

God's Sovereignty and Your Salvation, Part 8

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The air conditioner is still broken, but we've got a new one ordered—two new ones, as a matter of fact. We're going to see if we can get some frost in here pretty soon. But, for this morning, we'll just be thankful we're not in hell, where it's a lot hotter. If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 10:21–24, where we are going to look at God's sovereignty and your salvation, [with a specific] look at the subject of assurance.

I don't know if you've ever wondered if you weren't saved. I think everybody who is a Christian at times has questions about his or her salvation. Maybe you know you're not saved. Even if you are a Christian, or at least [are] pretty sure you're a Christian, or maybe [are] convinced you're a Christian, there may be times in your life [when you] have experienced times of doubt, times of just wondering, "Do I know Christ or not?"

Maybe you have told others who asked you, "Are you a Christian?"

"Oh, yes."

"Are you saved?"

"Of course I am!" But there's this lingering thought in the back of your mind that maybe you're not. You look at your life, and you know your sinful thoughts, you know your sinful deeds, and you're thinking to yourself, "Is this what it means to be a Christian? To always be struggling, confess-

ing, fighting against sin, or am I just [fooling] myself? Am I just lost and deceived, or do I actually know the Lord?" There may [have been] times in your life when you were on fire [for the Lord]. You can think back to times when you were so excited about your faith, and your study of the Word, and prayer, and involvement in ministry and giving—you were just glowing hot. Then, maybe you look at your life now, and your spiritual life looks like a smoldering wick. Maybe you're just barely warm, and you're wondering, "Why is that? Am I not a Christian, or am I Christian who has grown cold?" You know that one of Satan's strategies is to try and get you to think you're saved when you're not, and you know that one of his strategies is to try to get you to think you're not saved when you are. He's working at you from both directions. So sometimes you wonder, "Oh, Lord! Where am I? Do I know Jesus or not?"

I was going to do a little two-part sermon today, address[ing] the assurance of our salvation and the perseverance, or eternal security, of our salvation, but after I started studying, I thought, "There's no way," so the eight-part series [on God's sovereignty and your salvation] has turned into [a] nine[-part series]. I think next week is going to be the absolute last one... maybe. There's just part of me that says, "Oh, you cannot go too fast." This morning, [I] want to talk about this whole idea of assurance. To start off this morning, we're basically going to do two things. We're going to go back to our text, our launch-pad text, for God's sovereignty and your salvation—Luke 10:21–24—and I want to comment on one particular irritating, burrowing paradox in the passage. I know some of you have been thinking, "How can that be?" [when we read that portion of the text]. Even though we've answered [that question] to a degree in a general way [while we were] addressing other issues, I want to tackle it head-on this morning. Then I want to look at the three ways God gives us so that we can know that we're saved.

That's our plan this morning. Look at the text [in] Luke 10:21–24, [and] remind yourself that the seventy have been sent out to do pre-evangelism, [and to] heal the sick, cast out demons, [and] preach the gospel. They come

back, and they're really excited that the demons [were] subject to them. They were not excited that people got saved, they were excited that the demons were subject to them. To Jews, demons were really powerful, and [the disciples] just loved having that authority given to them by Christ, where they could just go up to somebody who was demon-possessed, and say, "Out of there!" and the demon would have to leave. They came back, [saying], "Man, we're bad! You should have seen that one demon, man! He was screaming out!" [In response], Jesus says, "Don't rejoice in that, rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" [see Luke 10:20].

Now, [in our text], Jesus Himself is going to model for them what He expects them to do. [The text] says this, starting in verse 21:

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

We're going to do [a] two-flanked approach here. First, [I will] address this little, knotty issue in the text, and then [I'm] going to address the three ways you can know that you are truly saved.

First, [let's look at] the difficulty in the text. Look at verse 21: "At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.'" The text says Jesus "rejoiced." It means "to rejoice exceedingly, to have exceeding joy, exceeding happiness," it is

“to overflow with happy thanksgiving.” There is another word here, the word “praise,” [which] is a strong word meaning “to declare or to confess forth openly, to make a public acknowledgment, or to celebrate publicly.” [If] you combine those [words] together, it means [that] Jesus was bursting with joy and happiness. He was excited, and it was not that [the disciples] had power over demons, but that their names were recorded in heaven. He was rejoicing over the salvation plan of God.

You need to get the picture [of this] in your mind. The seventy are there, they're all standing in front of Jesus, Jesus is saying, “Don't rejoice in this,” and then, [with] maybe [His] hands lifted up, [a] smile on His face, laughing as He says it, [He says], “I praise you, O Father.” What's amazing is not that He praises the Father, and not that He does it with great joy, but what's amazing is the first thing [for which] He praises Him. Look at the middle of verse 21: “That You,” Father, “have hidden these things,” the gospel truths, “from the wise and intelligent.” That is an interesting statement. I've read that [verse] through the whole [sovereignty of God in salvation] series, and every time I do, I can see people out there with their heads kind of tilted, [thinking], “Whoa! Owie! What is that? [Do] you mean that Jesus is rejoicing, He's laughing, He's praising, that the Father hides the truth from the wise and intelligent?” Well, that's what the text says. “Well, that means they can't be saved!” That's what the text says.

I know what you're thinking. It's what I think—it's what everybody thinks when they read this: “How can this be? If God desires all men to be saved [see 1 Timothy 2:1–4], and God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked [see Ezekiel 18:23, 33:11], then how come Jesus is rejoicing that the Father hides the truth from these wise and intelligent people so that they can't be saved?” That is the knotty little issue I want to address because it torments people. I mean, you read things like this, and you're thinking, “How could this be true? OK, it's in there; it says that. What does this mean?”

Who are the “wise and intelligent,” first? We learned this already: the “wise and intelligent” are those who do not believe in God's sovereignty in

salvation. They are self-sufficient, self-righteous, [and] self-trusting [people]. They are like the Pharisees who didn't need God, they didn't need a Physician, they didn't see themselves as weak, helpless, worthless sinners who couldn't save themselves. They saw themselves as pretty good, and better than the average person. If anybody had a hope of ever getting to heaven, it surely was them. They were fine with that. Jesus is rejoicing not that the Father is saying, "Mwahahaha, I get to make these people evil and then damn them to hell!" That's not what the text is saying.

Let's see what the text *is* saying. First of all, we ask this question: Salvation is by [what]? Grace. OK? You guys know that one, that's good. We all know that grace is undeserved and unearned favor, gifts given to us by God. You could say it this way: It's *unfair* to receive grace. That's kind of a little twist on things, isn't it? A lot of people [say], "Well, hey, I don't think that's fair." We know what fair is. Fair is that we all get to go to hell and be judged because of our sin. That is fair and that is just. Grace is undeserved and unearned, so no one can demand grace. There are no legitimate grounds for demanding grace. You can ask for it, but you can't demand it. Salvation is by grace and grace alone. Fairness implies that someone deserves something. We do not deserve grace. Salvation is not by fairness; salvation is by *unfairness*. We don't deserve it. "While we were yet sinners" [see Romans 5:8], "while we were yet enemies" [see Romans 5:10], while we were haters of God, while we were running away, then God, by His grace, saved us, and we didn't deserve it. Justice is deserved, and I wouldn't recommend [that] you ask God for that.

When you study grace, you learn that God has basically two different kinds of grace that He extends to mankind. If you don't understand this, then you come up with faulty views of salvation. We [may] look at grace and think of grace as one big lump thing. It's grace. Actually, [however], there are two general categories, or kinds, of grace. If you don't understand them, then you get confused about what's going on in God's salvation plan. The first category of grace [is grace that] God extends to all people. It is called "general" or "common" grace. This is the grace that God gives to

people in helping them live, giving them health, giving them jobs, giving them sustenance, sustaining them while they breath, giving them children, allowing them to enjoy pleasures on earth. Unbelievers, all unbelievers, receive God's common grace. He allows the sun to shine, the rain to fall on the just and the unjust [see Matthew 5:45]—those are all gracious provisions of God.

There is, within the general, or common, grace of God, something that more specifically relates to salvation, and it's called "general revelation." General revelation is what you and I, as [believers or unbelievers], can know about God from three distinct areas. We've looked at these from Romans 1 and 2. I'm just going to remind you of what they are: One, it can be seen through creation and what has been made that God is a great God, a powerful God, [and] a wise God. [Two], God has also shown us that He exists because He has put His law in our hearts. That is, He has given us an instinct of right and wrong. You can go up to [a person from] any culture, even a pagan culture, and say, "Is it right to go up to somebody and just punch him in the face?"

"Well, no."

"Why?"

"It's just not right."

"Why?"

"Because it's wrong."

"Why?"

"Because it's not right."

See? They just know. Everybody has this instinctive knowledge of right and wrong, this moral code [that] lets him or her know that the God of creation, who created him or her, is a God of morality and has standards of right and wrong. [Three], Paul also says that God, in a general sense, reveals Himself to all men by giving us a conscience, which is kind of like an internal alarm that goes off when we violate the law of God within us. Paul says [that] because all men have and receive this general understanding, this general truth of God, they are all without excuse before God because

it can be clearly seen, clearly experienced, that God exists and that He is certain general things.

Paul also says that there is a problem with general revelation. Actually, [the problem is] not with revelation, but [with] those who receive it. Even though this general revelation is a gracious gift of our Creator, and He gives it to all men universally, all men universally suppress that truth [see Romans 1:18] and refuse to seek that God, seek His morality, and listen to their consciences. They suppress [that general revelation]. Paul makes it clear that all men, without exception, do that. If God, therefore, were to judge all men, He would be fair and just [based] on that alone to condemn them. General revelation is enough to condemn men, but since they all suppress it, it's never enough to save them.

Now, in our text, when Jesus rejoices [that] the Father hides the truth from the "wise and intelligent," keep in mind [that] Jesus is not talking about the general grace of God, or the general revelation of God that is given to all men. That's gracious provision enough—[that they still don't deserve]—to condemn all men, but He still gives it to everybody universally. [Jesus is] not talking about that, He's talking about "special grace," saving grace, which is God's undeserved, unearned favor that He gives to certain people that they might be saved.

[Imagine] you're an old man, you're rich, and you help establish [a] college. You live close to that college [and] you love seeing the students. You love the higher education system. Since you've got the money, you have made a deal [with the administrators] that you will donate \$1,000 to every student who enrolls, [which] reduces the cost of tuition and school expenses. A lot of students come to the college, [and] they don't even know you. They don't even know about you. They just like it that this college has a good deal on tuition. They all receive the benefits of your grace, and they never give you thanks because they don't know you.

Periodically, you get dressed up and you walk through the college campus, [observing] different college students. You're looking for certain poorer students, hard-working students, struggling students. You ask

around, you talk to people, [and] you find out who these students are. [Then] you approach [one of these students], introduce yourself, and say, “I am going to give you a full-ride scholarship to college. I am going to pay for all of your tuition, books, rent, car [payments], gasoline, insurance, food—everything—for the rest of your time in college.”

[The student] has already received grace from [you, but the student didn't] know [you, he didn't] even know [he was] receiving [your] grace. But [you have] introduced [yourself], and now [the student] know[s you]. [The student is] experiencing [your] super-abundant grace. Let me ask you: Can any of the [other] students cry out, “Well, that's not fair! How come I didn't get a free-ride scholarship?”? See, the thing is, no one deserved it, [therefore], no one can complain. [You have] a right to do with [your] own what [you] please. This is what Jesus is talking about. God has given plenty of grace to everybody, and then to certain ones—certain poor, struggling, helpless sinners—He dumps on super-abundant grace, saving grace, and He saves them. The rest of mankind can't cry out, “Well, that's not fair!” because grace is never fair, it's grace. Justice is fair, but grace is not. God is not unjust for withholding what is never deserved.

Jesus Himself is not chortling because God is condemning sinners. He is praising God because God has this plan of salvation [in which] people [who] think they're self-sufficient and self-righteous, and [that they] can earn their way to heaven, [aren't given] that extra-special saving grace. He allows them to have the grace they already have, the knowledge He has already given them. He sustains them, He gives them a lot of things, but He doesn't give them that grace that we looked at a couple of weeks ago—all those things God does to bring a sinner to repentance. This is what Jesus is rejoicing in.

I just want to talk about something [for a moment]. There are some, like the Methodists [and] the Nazarenes, who have argued that God gives equal saving grace, [something like] equal-opportunity salvation, [in which] God gives equal special saving grace [to everyone]. He gives everybody the ability to understand the Scriptures, to know the gospel, He frees their minds so

they can understand the truth, and everybody is equally, across the board, able to believe and receive Christ based [on] the grace of God working in them. The term they use is “prevenient grace.” [They believe that] everybody has prevenient grace. [With this type of grace], men have the opportunity to either choose God or reject God. That’s very fair, [but] it’s just not biblical. We learned before that all that the Father gives to the Son come to Him, and He loses none [see John 6:37], that when God places His saving grace on somebody, they do get a clue, and all those who get a clue come to Christ. The doctrine of prevenient grace is flawed because it attempts to merge common grace with special grace. It is true that God’s grace frees people up to believe, but it’s not true that all men receive that saving grace—only the elect do. We saw that in previous sermons.

OK, we got that issue dealt with, but what about the assurance issue? How do you know you’re going to heaven? You’re a Christian, you call yourself a Christian, [but] somebody said that doesn’t make you any more a Christian than standing in a garage and saying you’re a car makes you a car. So, how do you get there? How do you know? How can you be assured? There are basically three different ways you can know you’re going to heaven, [but before we discuss those, we need to look at a couple of ways people become confused or feel insecure about their salvation]. [First], some people, when they start talking about predestination and things like that, they just say, “If God saves, He predestines, He’s sovereign, then I don’t have to do anything.” Oh, yes, you do, because predestination and the sovereignty of God never remove your responsibility to repent and believe—ever. You still have to do that. God doesn’t command Himself to repent you, He commands you to repent. He commands you to believe. He commands you to turn from your sin, and you to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. You, you, you. If you don’t, you’re responsible. People who are judged are judged because they do “not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” [2 Thessalonians 2:10], not because they’re not elect.

Remember, we learned that predestination and election are first and foremost doctrines given to believers for their encouragement. That’s what

the doctrines are for. Once you are saved, and you know you're saved, then those doctrines are there to say, "Hey, guess what? God knew you, He chose you, He foreordained you before the foundation of the world." If you take predestination and election and try and use it as an excuse not to come to Christ or try to take that doctrine and apply it to an unbeliever, you have crossed the bounds of what the Scriptures do, and you will only be frustrated, confused, and you will think, "Well, it couldn't be true because it just doesn't work with an unbeliever." It was never supposed to work for an unbeliever. The message for an unbeliever is a different message: Repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Second, you can't use [election and predestination] as an excuse [to not repent] because God's knowledge of who [is] and who isn't going to be saved is none of our business. It's none of your business, or my business, or anyone else's business. God doesn't tell us, He doesn't want us to know beforehand, and it has nothing to do with our responsibility to either share the gospel or to believe the gospel if we don't know Christ—nothing whatsoever. Now, it is true that when you start looking at the doctrine of assurance, it is there to encourage believers, but it is a whole different doctrine, so you can't [merge] it with these other ones. Otherwise there's confusion.

How does one know he or she is saved? Assurance comes from three primary sources. Think about this with me. One: It comes objectively. What is an "objective truth"? An "objective truth" is something that's outside of you, something that is before you, that is not based on emotions, feelings, [or] things you sense. It is objective. It is outside of you. True, factual—that is objective truth. [Two]: you can have assurance of salvation subjectively, [which is] the exact opposite [of receiving assurance objectively]. [Subjectivity is made up of] feelings, emotions, [and] internal experiences. There is some subjectiveness in knowing you're saved. [Three]: there is "empirical" evidence [of assurance]. That is, you can know "empirically," or by evidence outside of you, that you are saved. These three things, [when combined], can give you assurance and make you know [beyond a shadow of a doubt] that you're going to heaven.

Let's look at each of these. First, you want to look at your objective truth outside of yourself. What do you think that objective truth is? It's the Word of God, specifically the promises of God and the gospel of God. The Bible is objective truth. I could [read a verse out loud, and then] go to you, and say, "What does this verse say?"

You would read it, and say, "Yes, that's what it says to me, too."

[If] I go to the next person, [and ask], "What does that verse say?" He would read it [and I would ask], "Is that what it says to you?"

"Yes, that's what it says to me."

I could go to many [different] people, we could all read the verse, and [we would] all say [that it says the same thing]—it's objective. It's factual, it's outside, it's written in the Book. We have objective truth—God's Word gives us objective assurance.

For instance, turn over to John 1:12–13. John starts off talking about Jesus' deity, His incarnation. Notice what he says here. Here is some objective truth. You want to know you're saved? Here it is:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Sounds like a sovereignty text, doesn't it? It is. Notice [that to] "as many as received Him," God gives the right. So, I just ask you this: Have you received Christ as your Savior? John says [that if] you receive Him, you receive the right, with Jesus, to be a child of God. That is an objective promise to you, for your assurance.

Turn over to Romans 10. We're just going to look at a couple [of Scriptures] in each of these categories [of assurance] so you can get a feel for what [they are]. There are many [verses] that we could look at—too many [to cover in one sermon]. [In] Romans 10, Paul is talking about how the Word of God brings people to salvation. [This is] just like Gary was talking

about [regarding what's happening] in Papua New Guinea, [and] it's what we talked about a couple of weeks ago when we talked about the gospel bomb [being] the thing that God uses to bring people to salvation. Here, in Romans 10:8–13, notice what Paul says: “But what does it say?” that is, [what do] the Scriptures say?

“THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

That is pretty clear, isn't it? There's an objective group of promises for you—a whole [smattering] of them. “Confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord”—have you done that? “Believe in your heart” that Jesus rose from the dead—do you believe that? Believe in, trust in, rely upon Jesus alone for salvation—have you done that? Of your own will, freed up by the grace of God, call upon the Lord to save you—have you done that? [If you do those things], you will be saved. You are saved. That's just the way it is. Don't let anybody tell you any different. It's a fact. That's what the objective truth of God says. The message to every unbeliever [is] the command to repent, receive, and believe in Jesus, His person, as God incarnate, as born of a virgin, as living a perfect life, [and] after living a perfect life, voluntarily offering [Himself] as a sacrifice, a substitute for the sins of the world, dying

on the cross, bearing the Father's wrath, [was] buried and rose again. [If] you believe that, you confess that, you're saved. End of discussion.

Second, you can know you are saved subjectively. This is kind of odd. [You may be thinking], "Well, I thought it was objective." It is. "How can it be outside and inside?" It's both. Turn to Romans 8, a couple chapters before [where we were in Romans 10]. Romans 8 is so yummy. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" [8:1] at the beginning of the book, and then [Paul] talks about those who are in the flesh—unbelievers—and contrasts them with those who are in the spirit—believers. He makes these parallel contrasts, and when he gets to verse 9, he summarizes the whole point of [the] "those who are in the flesh, those who are in the spirit" [statement], and he says this: "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." The point here is obvious: if you don't have the Holy Spirit within you, you don't know Jesus. Period.

The problem is [that] the Holy Spirit is hard to see. He's invisible. However, after [Paul] says this [in] verse 14: "For all who are being *led by the Spirit of God,*" who dwells in them, "these are sons of God" [emphasis added].

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.
[8:15–17]

Did you see that? Do you see the subjective, inner assurance of salvation [that] comes from within the believer because of the Holy Spirit within him? If you're a believer, you have the Holy Spirit, and the Holy

Spirit within you is going to give you that assurance from within. You're thinking, "Well, that's great! That is great. Now, what does salvation feel like, anyway? Does it feel good? What is that feeling, that assurance? What is that emotion, what is that thing?" Paul doesn't describe it; he just says it's true. You might be wondering how this works, and it works this way. You've got to understand this. The Holy Spirit always works in accordance with, and in concert with, the Word of God, never apart from it, and *never* in contradiction to it—ever.

So, first comes the objective truth, the commands to believe, the promises of the gospel offered to all men. You repent, you believe, you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand the gospel, you call upon the name of the Lord. That is from without. Then from within, after you receive the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit gives you assurance in accordance with that truth that you did that, and you're saved.

[Imagine that] I set before you a large plate of cold watermelon—the juicy kind. Summer watermelon. My wife and I are always trying to find the perfect melon. We kind of take turns [picking them out]. We knock on them and do all those things that don't work. You still have a fifty-fifty chance you'll get some spongy one, and then one's that kind of sour. Anyway, every once in a while you get a good one—that perfect one. Let's just say that I place before you this big plate of cubed-up, juicy, crisp, sweet watermelon. Does that sound good? (Let's go!) You have this watermelon before you, and I tell you, "Eat that whole plate of watermelon." So, man, you get the fork, and pow! Oh! That first bite is so good. The juice is kind of dribbling out [of your mouth]. You think, "Man, that is good!" and you eat another [piece], and another one. Pretty soon, as you're getting down to the bottom of the plate, you're thinking, "I am full! I am stuffed," [but] you finally get it all in (that's what I like about watermelon: it fits into all the cracks).

Now, that watermelon was outside of you—objectively—but now you have this inner testimony coming from your stomach that's telling you that [the] watermelon is within. It's really within. It's way within. [You're] full

of melon. You know for sure that you've eaten that melon, even though you can't see it anymore, right? Well, that's what [Paul] is talking about. He's saying [that] when you see the truth, when the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to you, you understand the gospel, you repent and believe in this objective truth, that truth then enters into your mind and your heart by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit then tells you, "Listen, you [have] the gospel. You know Jesus. You're full now. You're saved!"

Earlier, in Romans 5:1–5, Paul lists a whole bunch of things that God does in and through the believer, and he says this in verse 5: "Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Do you see all the elements here? You have the truth entering into the believer's heart through the Holy Spirit, pouring out the love of God so that you know you're saved. [Turn to] 1 John 5:10–12. You know what? I had this huge section in this sermon where I went through [the previous verses in this text and discussed the evidences of true salvation given], and it's so fun, but I just didn't have time [to include it in this sermon]. I encourage you, [however, to] take a quiet time [and] get a pad of paper [and write down all the evidences of a true believer you can find]. You can [also] call the office [to get] a little test you can take [in which] you can fill in the gaps where you can see all the evidences of a true believer compared to all the evidences of an unbeliever. At the end of all these evidences, John writes this in 1 John 5:13: "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." [That's] the theme of the whole book. Right before he says that, he says this [in] 1 John 5:10[-12]:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has

the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Did you see that? He has the testimony of God where? In himself. What is the testimony? That God has given us eternal life, the life is in Christ, and he who has the Son has the life. That is a testimony born in a believer by the Holy Spirit once [the believer] receives the objective truth. Look at your heart. (Like Gandalf [says], “What does your heart tell you?”) What’s going on? When you look at the Word of God, and you know the gospel, and you have believed in the gospel, what does the Holy Spirit tell you? If you are [an unbeliever], the Holy Spirit isn’t telling you anything because the Holy Spirit isn’t in you. You don’t have the Holy Spirit—you’re spiritually dead. (We had a whole sermon on that, too.) But if you’re a believer, you’re going to say, “I know Jesus. I just know it in here. I know it.”

Third, you can [empirically] have assurance [that] you are saved. Turn to 2 Corinthians 13. This is toward the end of the book, where Paul is basically giving a bunch of parting instructions, exhortations, comments, and things at the end of the book. [In] 2 Corinthians 13:5[-6], he says this:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

Now, a lot of times people just read verse 5 and then [they] end up saying, “Well, what’s the test? What is the test? I’ll take it. What’s the test?” “Test yourself to see...” well, where is it? It’s kind of frustrating, isn’t it? That’s what happens when you don’t look at the context.

[Paul] says, right after that in verse 6, “You yourselves know that we passed the test. We are in the faith. We know Jesus.” If you have ever studied 2 Corinthians, you know that the theme of 2 Corinthians is Paul[’s defense of] himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He starts at the beginning defending [himself], giving evidence after evidence after evidence after evidence

that he is a true believer and apostle of Jesus Christ. He says, “You, when looking at my life, you see in my life the fruit of God’s Spirit working in me, and so you know that I pass the test.” That’s his whole point. Because the exhortation is a present active command, “Examine yourself,” it means [that] Christians are to always be in the process of doing this. [Evaluating your own spiritual life] should be a regular habit. Never have a hope in the past that you’re saved. Always have a hope in present realities. Examine yourself *now*. Look at your life *now* to see whether you “be in the faith” [see 2 Corinthians 13:5, KJV].

When you do look at that, you’re going to experience one of two things. You’re either going to pass the test and be assured, or [you will] fail the test. But again, what is the test? The test is the outward manifestations, or consequences, or regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifying work of the Spirit in a person’s life. If you look at 2 Corinthians 13:4, after Paul sums up—he’s listed all these things proving he’s an apostle—he says: “For indeed He,” that is, Jesus, “was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.” What is he saying? He’s saying this: “When we came and we ministered to you, [do] you know what you witnessed? You witnessed God’s power working through us. We, of ourselves, were weak, but even though we were weak and we were nobodies, God changed your lives, [He] saved a lot of you, He transformed you because His power was flowing through us. I just want you to know: You know that.”

That tells us that Paul is talking about evidences. This is why, when you look in the Scriptures, you will see things [such as] Galatians 5:19, [which] says that “the deeds of the flesh are” what? “Evident.” Then [the author] lists what’s evident. The fruit of the Spirit is also evident, which is when you look at a person and you see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, [and] self-control [see 5:22–23]. Then you know, “Hey! Look at that! That tells me there’s something inside that person. [There’s] a Person inside that person, causing him or her to be

that way—the Holy Spirit.” That’s what the Spirit produces in the life of a believer.

In 1 Timothy 5:24–25, Paul says: “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.” Look at your life. What are the evidences that you know Christ? The Apostle John says it this way [in 1 John 3:10], one of the clearest, scariest, and most encouraging verses in the Bible: “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God.” Let me ask you: Do you practice righteousness? We’re not talking about perfection here, [so] don’t give me that, “Well, nobody’s perfect, everybody sins.” Exactly!

John says earlier in the book, “If you say you have no sins, you’re a liar and the truth is not in you” [see 1 John 1:8]. He says, “All Christians sin, but when they sin, they continually confess their sin.” Is that what you see in your life, or do you just see yourself sinning and then living in it, hiding it, keeping it from people, not confessing it? That’s bad. That is the behavior of a child of the devil. The behavior of the child of God is to sin, confess, sin, confess. I mean, we’re always doing it—we’re always sinning, we’re always struggling. If God were to say, “OK, what I’m going to do is I’m just going to show you all of your sin all at once,” it would just kill you [or] put you in the fetal position, wouldn’t it? God is so gracious. He says, “OK, Jack, you weak worm you, what I’m going to do is I’m just going to show you these couple areas in your life that you need to work on.”

It’s like, “Whoa!” and all of a sudden, [I’m dealing with it, and saying], “OK, OK, OK.”

I’m working, and as I grow in the Lord, all of a sudden, He goes, “Here’s another one.”

Then I think, “Oh, I just started getting over that,” and then [He gives me] another one and another one. All your life it’s another one [and] another one. First, you’re just trying to quit smoking, drinking, cussing, and chewing. After that, man, then you start getting into hard issues that no one

can see but you and God. God says, “OK, it’s you and Me. This is going to be painful. Man, you need to die to self,” and then He starts working on you. He starts working in your heart. You know this if you’re a Christian. It’s like, “Oh, no kidding!” That’s Christianity.

Turn to 2 Peter [1]. You need to see this because this shows the role of a transformed life and how it can give you assurance, or the absence [of a transformed life], which should not give you assurance. [If] you’re living in continual, unconfessed sin, you have no assurance you’re saved. I don’t care what the past had, the present tells you [you’re an] unbeliever. [In] 2 Peter 1:3–11, Peter speaks of the promises of God, [and of] God giving us “everything pertaining to life and godliness” [1:3]. Then he gets down to verse 8, [and] I’m just going to read this [to you]. This is [marvelous]. Think about everything we said about the Spirit and the truth, and how that all works out, and now [Peter is] going to talk about how this should pan out in our lives as believers, as one of the ways we have assurance. He says this: “For if these qualities,” these godly qualities, “are yours and are increasing,” now just stop there. Look at your life. Are you growing in the Lord or not? [Are] you pursuing the Lord or not? Look back at last month, look back [at] the last six months, look back at the last year—do you see that you’re growing in knowledge, understanding, [and] Christlikeness? Do you see that? Granted, it’s not a straight-line thing, it’s more like a very jagged thing, but if you averaged [it] out, you would see that “He who began a good work in you is perfecting it until the day of Christ Jesus” [see Philippians 1:6]. Do you see that? Do you see if these qualities are increasing?

Look at what [Peter] goes on to say in the middle of [2 Peter 1:]8: “They render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities,” godly, increasing qualities, “is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” [1:9]. He is not saying, “make certain by saving yourself,” he says, “make certain by looking at your life to see if godly qualities are ever-increasing in your life.” [He continues in verses 10–11]:

“For as long as you practice these things,” these godly qualities, “you will never stumble; for in this way,” this ever-increasing practice of [the] pursuit of godliness, “the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.” There it is. What do you see?

I just want you to know [that] God's sovereignty in salvation does not remove your responsibility to pursue holiness and the fear of God. You still have to do that. Granted, God is going to do it by His grace, but He does it in concert with your will. You ask Him, you trust in Him, and then you, in trusting Him, pursue what's right, asking Him to help you, and He will. [If] you go off on your own, you're like the man in the desert, [in] the “land of salt without inhabitant” [Jeremiah 17:7].

But listen, even if you're pretty sure you're saved because you look at these evidences, even if you look at your life and you see in your life this pretty good evidence that you know the Lord, evidences of going to church, reading your Bible, praying, serving, I just want to remind you that there is a strong warning here. [It] is [this]: external evidences can be faked, forged, falsified. Gardiner Spring in his small but powerful book *The Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character* lists eighteen or twenty character traits that Christians have but which are not necessarily sure indicators of salvation. For instance (I'm just going to give you a couple because there are too many to give, and it'd be a whole sermon in itself): visible morality. [This would be] somebody who is a good person, does right, [does] philanthropic deeds, or whatever—like Judas.

[This could also be] somebody who has a knowledge of the truth, who has maybe followed Jesus around for three years, and studied, and practiced, and done all these things, and has all this knowledge—like Judas.

[This person could also have] a form of religion, [someone] who is very zealous, very devout, and very consistent in his or her religion, like the Pharisees who didn't know Christ.

[It could be someone] who has a conviction for sin. You [might] think, “I'm convicted of my sin, therefore I know I'm a Christian.” No, that's not

a certain indicator. That's part of what could be an indicator, but the Holy Spirit convicts the *world* of sin and judgment. [If] you take any unbeliever, sit him down, and [have him] start reading the Bible, he's going to be convicted to the core, but it doesn't mean he's saved.

[A person could also have a] strong assurance he is saved. Other people [say], "I know I'm saved," [and they are] like those people who came to Jesus, and said, "Lord, Lord, have we not," and He said, "Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you" [see Matthew 7:22–23]. Strong assurance is not sure assurance that you're saved.

[A person could have] a time of supposed conversion: "Oh, I remember the day when the preacher preached and I was so convicted. I wept, and I cried, and I raised my hand [and] went forward, and prayed the sinner's prayer. That church leader told me that I would never lose my salvation, and that was it." Ten years later, the person repents, comes to Christ, and gets baptized again because he realizes he was never saved to begin with. We know it's true, and [there are] many other things like that.

If you're out there thinking, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait! You just pulled up my anchor! Come on! You've untied me from the dock, and now I'm just adrift in this sea of uncertainty. Wait a second! How do I know [I'm saved] if [those indicators are not] sure?" Here it is. Listen very carefully to what I'm going to say. True believers do have those external evidences, even though they can be faked, but here it is, here's the package deal: [First], do you know, objectively, the gospel? Do you know the gospel—not just the word, but do you know what the gospel is? If you come here [to this church] and you don't know the gospel, you are dead. I only mention it about three or four times every Sunday. Do you know the gospel, what it means, what it is, and how to appropriate it?

Second, does the Holy Spirit bear testimony within that you know that gospel, that you have repented of your sins, and trust solely in Christ and His grace to save you? Third, does your life show transformation? When you look at your life, do you see that you love the Lord, you love the Word, you love the people of God, you love to give, you want to be more like

Jesus, you're sensitive to your sin, and you're pursuing righteousness? Do you see that pattern in your life? [If] you have all three of those, I'm telling you, you know you have eternal life.

But, I also want you to know, that if you're sitting out there and going, "Well... I know the first and third," or the first and second, or the second and third, that's not good. You need to see all three, you need to know all three. If you know all three, you can have eternal life. If you don't, and [you're thinking], "I'm shacking up with my girlfriend, but I have assurance," no, you don't, because you're living in rebellion against God and hate toward God. "Well, I know I'm a Christian even though I cheat every week in my business." No, you don't know Jesus. You cannot live and have assurance, especially subjective assurance, that you're saved when your assurance is based on something that contradicts the Word of God. It just won't work.

If you've never repented of your sins, if you've never placed your faith in Christ alone to save you, cry out to God, and say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner. I know I can't save myself. I know I'm weak. I know I'm helpless. I know I can't change my life, but I know You can, and I know Jesus died on the cross for my sins, I know that He shed His blood, and that He was buried and rose again. I am going to believe and trust in that alone to save me, and I am going to believe and trust that You will change me." If you do that, you will be saved, you will have that inner assurance, you will see the results of a transformed life, and you never need to doubt as long as you see that as a pattern in your life. [Also, remember that] the command to examine [yourself] is present and active, not past. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, which is clear to us about how we can know that we have eternal life as we know Your objective truth, as we experience the testimony of the Holy Spirit within, confirming in our hearts that we know that truth and have appropriated the gospel and placed our faith in Jesus alone for salvation, and as we see Your grace work in our lives to transform us from one glory to the next. Oh, Father, if there is anybody here who doesn't know you, may he or she cry out to you this

morning, right there in his or her pew, and just say, “Jesus, save me because I am a sinner. I believe You died on the cross for my sins, that You were buried and rose again on the third day. Oh, change me! Make me new! Help me to have assurance of my salvation.” And, Father, we know that you would never let anyone down with that prayer request. We just thank You for all that You give us, in Christ’s name, Amen.

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