposed to the Word of God prayerfully, the more likely it is I'll be sure that I'm a Christian.

And the less exposed to the Word of God I am prayerfully, the less likely it is that I'll be sure of my salvation. Nothing is more healthy to a Christian than to be in a prayerful atmosphere with the Bible open. Let us pray and then we'll take some questions.

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