

Is It OK To Question Someone's Salvation

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the importance of discernment within the church community, emphasizing the need to balance grace and caution when evaluating the genuineness of one's faith. Drawing insights from the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13, the speaker highlights the coexistence of true and false believers in the church. The sermon underscores the biblical call to test the spirits and exercise discernment without being overly judgmental, as only God truly knows the heart. It also explores the significance of examining one's faith, the fruits of the Spirit, and the intimate relationship believers have with Christ, emphasizing the transformative power of genuine salvation.

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Description

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Transcript

And I want you to biblically try to discern this, try to answer this. Is it okay to question or think someone might not be saved or born again? So that's the question on the table. Is it okay to question or think someone might not be saved or born again? So what do you think? Who wants to answer that? Is it okay to question or think someone might not be saved or born again? I think so, yeah.

Yes. So it's okay to do that. We probably need to think in light of several portions of Scripture, I think.

Obviously, this is an area that we have to be balanced. Would you all agree? I would say yes, but we need to be careful. Okay.

The parable of the wheat and the tares. We should probably start there, because Jesus gives us a parable that actually deals with somewhat along the lines of this very subject. Matthew 13.

Matthew 13, verse 24. Now, this is important, because the truth is that you have a bunch of people in the church that are all claiming to be Christians. And they're living in the midst of each other.

And then you have sister churches. And you have people on the radio and people on the Internet. And they claim to be Christians.

We've got people writing books. People preaching sermons. We've got people all over the place that are claiming to be Christians.

And John told us we need to test the spirits. So we do need to be discerning people. When Scripture says that love believes all things, look, obviously we have to take Paul in context there.

Paul is not telling us to believe something that's not true. Something that's obviously not true. Paul's not asking us to be unbiblical in the way we make judgments.

So let's think about the parable of the wheat and the tares. Matthew 13, verse 24. He put another parable before them, saying the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them, An enemy has done this.

So the servant said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them? He said, No, lest in gathering the weeds, you root up the wheat along with them. So look, we have a principle there. We know that among Christians, some are true and some are false.

We know that on judgment day, many are going to say to the Lord, Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that, we cast out demons, we prophesied. And He's going to say, I never knew you. The truth is, John tells us there are certain people that went out from us because they weren't of us.

The truth is that while they were with us, they seemed like they were of us. We have people that make shipwreck of the faith. Paul talks to Timothy about that.

But you know what? Before they made shipwreck of the faith, undoubtedly they were called brother. So the point is this. The church is full of the true and the false.

And what Jesus is saying is we should not try to make it a point to go around and try to discern who's real and who's not real. That should not be our primary job. Because, listen, that doesn't mean we can't exercise church discipline.

That doesn't mean that there aren't some people who obviously are lost. We're going to look a little more at that in a second. But what the Lord doesn't want us to do is try to be the salvation policeman.

Where we're trying to figure out all the time whether everybody's real or everybody's false. Because the big problem is this. That if we try to take that upon ourselves, He knows we're going to be wrong sometimes.

What that tells me is this. There are people in the church who we would very likely think are not saved. That in the end will be.

And Jesus knows that. He knows we're not discerning enough to figure that out. And so He doesn't want us running around.

You know, brethren, I want you to see something. Go to 1 Thessalonians 5. Over the years, this has always jumped out at me. 1 Thessalonians 5. Now here, verse 14.

We urge you, brothers. This is 1 Thessalonians 5.14. We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle. Or it could be disorderly.

Or undisciplined. Or the unruly. Encourage the faint-hearted.

Help the weak. Be patient with them all. Now, the brothers that He's dealing with there are undoubtedly the leaders in this church.

It could be all the brothers helping one another. But here's the point. The point is this.

You are going to have some people in the church that are unruly. That are undisciplined. That are disorderly.

That are faint. And that are weak. And I have thought this before.

What if the church I'm pastoring has the man in it that is the weakest Christian that ever is going to be in Christ's kingdom? What if the most faint among all of God's people through all the ages ends up being in our church? Or the most unruly? I have a feeling we all would have real doubts. If you had the most unruly, undisciplined, and disorderly person that has ever truly been saved. And that person was in your church.

I suspect all the rest of the brethren would probably have real questions and serious doubts about where this person was at. And I've often thought with a text like this. That if there are people in the church that are weak.

And there are people that are faint. And there are people that are unruly. And yet, under inspiration, Paul knows that those people are very much real Christians.

And so we need to take that in mind when we're thinking about, you know what? None of us have perfect sanctification in this life. So we need to be charitable as Scripture is charitable. And what I mean by that is this.

There are three letters in the New Testament that I find especially interesting. Hebrews, Galatians, and the Corinthian letters. First and second Corinthians.

Why? Especially first Corinthians. Because there's real problems. The Hebrews have real problems.

The Galatians have real problems. And the Corinthians. And I want you to see something.

We'll take this in the order that it comes at us. But look at first Corinthians. First Corinthians 1. Paul addresses the Corinthians like this.

First Corinthians 1. It's been reported to me by Chloe's people that there's quarreling among you, my brothers. Now, I like that. He calls the Corinthians my brothers.

And if we jump over to chapter 15 and verse 58, he calls them an even more endearing term. He says, my beloved brothers. Now, what's so amazing about that? Well, it's just this.

If you think about this, like go over to the second Corinthians. Chapter 13 and verse 5. Here he says, examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith. Test yourselves.

Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test? Now, here's the thing. The Corinthians, they had real problems. They were suing each other.

There was division. We know that they weren't waiting for each other at the Lord's Supper. Seems like there were women that were out of order according to first Corinthians 11.

These people were given to sexual sin, had to be corrected in first Corinthians 6. Idolatry was a problem. These people were carnal. And Paul said, I can't deal with you as spiritual.

Now, here's the amazing thing. When he gets done writing two letters to these people, he says this. You need to examine yourselves as to whether you're truly in the faith.

Now, what I find interesting is that yet he called them holy brothers. He called them beloved brothers and my brothers. Here's what's happening.

Paul is being charitable to these people. Does he realize that some of these people may be lost? Yes, he realizes. That's why he's telling them examine themselves.

You remember that the guy in first Corinthians 5, that he tells them to put out of the church. This guy claimed to be a brother. And yet Paul's telling him, get that guy out of the church.

And he calls him an evil person. So, the same thing happens in Hebrews. And it happens in Galatians.

In all three of these letters, the author is calling the people holy brothers, my brothers, beloved brothers. Repeatedly in Galatians, they're being addressed as brothers. And yet, in all three of these letters, there's real strong warnings about falling away, about drifting, about dishonoring the blood of Christ.

There's real warnings about falling from grace, about trampling the blood. And so, Christ becoming of none effect. And so, basically, what you see is this.

You see people falling into errors. That they're being told, if you continue down this path, you won't be saved. If you continue down this path... Now, see, we don't like that kind of talk.

We always want to talk, well, is a person saved or is a person not saved? Well, Jesus said we're saved if we endure to the end. And the truth is that sometimes people don't endure. And Paul knows that.

And the author of Hebrews knows that. They know that when they're addressing the church, there's very likely not all the people are genuinely saved. But you know what? They're being charitable.

And they're dealing with people according to what they claim to be. And they're pressing them. And they're encouraging them.

They're rebuking them. But you know what? If their sin is too aggravated, even though they claim to be a brother, like 1 Corinthians 5, put them out of the church. Get rid of that evil person.

He may claim to be a brethren. You get the idea of false brothers. You can see that in 1 Corinthians.

If we look at, like, 2 Corinthians 11. 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 26. Paul talks about being frequent journeys in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers.

And he also talks the same way to the Galatians. If you go just to the next letter, in Galatians 2 verse 4, he says, It is because false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom, that we may have in Christ Jesus. You see, the point is this.

What's a false brother? Well, it's somebody that's not real. Do they claim to be a Christian? Yes. That's why they're a false brother.

They're a false Christian. What makes somebody false? Well, they basically... Why would Paul ever get to the point where he would actually call somebody a false brother? Well, because something about their life is demonstrating that they're not real. And there are tests in Scripture by which we can judge ourselves and by which we can judge others.

One of the best places in Scripture for us to look is 1 John. We'll just end this question right here. But if you go to 1 John, if you were to ask John, Hey, John, what do you think? Is it okay to question or think someone might not be saved? Somebody might not be born again? What would John tell you? John is not ashamed to say in no uncertain terms, Yes, you can tell a genuine Christian and you can tell somebody that's not genuine.

And I mean, if we just do a running survey, 1 John 1, verse 6. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. You see, we lie. In other words, the person claims to be a Christian, but they're a Christian who's walking in darkness.

And he says that person's a liar. They're not practicing the truth. In verse 8, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

You see, no matter what somebody says. Now, typically today, we don't really have the problem of perfectionism. But if somebody were to come to that place, we know they don't know the truth.

Verse 10, if we say we have not sinned. Well, verse 8 seems to have to do with the present. Verse 10 seems to have to do with the past.

We're basically denying that the things that we've done are actually sin. Well, we make Him, we make the Lord out to be a liar and His word's not in us. You see, these tests come at us.

How about chapter 2? 1 John 2, verse 3. By this we know that we have come to know Him. See, you can know if you've come to know Christ or if not, if we keep His commandments. You see, this is not works salvation.

This is what salvation produces in real converts. See, everybody that genuinely gets saved, God is going to cause them to react to the word of Christ in a certain way that they will bow the knee and surrender. They don't just call Christ Lord.

They believe He is Lord and they submit to His Lordship. And if they don't do it, well, then that's proof they haven't come to know Him. Verse 4, whoever says, I know Him, but does not keep His commandments is

a liar and the truth is not in him.

I mean, look, if we basically look at somebody and they claim to be saved, but they really are not bound by the word of Christ. They really are not motivated by the commandments of Scripture. I'll tell you, people that are antinomian, that is a very dangerous position to take.

People that basically believe that Christ has never given us any commandments to keep, that's simply not true. He's Lord. And He says, why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say? And the fact is, if somebody says, I know Christ, but He doesn't keep Christ's commandments, the truth is He doesn't know Christ.

The truth isn't in Him. Whoever keeps His word, in Him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him.

Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. You see, we have these tests that come at us. If you go to chapter 2, verse 9, whoever says he's in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness.

And you say, well, I don't hate my brother. Well, the point is this. I mean, Scripture is very plain.

That if I see my brother in need, and I don't supply the need, as I was saying just recently, the opposite of love is not hatred. The opposite of love is indifference. It's apathy.

And if we just ignore the needs of our brothers, how can we say the love of God is in us? And so you see these tests. Verse 11, whoever hates his brothers in the darkness, walks in the darkness, does not know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. So this keeps going.

I mean, if you jump to chapter 3, John is very insistent right here. Chapter 3, verse 6, no one who abides in Christ keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or know him.

Now, obviously, this is the idea of the practice of sin. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil's been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.

So you see that? Is it okay to question whether somebody's born again or not? Well, no one born of God makes a practice of sinning. So if somebody claims to be a Christian, but their life is just as much in bondage to sin as it ever was, there's no freedom. You know what Paul said in Romans 6? Sin would no longer have dominion over us.

If sin still has dominion, John is saying that person's not born of God. That person is of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him.

He cannot keep on sinning because he's been born of God. By this, it's evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

But let's remember this. We need to admonish one another to keep each other from becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Follow what I'm saying here.

Brethren, when we find somebody in the church that may be weak, that may be unruly, that may be fainting, that may be falling into sin, our approach should be to restore the person. Our approach should be to help the person, encourage the person, to help that person make it to the end. We should be there to try to use our spiritual gifts to assist.

Because the fact is, Christians are going to have falls, they're going to have failures. Can we use the Word of God and assess where people are at? Yes. We can make spiritual judgments based on these passages.

But we also want to be careful. We want to be gracious. We want to recognize that there are weak people.

There are fainting people. There are people who are struggling. There are people who are drifting, like the Hebrews were.

There are people who are beginning to embrace false doctrine, like the Galatians were. There are people who are carnal, like the Corinthians were. But you notice this.

The expectation in every case is that as proper teaching and the Word of God is applied to their situation, the expectation is there's going to be repentance. The expectation is that there's going to be growth. And you know what? Where we don't see that, is there reason for concern? Yes.

And undoubtedly in the midst of all this, if we get unruly people that are divisive, and we rebuke them and they continue to be divisive, we're to put them out of the church. We've got people that sin and they won't repent. We need to put them out of the church.

We've got people living in gross sin, like 1 Corinthians 5. We need to put the people out of the church. And the hope is that through that disciplinary action, the people will be restored. They'll repent and we'll restore them back into fellowship.

But you know what? A lot of times when people like that get disciplined, they just go on in their sin. And it just proves altogether what they are. Often people go out from us because they weren't of us.

Once they go out from us, John tells us it's evident they weren't of us. And just one other thing. I didn't really look at this, but John also talks about our perspective on Christ.

You know, if we denied the Son, we denied the Father also. And we're not true. And by denying the Son, it doesn't mean I say, oh, Jesus doesn't exist.

Denying the Son is simply denying that Christ is who the Bible says He is. That's denying Christ. It's to reinterpret Christ.

And people are doing that all the time. If we deny that Christ is who He is, that is also something. You see that in, where do you see that? First John, isn't it? That He who does not have the Son does not have.

Yeah, I'm just, I'm thinking of like maybe verse 22 of 1 John 2.22. Who is the liar? But he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. That is the antichrist. He who denies the Father and the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. And you need to recognize right there what that is.

Like I say, that's not just saying I don't believe Jesus ever existed. To deny the Son means you deny what Scripture teaches about Him. Scripture teaches He's God.

If you deny that, the truth isn't in you. It teaches He was fully man. If you deny that, the truth isn't in you.

It says that He died on the cross for our sins. If you deny that, Muslims deny that. That's one of the reasons we can dogmatically say they do not know the Lord.

They deny He's the Son of God. That's what Scripture says. They deny He's God.

That's what Scripture says. They deny He made atonement by shedding His blood on the cross. That's what Scripture says.

We know that they don't know Him. They don't truly know God. Not the Father.

Not the Father of Scripture. And so, anyway, we know this. In 2 Timothy, Paul tells Timothy that there are people that appear with a certain form of godliness.

But they deny the power thereof. And so we know there are fakes all around us. There are people that profess to be Christians, but they lack the power of true Christianity.

And it's not for us to be like hound dogs, always trying to sniff that out every place. We want to take people charitably at their word, like Paul did to the Galatians and the Corinthians, like the author of Hebrews does with the Hebrews. We want to call them brother.

We want to call them sister. Even beloved brother. Holy brother and sister.

We want to seek to be an encouragement. We want to seek to try to encourage people's faith. Any weakness that might be there.

Any faint heartedness that might be there. Correct any unruliness that might... Any hardness that's setting in. Any wrong doctrine that may be... We don't want people to be blown about by every wind of doctrine.

That doesn't always mean that somebody's lost. It may mean that they're children. Children get blown about by every wind of doctrine.

We want people to mature. And so we want to try to help people to mature. We don't want to just write people off.

I mean, there's a place when they go out from us. There's a place when people sin in such an aggravated way that we have to put them out of the church. And they don't repent.

I recognize. But you know, shy of that. If somebody comes into the church and... I mean, brethren.

You know, if somebody comes into the church and they say I'm a Christian. The fact is that if they're doctrinally correct and on board and they're claiming, they're trusting Christ and clinging to Him and they want to join themselves to us, you know, that should be adequate. But you hear what I'm saying.

I mean, there has to be a theological accurateness. Because even though our testimonies all vary in certain places, there are some aspects of our salvation that are absolutely the same in every single one of us. And, you know, if somebody comes along and they want to tell me that they're a Christian but they don't even mention Christ in their testimony, that's not good.

I mean, that's... If Christ isn't first and foremost in whatever kind of salvation the person has, that's really telling. That's really concerning. You know, when you just freely let people tell you about how they were converted, if it sounds like they pretty much turned faith into a work and repentance they turned into a work and how they did it and they did this and they did that and they've really made it sound like it's a salvation of their own construction and they hardly talk about the Lord, I know this, when people get saved, the Spirit of God convicts people of their sin and of their lack of righteousness and of judgment.

That's what John 16 says. The Spirit moves to convict men. You know what Jesus said? Jesus said that no one's going to come to Him unless they're first recognizing they're sick.

Nobody who's well needs a doctor. And so if somebody's truly saved, I'll tell you this, the Spirit of God showed them that they were sick. You get some people, they want to talk about being a Christian, you just don't have any sense whatsoever that they've ever been sick.

They seem way too well. And I'm not saying we should just simply embrace everybody. But you know what? Love should dictate.

We don't want to unnecessarily deceive people. If there's good, credible evidence that somebody's testimony is biblical, we want to embrace them. But if it's fairly obvious in their testimony that they don't really know what true salvation looks like, we don't want to just try to build the church through deception.

Love would indicate we'd be honest with people. That's where Paul was coming from when he said, examine yourselves. I mean, I think there is a place at times.

I've been there over the years. We've had people there in San Antonio that I've had to say, after observing your life for the last five years, I've got real concerns about where you're at. You really need to examine yourself as to whether you're in the faith.

Anything else on that? Yeah, can I ask something? How would we approach people that perhaps say about testimony that it's just between me and the Lord and I don't like to share it with other people or that kind of sentence? What would you say about that? I would say Peter says you better have an answer. Listen, salvation is the most incredible thing that can happen to anybody. And if somebody's lips are zipped and they don't want to talk about that, something is really wrong.

I mean, a person that's genuinely been converted wants to boast about what the Lord has done for them. They don't want to be quiet about it. If there's anything that will loosen the lips of a sinner, it's finding a Savior like Christ.

I mean, if anything is going to cause a person to shout hallelujah and want to tell people what's happened, it's true salvation. Typically, the reason that somebody would not want to share that is because their testimony is actually very defective. I mean, when a person's not wanting to be transparent about their testimony, it's probably a good evidence that something is very wrong.

And I know this, that in interviewing people, I would never baptize or bring into membership anybody that took that position. I mean, I've never come across it. I've never had anybody come to grace over the years that wanted to be baptized and join the church that would have taken that position.

Typically, that happens more when you maybe cross paths with somebody, maybe like out on the sidewalk and we all go down to the city center. If you were to ask somebody, are you a Christian? They say yes. It would probably be somebody you didn't know a whole lot about, somebody that something's wrong, but not likely somebody that would come through the doors of the church wanting to join.

I remember Bob Jennings saying that there was a guy that came to his church and Bob knew he was lost, but he called him brother. He kept on calling him brother. And every time he called him brother, the guy was getting convicted because he knew he wasn't a true Christian.

And after a while, he admitted, didn't he? And he ended up... Well, here's a story. Bob told me about it. He said that they specifically had a lost guy over for lunch, and Bob was purposeful in not bringing up the gospel.

He just wanted the man to see these Christian brothers interact, and he didn't want to put pressure on them. He was trying to be sensitive and prayerful and just figure out the right thing to say at the right time. And he said that as they were getting done with lunch and they were kind of getting ready to go, he asked him, are you a Christian? And he said, yes.

And that's all that was said. The man went home that night and he just couldn't sleep. He felt so disturbed.

But there is another chapter to the story. That man made a profession, and over the years, Bob talked to me about different problems that he faced with this man, and eventually this man fell away. So you want to be careful.

But of course, if somebody gives us... It's like John. John tells us not even to greet people who deny Christ. And so, you know, there is a place.

Paul could wish that the people who were deceiving the Galatians, that they be mutilated. He pronounces a curse on them. He calls certain people false brothers.

And so, you know, on the one hand we want to be gracious, but on the other hand, if people prove to be false, it's not a loving thing to simply go on calling somebody brother who is very much proven to be an enemy of the cross, an enemy of the truth, an enemy of Christ. You don't want to do that. When somebody shows themselves to be a false teacher, a false prophet, a false apostle, I mean, we want to call it what it is.

Jesus talks about the Ephesian church there in Revelation 2, identifying the false apostles. Paul, in 2 Corinthians, he talks about the servants of Satan. We want to be clear about what we're dealing with with people.

And if people walk away, well, we can say they weren't of us. We don't continue to call them brother. I mean, the reality is if you get people that come to a knowledge of the truth and they purposely go on in their sin, you know what? We want to call it what it is.

There's nothing ahead for that person but a fearful expectation of judgment and the fury of God. And so we want to be biblical and we want to be balanced in this. We want to heed our Lord's words concerning the parable of the wheat and the tares.

But we also want to recognize there are enemies in the church. There are servants of the devil that creep into the church. There are false teachers creep into the church, false brethren creep into the church.

In fact, we're told it's going to happen. And so you know what? As much as I, as a leader in the church, want to be charitable towards people, I also have one eye open for false teachers, false brethren, people that come into the church to cause division, to split churches because these are all realities. And so, you know, when somebody shows themselves for what they are, we don't want to just close a blind eye to it.

We need to protect the church. And we need to protect the truth. We are the purveyors of truth in our day.

The baton has been handed to us. The church of the living God, we are the ones committed with the Word of God. We are the ones committed with the Gospel.

And we don't, when we find people enter in who are teaching error, who are, I mean, there is demon doctrine, brethren. When people, there are demon doctrines and there are people that are, you know, they come in as ministers of light, but they're just like the devil who very often appears as an angel of light. But they're very sinister behind the scenes.

And anyway. Can I ask a question? Yes, ma'am. If someone visits just once or maybe very infrequently and they share their testimony with you, but the testimony is not convincing or they don't seem to trust Christ for salvation, how would you handle this? If you maybe only see them once or very frequently, infrequently.

Well, I think that there's a place for applying truth. I mean, that's what we want to do. I mean, here's the thing.

You say that somebody is unconvincing. Well, there's reasons why they're unconvincing. In other words, they've said something to you that raises a red flag.

Something that they say doesn't line up with Scripture. And, you know, I guess we need to be sensitive in those situations. How much should I say? How much should I confront people? It's kind of like lost people that are making no profession whatsoever.

When do you speak to them? When do you hand them a track? How much do you say to them? You know, sometimes there's a place to shake the dust off your feet and head elsewhere. Sometimes there's a place to run to the next town. I mean, the Scripture doesn't necessarily say that we need to persist with every single person all the time.

I mean, some people are absolutely deceived and they are happy in their deception. We need the wisdom of the Lord to know when to speak, when not to speak. But if we do speak, what we want to do is we want to attack the error with truth.

And so, I mean, we can express our concern to people that, hey, you know, when we go to the city center, I think that that's just a perfect place. Because we are meeting people who I don't know. I don't really know their background, but I begin to talk to them.

And, you know, there are people that seem like they have a burden for souls. They have the basic message of the Gospel seem solid. They're preaching Christ.

And you have other crazies down there, like, you know, go around just shouting things. And they've got these Hebrew-Israelite kind of takes on things, or they deny the Trinity. I mean, you've got people that just want to fight, people that want to steal Sonny's crowd and start saying all sorts of things.

I mean, as soon as you get that kind of thing, you know, some of these people we embrace. Some of these people we greet with a smile. We can call them brother.

Some of them we would not do that. I mean, the guy that goes around downtown just shouting almost incoherent things right when Sonny's preaching. And, you know, I've confronted him two or three times.

And I would not call him brother because I think he's an enemy to the Gospel. Just because somebody's down there claiming, I mean, you know, somebody can quickly say, well, if they're not against us, they're for us. Well, the reality is if they're preaching another Gospel, they're not for us.

They're against us. They're against our Christ. And so we need to be discerning that way.

Can I just ask one more thing in regards to testimony? Would you say it would be a red flag if somebody said that they don't know when they were saved? And I'm not talking about, like, you know, the minute of a specific day, but even like a month or, you know, like a quarter of a year, and they can't pin down, you know, when they were, you know, changed. Because I've heard that from different people, that they just can't. Yeah, I was saved sometime back in the 60s or back in the 70s, and it's kind of like, well, that's quite a broad thing.

So would you say that was a big sign of like kind of, especially if they were saying they were saved for about 10, 20 years or something like that, but they still can't. Let me ask you this. If you met the Apostle Paul and you said, hey, Paul, do you know when you were saved? What would he tell you? Yeah.

He'd say, let me tell you. I was walking down the Damascus Road and my eyes were opened. I mean, I had a personal confrontation with Christ.

Let me ask you this. Timothy grew up under a godly grandmother and a godly mother. If you ask Timothy, Timothy, when were you saved? What do you think he'd tell you? I don't think he'd know.

A lot of Presbyterians tell you and say, I don't remember the time. I mean, I know some people that literally say that they can't remember a time of their life where they didn't love Christ. John MacArthur will say that.

Now listen, the truth is this. I personally am very little concerned if somebody can tell me the exact time or not, because I've seen people who undoubtedly can tell you the moment they were saved and they fall away. And I can show you other people that have no idea what the exact day, week, or month, and sometimes even year, and yet they're going on with the Lord.

And so what I am most concerned about is what Scripture... Do you recognize the Scripture does not repeatedly have people give their testimonies? Now, I know Paul gave his testimony. I know he did that. And I'm not in any way objecting to that.

But you know, aside from him talking about what happened to him twice there in the book of Acts, the truth is that we're not really commanded to... A person's testimony is not really the item that's tapped about

somebody's genuine position before the Lord. It's always what your present standing is. It's where you are currently.

And that's what's really important. Listen, I know this. Nothing but the Spirit of God produces a love for Christ.

You know what's really concerning to me? Somebody gives their testimony and it's Christless. That's concerning. This happened.

That happened. They did this. They did that.

Something over here. But almost no Christ. That's concerning.

You know what? I want to see if somebody has a love for Christ. I want to see if somebody's only hope is found in Christ. No matter what testimony they've got.

Because you know what? People can forget. People can misinterpret. I know people that were saved as adults, but they had various unique things happen to them.

And they don't really know which one of them... Like if you ever were to look at Bunyan's testimony, it's crazy. I mean, it's like, well, when was he saved? And certain things happen, and then other things happen, and they're not really certain. And you know what? That doesn't matter.

And sometimes it comes up with baptism. Because somebody says, hey, pastor, I think maybe I wasn't genuinely saved when I got baptized. Well, what I say to them is, sort it out with the Lord.

I mean, look. And we've had that happen. Repeatedly we've had people say, you know what? I thought I was saved a certain time, but the more I try to sort things out in my life, I think maybe it was over here.

My wife had an experience about 10 years back that was so powerful in her life, she began to question whether she was really saved when she thought she was saved. Well, the reality is she was saved, but she had a season where God came so close to her. I've heard of people that have embraced the doctrines of grace, and it was so revolutionizing to their perspective on things.

They thought, well, most certainly that's when I got saved. But you know, that often isn't necessarily the case. And so I don't think it really matters.

I think the real issue is this. Because what we don't want to do is we don't want to have people living and trusting a testimony. We're supposed to trust Christ, not our testimony.

And so people can have very powerful experiences, and sometimes those experiences are not salvation. I mean, people can taste of the power of the age to come. We see that in Hebrews 6. And yet, it's not genuine.

People can experience aspects of the spirits moving and it not be legit. The real test is this. It's the fighting the good fight of faith.

It's clinging to Christ. Christ is all my hope. I trust him.

I follow him. I cling to him. I call upon him.

And that endures all the way to the end. Christ is everything. Christ is precious.

Christ is their all. Christ is their only hope. I mean, that's really it.

I can tell you this, that in my own life, there were very distinct workings of the Spirit of God in my life. There was a point. There was a day when I came under such conviction, unlike anything I had ever experienced in my life.

I knew I was going to hell. I knew I deserved it. It was like I got hit by a freight train of conviction.

I was reading John MacArthur's Gospel According to Jesus and I came under just a devastating conviction. But I don't believe I was saved then, but it was remarkable. Something happened.

It was months later, the Lord left me in that state of conviction for quite a while. And he brought me to the end of myself. When I got there and I cried out for help, I cried out that the Lord would save me.

I mean, immediately something entirely supernatural happened in a moment. I mean, the joy afterwards, the hunger for the Word of God, I've never been the same since. I think that that was the day that I was converted.

And other things happened after that, other experiences. But I guess bottom line is I don't really trust to those things. What I'm really concerned about is where I'm at right now.

After 31 years, this Sunday it'll be 31 years. And that's my spiritual birthday. And what I'm going to come back to is this.

What is Christ to me now? Where am I at? What am I living for? Where's my hope? Where's my trust? Where's my confidence? That's really the question. Because I'll tell you this, nobody that's hoping in Him, nobody that trusts Him is going to be ashamed. If your confidence is in Him, though your faith be just as a small seed, even as a mustard seed, if it's true faith and it's in Christ, even if you're one of the weak ones, but that's where your hope is and you cling to Him, that person will not be ashamed.

Nobody putting their trust in Christ is going to be disappointed in the end. And that's really the question. It's where our hope is.

It's where our confidence is just now. And I come back to the text in John 8 all the time, to the Jews who believed on Him. He said, you are truly my disciples if my word abides in you.

If there's anything that is true of a genuine child of God, it's that they suddenly have a new relationship with the Word of God. God Himself says, to this man will I look. And it's the person who's humble and contrite, but the person who trembles at His Word.

It's such a test. Where does the Word of God fit into your life? Are you being directed? Do you hear His voice? You know, isn't that interesting? My sheep, they know my voice. And we have that.

I mean, when we go to the Word of God, it speaks, it resonates with us in a way that just was not true. I don't know, I can't speak for all of you, but I would crack a Bible open every once in a great while when I was lost. And it was just mysterious.

I had no comprehension. Why? Because the things are spiritually discerned. The natural man can't perceive these things.

But when God saved me, suddenly that book just exploded with life, with glory. And you see Christ in it. You see God.

You see the triune God in it. I mean, I was blown away. I saw God striking down Uzzah and striking down the two sons of Aaron and killing all the people in the world.

Brethren, I was spiritually ignorant. I was a nominal Catholic. And when I began to encounter the God of the Bible, now with eyes that can actually see, the God of Scripture is absolutely big and powerful and holy and punished sin.

And I found myself over and over and over saying, I never knew who God truly was. We just get this idea about this small God who caters to our every need and is like Santa Claus. And suddenly the Word just shows us we are confronted by a God who is terrible, who's awful.

I'm saying that in the meaning of those words in days gone by. But God is very fearful. God is very fearful in His holiness.

I came across Isaiah 6 and just the fearfulness of Isaiah's encounter there. I began to recognize that God is so much bigger and higher and greater than I ever imagined. And Christ, He was precious to me.

He was just a word I used to swear, foul mouth. I never considered blaspheming His name to be equal to blaspheming God's name. He's just the Son of God.

I was a nominal Catholic. I saw Mary as more important than Jesus. But once the Lord opened my eyes and I began to see this Christ in this book, there was a beauty there that I had never perceived before.

It blew me away. But that's what we should expect. That's what Scripture says will happen.

So that's absolutely right. There's fruits. And then the brethren.

Suddenly I was not viewing people the same anymore. Everybody was now being evaluated in my own estimation by whether they're saved or they're lost. Not by how much money they make or by what kind of job they have, but now it's all... We see people not according to the flesh.

We see them through spiritual eyes. But you know, if the Spirit of God is present, the fruits of the Spirit will be a reality. There will be love in a way that there wasn't before.

There will be a desire to help, especially the brethren, especially brothers and sisters. There will be a desire to take care of one another's needs. We see it in the early church.

They sold their lands. They sold their property. Barnabas led the charge, making sure that the Christians didn't go without.

But yeah, these are the things we look for. True Christianity is supernatural. And where people have really been gripped by this, they bear the marks of it.

They bear the fruits. You know what we become sensitive of is our relationship with God. And then what happens, we sin and God hides His face.

God withdraws. Not actually. He doesn't forsake us.

He never forsakes us, but He certainly can hide His face. And we become aware of it. Scripture says, draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

The truth is that in our relationship with Him, we can sense distance. We can sense when His smile's not there. We don't view sin... When we're under the law, it's all about doing our duty.

Well, we've got to be good. We've got to be good people to somehow earn some place. But as Christians, it becomes different.

Sin becomes something that interferes with our relationship. Because the truth is, once saved, once justified in the courtroom of God, no sin can actually separate us from Him. But we certainly feel it.

We feel a separation. It's much like a relationship that we might have with our wife or with our husband. I mean, you know, problems crop up and it doesn't make us unmarried.

But the relationship can definitely be soured. It can be affected. And we know this.

Oh, think about the Song of Solomon. What a picture. A picture of our relationship to Christ.

And you remember what happens there in Song of Solomon 5? The bridegroom, the groom, he goes to the bedroom of his beloved and he calls to her. And she delays. She's washed her feet and she can't get up.

He lays his hand to the latch. Finally, she gets up and she goes to the door and he's gone. I mean, if we've got eyes to see, this is a spiritual picture.

And we know that. That's something that a mere religionist, a mere false convert, they can never identify with. But this idea of losing sight of our Savior.

Where did He go? I mean, we have a sense of that. We have a sense of when He's close and we have a sense... And you notice in the Song of Solomon the problem with any distance coming between him and her. It's always her.

It's never him. He is never the reason for separation between the two. She is always the reason for the separation.

But He doesn't stop loving her. But He goes away. And why would He do that? He goes away at seasons to make us more hungry.

To make our souls pant all the more after Him. Our souls panting for God. That is one of the truest fruits.

Love is right there at the beginning of the fruit of the Spirit in our love for Christ. For an unseen Christ. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? You live your life and you're madly in love with a Christ that you cannot see.

And yet He's as real as anything tangible and substantial that you can actually touch. This desk here, my computer, He's more real than that. And we feel Him and we sense Him.

And my sheep know my voice. And Paul talks about the fragrance of Christ. There's a scene of beholding.

Isn't that what Paul says? He says that we're transformed from one degree of glory to another. How does that happen? As we behold the glory of the Lord. We actually have the ability to see this Christ, to smell this Christ, to hear His voice that comes through the Word of God.

That's what's so precious about this book is that it's our channel. It's our pathway to this Christ. The Spirit of God has not created this fuzzy picture of a Christ for us.

He is very real, very defined. He's got very real qualities about Him. The Spirit has spelled out everything we need to know to know who this Christ is.

Brethren, it's when our hearts burn after Him and to know Him and to be in fellowship with Him. I mean, what greater proof than that? Somebody is genuine. There are not many Christians in the world.

And we are. I mean, it's like, you know, if Jesus can talk about money bags, then I can talk this way. Brethren, we hit the lotto.

We hit the jackpot. I mean, are you kidding me? In all of the coming ages, He's going to show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness. There's an eternal weight of glory.

We're going to see Christ face to face. We're going to be like Him. Eternal life.

It doesn't get better than what we've got. We are the most blessed, privileged people on the face of the earth. Consider your calling.

We may not be very wise, but the reality is we may not have all the merits of the world and all the power and all that the world has. We're the things that are not. But you know what? Be that as a name.

The truth is we're sons of the King. We've been brought in. We're no longer strangers and aliens.

We're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. And we are built on a strong foundation that's never going to fail us. And we're being built together as a dwelling place for God.

He's going to dwell with us. We are the bride of Christ. I mean, it doesn't get any better.

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