

# Biblical Tests of True Faith

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Let's open up our Bibles to First John, chapter five. Verse thirteen.

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These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, I come before you today, in the name of your Son. Lord, there is a great struggle, in this building. The thing that has come to hinder this service. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, that you would put it away. And that your word would be proclaimed. That the Spirit of God would work in the hearts of men. That all flesh be abased. That Christ alone be exalted. Father you know, you know. Restore the work, Lord that you began this morning. Let nothing hinder it. In Jesus name, Amen.

Today we are going to be talking about Salvation. There is nothing more important than the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Salvation. Most of you are younger than I am, but you'll find that life is going to flee quickly. That your days are going to pass quickly. That it'll be less than a century, less than several decades that every one of us will stand before God, and be judged. There are some who will stand before Him, and hear "Well done my good and faithful servant."

There will be others, who have rejected grace all their life. They have rejected grace, and because of that, they will hear "Depart from me, I never knew you."

It is very clear cut in scripture, but because of the country in which we live filled with so much heresy. It is hard for many to discern whether or not they are truly Christian. Some take the gospel as though it were, something to buy after a sales pitch. Thinking that their eternal security, is locked down, that it is secure. Because one time in their life they prayed a prayer, and asked Jesus to come in.

There are others who walk in condemnation. Because they have legalism, and all sorts of self-righteousness thrown upon them. So that even though they are true believers in Christ, they walk in constant doubt. Only the Scriptures can give us the correct balance. Only the scriptures.

How do we know that we are truly Christian, when it is so easy to be deceived?

On one side, being nonchalant about the faith. On the other side, reeking self-righteousness.

How can we truly know, that we are Christian? And that is the reason why this book was written. 1st John chapter 5 tells us: "these things." What are "these things?" The things written in this book. Were written to whom? To those

who believe in the name of the Son of God. It was written to true believers. For what purpose? That upon hearing the word of God, the Spirit of God would apply it to their heart, and they would have a biblical assurance that they were converted. Now that's John's purpose. But at the same time, I want you to see that this purpose can reverse itself upon those who think they believe, and yet do not. Because John is going to give us a series of tests, by which we can examine our lives to see if we are in the faith. And those who are true believers will rejoice, and be made strong at what they hear in this text. Those who are unbelievers, well there are two possibilities. That their hearts are so hardened, that they'll hear these standards judge themselves, and still have peace. Or, their hearts will break, and they will begin to see: I do not know Him, I do not know Him.

Now before we get to these tests, I want to go through a small introduction in this way:

How do we know that we are Christian? There is one sense and we can look at this logically, but with a true logic and an honesty.

The bible promises this: For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. There is propositional truth here. There are statements being made, and those statements are this: The one who believes in Christ, has eternal life. And so there's logic. There is reason. You ask yourself, do I believe? Do I trust in Christ alone? Or, am I trusting in Christ plus something? So many today claim to have a faith in Christ and yet when I press them, press them, press them. Eventually they work themselves back around to their own self-righteousness. But the true believer: Well let me say it this way. It will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than it would be for someone pass into heaven, with a shred of self-righteousness upon them. The true believer is a broken person. The true believer mourns over sin. The true believer only has hope and joy and peace because of Christ. The TRUE believer does not delight in constant inward looks. Rejoicing in their own piety. And they do not call attention to themselves. But they adopt the sayings of the Psalmist who said: "Not unto us O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thee be the glory." Will not draw attention to themselves, will not boast in their own righteousness, will not exalt their own piety, will not open up the door and say, "Look at me!" Because your most righteous deeds are filthy rags before a Holy God. And it stinks in the nostrils of God. But the true believer says, "I have nothing except Christ, and Christ alone." They have grown in true spiritual wisdom, so that they say this: "I no longer boast in the flesh, but I hope in Christ, Christ alone."

I know, and have seen, and will see again. Genuine believers, who struggle with doubting their salvation. I have seen that. Sometimes you hear the false teaching, that if you doubt your salvation it's because you are lost, that's not true. The reason why this book was written is because the genuine believer can come to the point of doubting their salvation. A genuine believer can doubt their salvation, but a genuine believer will never doubt, will NEVER doubt one truth: That Christ is their only hope. Christ is their only hope.

A genuine believer may go back and forth in this: "Am I saved, am I not saved, am I saved?" But they will not go back and forth with: "Am I righteous enough to be saved, or am I not righteous enough to be saved?" That's been settled in their heart. That's been settled in their heart.

Now verse 13, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may

know that you have eternal life. I mentioned in the introduction, that there is a sense in which we know we believe based upon reason. We know we are saved based upon reason. The promise is there, and I believe it. But there is another way, and that is: the witness of the Spirit within our own heart. Now primarily that witness is the great transformation that He begins to work in us throughout the full course of our life. But there is also a subjective witness of the Spirit. I know on that day that I was converted that I was saved. I knew I was a child of God. There was an assurance, there was a peace. Yes it was subjective, but none the less REAL. Something happened to me, it was more than just the adoption of a morality. It was more than just starting a new ethic, and it was more than just joining some religious maneuver, or movement. Something happened inside me. And every true believer will have that testimony. With some it may be more dramatic than others, but none the less, It is a Supernatural thing, the work of Salvation. And if we have been converted there will be something of that Supernatural testimony within us. It's the work of the Spirit who indwells us. Now immediately people want to say, "But the heart can be deceived": and "You shouldn't follow emotions." And all things like that, and that is true. But we still cannot eliminate the subjective from the Christian life. Something happened. The believer says, "I was changed on that day." Something inexplicable happened to me. I was in darkness, it became light. I had no peace, I was filled with peace. I knew not the love of God, and the love of God was shed abroad in my heart. So we have the idea of reason. We have the idea of the Supernatural, something occurred in us. Something changed in us.

And then we have our text here. What John is basically going to do, is based upon the Doctrine of Regeneration. You cannot understand 1st John, unless you understand the Doctrine of Regeneration. And what is that doctrine? That salvation is more than just a human decision. That when someone is truly converted, God changes their nature. He changes their heart, and He writes upon their heart His laws. That is the promise of the entire New Covenant. In the history of Israel, we see Israel being brought out of Egypt, and what do we see? They are given the Law, tablets of stone, something external. And then we see nothing but a history of disobedience. And then we come to Jeremiah, hundreds of years later, and God prophesies God speaks through Jeremiah, and He says this: I am going to make a new covenant, and it's going to be different. Not like the covenant I made with them when I brought them out of Egypt. No, it's not going to be Me giving them tablets of external stone. What I'm going to do is I'm going to write My laws on their heart. And they will have no need of being taught about these things. For I Myself will teach them, and they will be My people, and I will be their God.

So, we have Paul saying in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5: If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. And here's what you need to understand: There is a direct relationship between nature and will: nature and will. If the nature is evil, the will, will be inclined to evil.

You must understand that. That is the case of every man born on this planet. He is born with a fallen nature, and his inclination, the direction of his will is toward evil. What must happen? A man must be regenerated. His heart must be transformed by God. And when God gives a man a new nature, that new nature has new and righteous affections, and those new and righteous affections drive that man to the will of God, to wanting to do the will of God. And that's why John now can write that those who truly know Christ are going to live a certain way. Do you see that? There are going to be: There is going to be fruit. Matthew chapter 7: "You will know them", not just the

false prophet, but you will know all “By their fruit.”

Let me put it this way, I don't care how much Scripture you know. What do you do? What do you do? The bible does not look at what so much comes out of your mouth. What do you do? How do you live? What are you like? That is the evidence of a truly converted person. And there's so many people taking Matthew chapter 4 say that when the devil comes, you got to quote scripture at him. Jesus did not defeat the devil in those 40 days in the wilderness, because He quoted scripture at the devil. That is the silliest thing I've ever heard. But it is predominant in the land, isn't it? He didn't defeat the devil by quoting scripture at the devil. He defeated the devil by obeying the scripture He quoted. Do you see that? Do you see that? This is not wizardry. This is not magic. This is faith and obedience. That's what this is.

Now let's look at these tests, and let's start in chapter one, verse five: This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. God is light. Now when we hear that, primarily people begin to think. Yes, God is Holy there is no blemish in Him, and that's true. But that's probably not John's principle idea here.

You see there was a group of people, they can't really be called agnostics, but at least they were the beginning of the agnostics, a terrible, terrible cult that did great damage to Christianity in the first several centuries of Christianity. And actually it still exists today.

Not only in a group called agnostics but it has permeated even parts of Evangelicalism. They were a dangerous group and they were teaching basically this: That God is not light. God is dark in the sense that God is hidden: Esoteric, that you can't really know God. The common man, the common believer can't really know God. Only these super spiritual people could actually know God. In not knowing God, we also couldn't really understand the will of God, or what He really requires.

You see this in secular thought today don't you? All the politicians will say they believe in God, it's just that He can't be known, and He hasn't so spoken. So you can say you believe in God, and yet you don't have to do anything He says. But John comes back, and what does he say? No! God is light. And in this case, knowing John, knowing the gospel of John, I would say that his principle idea is: God has revealed Himself. God has made Himself known. So look at it that way: This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you: That God is light: in Him there is no darkness at all.

Verse 6: If we say we have fellowship with Him. So many times this passage is taught as referring to believers, of whether or not believers are walking in fellowship, or believers are not walking in fellowship. But that's completely outside the context of this passage. To have fellowship with God is to be a believer. To be outside of that fellowship with God is to be an unbeliever. Now that's all there is to it, that's what John is teaching.

So basically he's saying: If we say we are Christian, if we say we have fellowship with Him, and yet walk in darkness. Now the word “walk” here is “περπατήσε” (peripatiō), from the Greek.

“Peri” – meaning around, and “patiō” – meaning to walk. It means to walk around. It is a word commonly used

by John, commonly used by Paul, and it refers to a style of life in every area of life, that the Bible sees no room for dividing our existence into secular and sacred. Or, there are places where we should obey God, and places where it does not pertain to God. That is not the way the bible sees it: That ALL things pertain to God, and that our style of life, if it is honest, if it is true, we will practice our religion, in every place that we walk. So he says: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him," that we are believers and yet we walk in what? ---that our style of life is immersed in darkness.

Now, what is darkness? It's not what you think. It is more evil than you actually believe, and it is less evil than you actually believe. You think darkness would have to do with something: that would have to do with Satanism or Witchcraft, or Atheism. Know the idea here is this: what is light? God's revelation. What has God revealed? He has told us who He is, and He has told us what He has commanded. That is light. We know we have light shed upon who is God. We have light shed upon what is God's will. The one, who walks in darkness, walks in a way that contradicts what God has told us about Himself, and contradicts what God has said about His will. That is what it means to walk in darkness.

Now, I want us to look at something. It is because we have to be very, very careful here. First of all the word "peripatiō" is in a present tense denoting continuous action. It's not just talking about a moment in time, but it's talking about the style of a person's life. So that if you were to simply judge a person by one moment in time, you could grossly misjudge that person. You could see a true believer commit a deed that was sin. And immediately write them off as an unbeliever. But that would not be biblical; it would not be fair, it would not be correct. Or you could see a person with grotesque morality, and hatred toward God. You could see them, and in one moment see them do something of a righteous deed, and come to the conclusion that they are believers. So you see both of those aorist tense moments points in time are deceiving. But what the bible was talking about is looking at their entire style of life. How do they live? Over the full course of their days, and over the full course of all their activities, how do they live? Do you see that?

Now here's the question for you. Do you walk in darkness?

And realize this: you could walk in darkness, and be very, very moral. Do you walk in a way that contradicts what God has revealed about His nature, about who He is? Do you walk in a way that contradicts what God has revealed about His will. Does your lifestyle: Is it a contradiction to the will of God? Or is it in accordance with the will of God? We could set it this way, if we wanted to back to the book of Ephesians. Are you walking according to the course of this world, of this age? Are you going with the flow? Are you walking contrary to the course of this world? With your eyes set upon the will of God, and being conformed to the image of God.

So that's the first thing that you must answer. And these tests, before we go any further, are also very important for parents. Because a child raised in a godly home for the most part will say: "I believe, I believe, I believe." And if a child says, "I believe." No one should ever look at that child and say, "No you don't." We shouldn't squash the fire that is within them. But also, do not be hasty in your affirmation of that faith. A proper thing to do is to say: "If you believe, you are saved. But let us watch your life." "Let us examine ourselves in the light of scripture, until you

come to a full assurance of your faith, based upon the written word of God.” Do you see that?

Just a practical thing here: for the Church, for parents. Another very appropriate thing to do... something that... is very helpful. When a child says “I believe”, like, they want to participate in the Lord’s Supper. Or they want to be baptized, after seeing a baptism: “Well can I do that too?” Sit down and discuss the matter with them, but then tell them: “Here’s what I want you to do.” “Sunday, go to the elders, go to the elders, and talk to them.” “Well Dad, will you come with me?” “No, No, I won’t. If you truly think that the Lord has worked in your life: Go talk to Brother Anthony, and Brother Mark. Then set up a meeting with them, so that they can discuss these matters with you.” It’s a really practical way to see that someone wants to be baptized, just because all the other kids were baptized. It’s really practical way of seeing that someone wants to be in the Lord’s Supper, just because they saw some other child their age in the Lord’s Supper, but they wouldn’t want your elders involved in this? Their counsel. And when you see a child that says: “Then to the elders, I will go, because I have been converted.” Wow. And they sit down, and they explain their faith, and explain what God has done in their lives. Now that... That’s something.

Now, just a practical thought.

And so the first test is this: A true believer will walk in the light as a style of life. Will walk in accordance with what God has revealed about His nature and His will. Now, if you take my words seriously at this moment. You should be trembling. Why? Because believers, true believers, the most mature believers: sin. Even in the most pious life, it is often times two steps forward and three steps backwards. So what do we do? Are we not Christian? Are we all to be condemned? Have we all lost our assurance this morning? Because no one walks constantly, continuously in accordance with what God has told us about Himself or His will. And if you think you have, I can assure you, you have now truly flunked the test. You’re not Christian. You are deceived.

And so where are we to go from here?

Well, we just need to keep reading, because now John’s going to deal with that problem. Look in verse 8, if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

And here’s something that’s very important. When you say that God is dark that He hasn’t told us who He really is, and that you can’t really know His will. Then it’s very easy to begin to believe that you are without sin. The more God is hidden from men, the more self-righteousness you are going to find. And the more men truly know, and proclaim God, the more humility before God you are going to see. Do you see that?

So these believers, they’ve heard now. That if you’re a true believer you will walk according to the nature and will of God, and they’re sitting there: “But John!” “We’ve sinned!” “We still sin, we struggle with sin, we hate our sin, but we do sin John.” And so John gives them another test. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

So one of the great evidences that you are truly Christian is not that you no longer sin, but that you NOW recognize your sin, and you see it as sin. As a matter of fact, if you don’t recognize your sin as sin, and you don’t see it as sin, it is evidence that you are not a believer.

So he says: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” God’s truth implanted by the Holy Spirit is simply not in us.

Verse 9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all un-

righteousness.”

“If we confess our sins...” What is one of the greatest evidences of a true believer? They recognize sin in their life, and they confess it. They confess it. They are confessional in that way. They are marked by brokenness, and they are marked by confession. But don't think that the Christian life is simply, looking at your sin, being broken over it, and confessing it. No! Because when we look at our sin, and we confess our sin, being broken by our sin, we also experience what? ---The Grace of God and the Joy of our Salvation, not in our own works, but in the works of Christ on our behalf. Do you see that?

Now what does confession mean?

“Lord, forgive me of my sins.” No that is not what confession is. That's asking the Lord to forgive you of your sins, but that is not confession. Or, “Lord if I have sinned in any way, forgive me.” That is not confession, neither.

What is confession? Comes from the Greek word -Homologeó. “Homo” – which means “like”, or “same”. And “lo-geó” – to confess. Homologeó – is to confess the same. Now what does that mean? Is it not the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to speak to us about our sin? It is His ministry: To convict not only the world, but also us of our sin. So let's say that we get up in the morning, and we have been impatient with one of our children, or we have been impatient with our wife, or we have been cold towards someone, wrongly cold towards someone. And as we leave the house, or leave the building, the Holy Spirit begins to deal with us. Bringing scripture maybe to mind, showing us we have sinned. And so the Holy Spirit says: “You have sinned, you have been impatient.” Confession is when you agree with what God has spoken. “What you say about me, God, is true!” “I have sinned, I have been impatient.” Do you see that? It is speaking the same thing. It is agreeing with God over your sin. That's confession. That's confession. And the true believer, they're marked by it. They're marked by it.

But let me just show you kind of how it works. Because we've talked about revelation, now we're talking about confession.

A person is walking in this world; he's an unbeliever without..., he's in darkness. And all of a sudden someone preaches the gospel to him and the Holy Spirit works in his heart, and illuminates his mind and he sees God as he's never seen Him before. And in light of that light, he sees himself, as he has never seen himself before. And he sees his sin, as he has never seen his sin before. And he is broken, as he has never been broken before. Yet, he does not repent unto death. It is not a brokenness unto despair. Because in that revelation of God he sees Christ, and Calvary, as he has never seen it before. And he trusts, he believes, and then what happens? He is filled with joy. He trades his sackcloth and ashes, for the raiment of joy.

Now as believers what happens? What happens as believers? As we grow: You're a brand new believer, and you begin to study the scriptures. As you study the scriptures, the nature of God, the nature of God revealed in His commands, His righteousness, His holiness, He begins to show you, more and more, and more of your sin, which leads to a greater, and greater brokenness, which leads to a more profound confession, and that profound confession turns into a more profound joy. So that the end of your life, you are more holy than when you began, and yet at the same time, you are more broken than when you began, and yet at the same time, you are more joyful than when you began, and a great interchange has happened, instead of now boasting in your performance, which reeks

in the nostrils of God, you now boast in the finish work of Christ alone.

Do you see that? Confession, what is one of the greatest evidences that you have truly become a believer? It's confession.

That is not to say, that a Christian has no victory. They do have victory. That is not to say that a Christian just is saved in his sin, no. He's saved out of his sin. God works in his life and begins to change him, but know this: you will never reach a point of perfection, until the day you step over into glory.

Is your life marked by confession? Is your life marked by confession?

Do you see sin in a different light now? Does it bring you to agree with God, And confess it, and at times even confessing sin to a brother and sister in Christ, whom you have wronged?

Let me give you another illustration. This will help some of you I think who struggle in this area. Not that you do not confess, it's just that sometimes you are wrangling with sin, causes you to doubt that you have been converted. A man is unconverted, and he's getting ready to leave for the office. It's snowing outside, he's late, and he's dropping papers out of his briefcase. He's got to get through the kitchen, doesn't have time to eat. No cup of coffee. He's miserable. He reaches for the door. He's going to run out to the office.

At that moment his wife calls him and says: "Take out the trash."

Without even thinking, the man spins around and says, "What's wrong with you? You take out the trash. Don't you know I'm late? I've got a job to do, I've got all this pressure on me. You take out the trash!" And he walks out the door totally justified. Has no problem with what he's done. No problem whatsoever: gets in the car, goes has coffee, goes to his job, makes his presentation. He's fine. Three months later he's converted. And then nine months later, he's coming down the steps walking through the kitchen. It's snowing outside. He's got all kinds of pressure on him, there's papers flying out of his briefcase. His boss is just giving him up and down problems. He's getting ready to walk outside, and all of a sudden his wife comes down the stairs behind him, and says, "Take out the trash before you leave." And without even thinking he spins around and goes: "What's wrong with you? "Take out the trash"--- Don't you see I've got an appointment? I'm dropping papers, I've got so much pressure on me!"

You say: "Brother Paul what happened then, what did conversion do to him?" What did conversion do? The moment he spun around, and the moment those words started coming out of his mouth. It was like someone took a knife, and drove it straight through his heart. And he bucks up against it, and he gathers his papers. He doesn't apologize, he knows he's wrong. He's even more furious now, he walks out the door. He's miserable. He is miserable! He gets in his car; he's going to drive off. He can't even drive the car, he's miserable for what he's done. He bucks up against it; he makes it to the office. He's got go in and give his presentation, and finally he just looks at his team and goes: "Look, I'll be there in a minute, I'll be there in a minute." And he gets down on his knees. "Oh God forgive me." And when he finishes there he gets on his cell phone, and he says, "Wife, I am so sorry for what I've done. Forgive me; I can't go in there unless you forgive me."

You don't think that's powerful? You don't think that's supernatural? I'm telling you it is. Something's happened to this man. And gradually, it will start coming out more and more and more. It will take a while. But when his wife comes down, and says take out the trash, he says: "I... I can't... right now." Or, "OK" "I will". Cause you're no longer



consumed with self. God has worked in his heart, do you see that?

That's what we're talking about. That's why I can't stand these extremes. This one extreme, where you can just be nonchalant about sin: "Yeah, I'm a believer." And then this other extreme: "Well you sinned so you're lost." Both of them are deadly. You see you can walk a thousand miles that way, and a thousand miles that way, and be in falsehood. But to walk in the truth is like to walk on the edge of a razor blade. And there are ditches on both sides, and you can fall off in them. Avoid the extremes. We're a changed people. We can say that.

If a Christian ever puts on his T-shirt: "Changed." Then I would say he's a heretic, unless he puts on the back: "And still changing." Fundamentally, by nature we have changed. But the working out of that change will be a lifetime. Will be a lifetime, and not perfected until Glory. So what is one of the evidences that we are converted, truly converted?

Well, let me put it this way. Someone tells me: "I've got a new relationship with God." I ask them this question: "Do you have a new relationship with sin?" Because the evidence you have new relationship with God, is that you have a new relationship with sin. It's like the illustration of marriage. I have a new relationship with her. Well then that means you have a new relationship with every other woman on this planet, a relationship of "NO" You see? Now let's go on to the next test.

In chapter 2, verse 4. Let's begin in verse 3.

"By this we know that we have come to know Him."

Now this is a ... Now look at that: By this we know that we are a Christian, "If we keep His commandments." Now even bolder, John is going to become, "The one who says, I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments is a liar." Now let's just stop there for a moment. If I had a nickel for every time somebody in the United States told me: "Well I know, I live in the world just like the devil, everything else, but you don't know what's inside my heart. I really do love Him, I really do know Him" What is the answer to that? John provides the answer.

"The one who says, I have come to know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar."

Now again, the idea "keep" here, present tense, talking about a style of life. He's not talking about sinless perfection. But he's talking about a new relationship with the commandments of God. And let's just go back now.

Do you have a new relationship with God? Then you have a new relationship with sin, because you have a new relationship with God's commands.

Prior to conversion, a man does not walk around thinking about the commandments of God, trying to obey the commandments of God, Broken, when he breaks the commandments of God, Confessing, when he breaks the commandments of God. He has no relationship with the commandments of God. He does what is right in his own eyes.

But if he's been truly converted, what will happen? There will begin a relationship with God's commands, with God's will. He will want to know God's will for his life. He will want to obey God's will. He will ask for power for

obedience. He will confess sin when he finds himself breaking God's will. This is the evidence of true conversion. It is! Is it found in you? Is it found in you?

Again, we are not talking about some self-righteous Pharisee. Not at all. We may be talking about a person who is struggling, and struggling greatly. But their struggle come from the fact that they now want to obey God's will. They desire to obey God's will. It is meaningful to them, meaningful to them, precious to them. And now some of you, because I know the works of the Devil, I know how he works. Some of you are saying: "But, so often I don't want to study the scriptures." That's exactly what you're saying: "So often I'm lazy, does that mean I'm not converted? So often I don't memorize. So often I don't open the bible. Does that mean I'm not converted?" I can join you, in that song you just sing. None of us study the Word as we should. None of us memorize as we should. But here something I know: Prior to conversion it did not bother me, that I was lazy with regard to piety and devotion and the study of the Scriptures. Now that too, kills me at times. "Paul, you're a preacher. How can you not want to get up out of bed right now, and study?"

Do you see? If you struggle with this, and I know you do. If you struggle with this, this too tells me something about you.

You see: If men are truly, radically depraved. Then there is no virtue, or desire of God in them, apart from the work of the Spirit. And yet, you're sitting there saying "I desire to be more like Him. I want to know Him better, I want to obey Him more, and it kills me when I don't accomplish the very things I desire." That tells me that something has happened to you. But you will have a new relationship with His Word. You will.

Listen to me young people. Listen to me. Because you don't know what you think you know. And I know that. Because when I was your age, I did not know what I thought I knew. And I know that because 30 years from now, If I live that long, I'll look back to this very day, standing in this pulpit, and realize I did not know what I thought I knew even now. This is part of the Christian life. There are going to be trials in your life. There's going to be suffering. There's going to be walking down paves for days and maybe even years. That you never should have walked down, and God is going to allow all of it to happen. Not because He dislikes you, but because He loves you. He's going to allow all these things to happen. So that little by little, all your own trust, and your own wisdom will be made void. Do you see that? And you will no longer do as Israel did in the Book of Judges: Doing what is right in your own eyes. But you will seek to live by His commands. Not by what you see, not by what you feel. Not even by what you think, but by "thus says The Lord". It will become the guide of your life, so that if He says "Stay" you stay. If He says, "Run" you run. If He says, "Walk" you walk.

Now let's go on to another test: Verse 6 of chapter 2

"The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." I've read this before, and seen looks on people's faces, if I read people's faces correctly, in which on hearing this text was the final nail in their coffin.

"What do you mean? The one who is saved will walk, as He walked?"

We're not talking about John here. We're not even talking about the Apostle Paul. We're talking about Jesus. The perfect man without spot, without blemish, undefiled, unsoiled, always doing the will of His Father. The only one to pass into Glory, based upon His own righteousness. You're saying that in order to be a Christian, I must walk as He walks, or that will be the evidence of it? Well that's what John says. That's what he says clearly. He says, "The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."

But what does that mean? Again, we're not talking about perfect conformity. What we're talking about is "Telos"-End, Goal, aim, finish line. What we're talking about here: What is the great aim of your life? Who do you want to be like? Who are you seeking to imitate?

When I was a little boy, I was often times frightened of my father, but always, I respected my father. And he was a big man; he was about my size, my height, but he was much stronger, much squarer. And we would go out, when I was a little boy, and we would feed the horses, especially in the winter, when all of the snow and the ice would come, and there was no water for the horses or the cattle. And when would go out, and either bust ice, or carry water in great big buckets.

And I can still to this day remember my father, reaching down and grabbing one bucket with one hand, and another bucket with another, and standing there holding that out, and just walking across the snow. And I always wanted to be like him. He would have me out there when I was six years old. And I would reach and grab a bucket, and I would reach and grab another bucket, and then I would try to put my foot in his footprint.

And honestly, I looked like a drunken spider. If you would have seen me, you would have laughed. If you would have been less than a good man, you would have mocked and joked. But there would have been no doubt in anyone's mind, that little boy wanted to be like his father. He was stumbling, and falling, and failing, he could not take the same stride, but there was no doubt: He wanted to be like somebody. And that somebody was his father.

Now, may I ask you a question? Who do you want to be like?

Now, be afraid, because we really don't even need you to answer that question, we know it already. Not because we're prophets, not because we can look inside your heart. All we have to do is open our eyes. It's quite as concealed as you think it is.

Now I'm saying that with regard to you, with regard to me, with regard to all of us. The person whom you really hope to be like, it's very evident. It's very evident. Talk like the world, act like the world, dress like the world. Do everything the world does, have the same heroes, have the same passions and desires. Then all that's telling everyone is: you love the world. You love the world, or do you want to be like Christ?

So many things are taught about manhood that are so wrong. As though some of our, these historic characters, you know, Even John Wayne, or Teddy Roosevelt, or explorers, or this or that, are men to imitate. No they're not. Unless they did it for glory of God, they are not to be imitated, because we're not talking about being a man like John Wayne or Hercules.

We're talking about being a man like Jesus Christ.

We're talking also about being a woman, who shows the same virtue as her Lord and elder brother.

We're talking about wanting to be like Jesus.

Is that evident in your life? Do you desire to be like Jesus? And do you sometimes sit alone, like I do, at night in the dark, thinking: This day, I acted more like a fool than I did Jesus. I acted more like a bumpkin than I did Jesus. I acted more like an arrogant man or a Greek or a Roman than I did Jesus.

Enter into conversations, and say, "I didn't speak, as Jesus would have spoke there."

Do you want and desire to be like Jesus? And be very, very careful. Because that wanting to be like Jesus, is always filtered through whatever culture, or sub-culture we live in.

Could be a guy running around with flip-flops on and "What Would Jesus Do" bracelets, and saying, "Man, I'm a wild man, like Jesus was a wild man." No, you're like your culture is what you're like.

Or, people dressing up as though we were still living in the age of "Pride and prejudice." And say, "I'm looking like Jesus looks." No, I am sorry they didn't wear those clothes when Jesus lived.

We're not talking about these kinds of things. We're talking about what we really are! What we really do! How we really think! Do you see that? Very important...

Now let's go to the last test, and we'll close.

Verse 7: Beloved I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning, and an old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

Now if you've been in our study on Wednesday night. You know that this is one of my favorite verses in the whole bible, why? I just find it intriguing, because John goes, you know I am a... I am not writing a new commandment to you. And then he turns right round and goes: I'm writing a new commandment to you. And you just want to look at John and go: "John which is it? You're either writing an old commandment or a new commandment?" He says, No I'm writing both.

What does he mean? And if you could just meditate upon this text and catch a glimpse of it... because I cannot explain it well, not even what's in my own heart about it. He's saying the commandment to Love, is an old command, It's been from the beginning, It's always been. The mark of someone who knows God is love. It's an old commandment.

But it's a new commandment, in what way?

When Jesus came, He revealed to us such a high expression of love. It is as though love had never been spoken of before. He took it to such another high level, that it's as though it was a brand new command. And He did. He did. And what does he go on to say here? He says, and I love this, On the other hand, (verse 8) I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you.

"John, it's true in me? How?"

He says, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The darkness is passing away,

and the true light is shining. And what does that mean? It has a lot to do with revelation, but it also has a lot to do with sanctification. The old things are passing away. There is a sense in which they've all passed away. You live in a completely different realm, and a completely different sphere, 2 Corinthians five. But the outworking of that, as you go on with the Lord, He's going to be faithful. He's going to be faithful to do what? To make sure that more and more darkness is passing and more light is shining. And how will you know when that happens? Well one of the chief ways you'll know is: how you'll love people, at least how you learn or are learning to love people.

The one thing that I most... The one thing that I see in such a new light, as I've never seen it before, even though I could have spoke the right thing with my mouth, was that in the new covenant, love is everything. I still don't know what I'm saying when I say that. It really is true. That if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And you love your neighbor as yourself, that you will be fulfilling the Law of God. And the greatest expression of biblical maturity is love, it really is.

So, a man can run through jungles being chased by enemies. A man can give away everything he has several times. A man can wear himself out. But if he has not love, he is nothing, he does nothing, he accomplishes nothing.

What's one of the greatest evidences that you are a believer? That you love. And just so you know how important this is, you know the warning Christ gives us in the judgment of the nations, of the sheep and the goats, that there is a separation. People misunderstand that passage, they read that passage and say, "This passage proves that we need to, you know give food to the hungry, and clothe the poor, and visit people in prisons, and have a prison ministry." That's not what that verse means at all. That's not what that passage means at all.

Now, we need to feed the poor, we need to have prison ministries, and we need to do all those things, but that's not what that text is talking about at all. You see how you can quote a text, and just take it totally out of context. Jesus is not saying "I was a murderer in prison, and you visited me". That's not what He's saying. What is he saying? The whole thing is the outworking of love for other Christians. That's what the whole thing is about.

You say "What do you mean?" Let me give you an illustration. We're meeting in a forest outside of Rome. We're a criminal religion. We're Christians. And the meeting breaks up at about eleven o'clock at night, and we all know to take different roads back to the city. You go home, you go to bed. About four o'clock in the morning, someone is pounding on your door. You open your door, and it's one of the believers, says: "You got to meet back in the wood, come". So you get dressed, you take your path back to the wood. There's a meeting there, all the believers. What happened? One of the elders stands up and says: "Two of our men, on the way back, were caught by the soldiers. They were found with some writings. They were tricked, and now they're in prison. They've been beaten, and thrown in jail."

Well, a lot of prisons around the world, you may not know this: if someone from the outside does not bring you medicine, and food and clothing. You're going to die. And so they said, "We've got to do something." And two

young believers jump up immediately, full of zeal, like some of you college guys, just full of Zeal: “We’ll take them the clothes, we’ll go, we’ll get the medicine. We’ll take it.”

And then an older guy like me stands up and says, “Wonderful, sit down for a second, you don’t know what you’re saying.” You see when you go, and you take that medicine, and those clothes, and everything else. And you take it to that prison. They’re going to know, you’re believers too. And if they do, and they’re not feeling... they’re not in that good of a mood. They’re going to beat you, strip you, and throw you into prison. Do you know what you’re saying; when you say “I’ll go?”

And then a group jumps up, from somewhere in the Church, jumps up a group of people and says “This is just stupid, this is ridiculous. We’re tired of this, may we believe in Jesus too. But we just keep seeing this Church getting more, and more radical, and we’re just tired of it. We think you guys are crazy. We’ve never been called to do this type of thing. They got caught, it’s their problem. God knows what He’s doing. We’re out of here!” And they leave, and what have you just seen?

The division of the sheep and the goats before judgment day.

And then two old men stand up and they go “Look, we’ve raised our families, young men sit down, we don’t want you going. We’ve raised our families, our children are grown. Give us the stuff.” And so all the people run back to their homes, they’re poor, they’re slaves. They get medicines, they go buy. They do everything they can do, they sacrifice everything and meet back in the wood, and the two old men take the food, the clothing and the medicine, to go minister to the brothers in prison. That’s what Jesus is talking about.

He’s basically saying this: One of the greatest, if not the greatest evidences that you believe in Him, and that you have claimed Him as Lord, is that you love the brethren. You love the brethren.

Now I know that there are people in this church, so many dear brothers and sisters in Christ that are converted, that would do that. I do know that, and that’s wonderful.

And what I’m going to say now, though church is not in any way to disparage that. I know you would do that. But church, remember this: we do have brothers and sisters in Christ in prison. We do have brothers and sisters in Christ in need. And maybe as a body, we should be giving more attention to that, don’t you think? I know that there are people here who would give everything they had in order to help a brother or sister in Christ. I know you would do that, but like me, just like me, we often forget, don’t we? How many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering, and in need! We need to be putting that before each other all the time. How can we help? How can we help? What can we do?

Someone told me a long time ago. You live in the United States you don’t have to go without. Then I can choose to for the sake of brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s just think about that.