

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

The Assurance of Authentic Faith

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Resources for Christ-Centered Discipleship

Contents

	Preface	P. 3
1	The Crucial Importance of Authentic Faith	P. 3
2	Faith and Fruitfulness	P. 15
3	By Their Fruits You Will Recognize Them	P. 24
4	Confidence in Christ	P. 32
	Discussion Questions	P. 43

Preface

Many Christians struggle with the issue of assurance. The question they wrestle with is: “How can I be confident of my relationship with Christ?” The Bible invites us to believe in Christ and find, through His grace, a source of confidence and assurance in our relationship with God that does not depend on ourselves. The Bible also warns us about the danger of false confidence that assumes all is well when it is not.

The four chapters in this booklet were first delivered as sermons at Christ Community Church, Daytona Beach, Florida. Their purpose was to challenge the listeners to consider the reality of their faith and to find true confidence in Christ. They are published in this present form to serve as a resource for Christ-centered disciple making.

All of the resources for disciple making published by Christ Community Church are designed to develop one or more of the following seven core facets of Christ-centered discipleship.

1. Focused on God
2. Fulfilled in Christ
3. Biblically Integrated
4. Growth Oriented
5. Ministry Minded
6. Committed to the Church
7. Devoted to Disciple-making

The focus of the material included here is Discipleship Facet #4: Growth Oriented. The assurance of faith and the confidence in Christ that brings are foundational for healthy spiritual growth and discipleship.

1 “The Crucial Importance of Authentic Faith

Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

One of the experiences I especially enjoy in Christian ministry is hearing the stories of people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. I almost always find these testimonies of how others have come to a life-changing faith-based relationship with Christ very encouraging. But there's a certain kind of testimony in which the enjoyment is mixed with deep concern. I'm talking about those testimonies in which people share how for many years they thought they were Christians but then came to find out that they were not. Now, after years of misunderstanding or self-deception and feeling somehow that something was missing, they have finally come into a real relationship with Christ. Often everything seems different to them now that they have true faith in Jesus Christ.

This week I went on line and did a search for the phrase "I thought I was a Christian." I found hundreds of web-sites where people told how they had thought they were Christians but something was missing in their faith and experience. Some of these people had been raised in the church and had been active in the church. One was a pastor's daughter. Another had gone to a Christian college and became a missionary in Chile. What these people were saying in their stories was that at some point in life they realized that although they were active in many Christian activities, believed in many Christian teachings, and lived outwardly moral lives, they had never experienced a new spiritual birth, because they had never personally received Christ as Savior and Lord.

Whenever I hear stories like that, I am thankful the person has come to real faith in Christ, but at the same time I am concerned that there are others like them. If there is one thing about which we don't want to be unsure, confused, or mistaken, it's the issue of our relationship to God and to Jesus Christ.

In these messages we are going to explore what it means to have authentic faith in Jesus Christ. It's very important that we all be clear and correct about this. Your eternal destiny depends on a right relationship to God through true faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important than that. The vitality of your spiritual life, fulfillment in this life, and the presence and blessing of God today all depend on a right relationship with God through authentic faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing is more relevant and significant for your life than this issue.

Uncertainty and insecurity about one's relationship to Christ is spiritually harmful, but there is something even worse. It is worse to have a false security, a false confidence, thinking that you are fine when you are not. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" We need to know the proper ways to test and examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith and if Christ is indeed alive in us. We need to be able to help others with this as well.

I know of no better passage in the Bible with which to begin than Ephesians 2:1-10. This is a Scripture that shows us the crucial importance of authentic faith. It teaches two key truths. What I've discovered as a pastor and has been confirmed in the stories I've read of people who thought they were Christians but were not, is that the problem usually comes from not understanding these two crucial truths and their relationship to each other.

The first truth has to do with how you receive the grace of God.

You Can Receive the Grace of God Only Through Faith in Jesus Christ

In Ephesians 2:1-10, the word "grace" appears three times. The heart of the teaching of this Scripture is summed up in verses 8 and 9, which say: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."

The Grace of God Is the Only Thing That Makes Us True Christians

Ephesians 2 makes this clear. Verse 1 begins by describing our condition apart from God's grace. Our condition apart from grace is that we are spiritually dead. Verse 1: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."

Verse 2 and the first part of verse 3 describe our conduct. We are dominated by sinful habits and perspectives. After mentioning our sins and transgressions, verses 2-3 say, "In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."

That may seem an extreme statement to some people, but what the Bible is asking us to do is to look deeply and honestly into the human heart and compare our lives to God's standard. That standard is expressed in God's Word and God's Son. When C.S. Lewis described his journey to faith in Christ, he wrote, "For the first time I examined myself with a serious practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds."

Our condition without Christ is that we are spiritually dead, and our conduct is dominated by sinful habits and perspectives. Verse 3 ends with the inevitable conclusion: we are destined for God's judgment. The end of verse 3 reads: "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." The wrath here is the judgment of God.

But it's against all of this background that verse 4 introduces the amazing grace of God. Listen again to verses 4-9: "But because of his great love for us,

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast."

The fact that you go to church, believe certain Christian teachings, and try to follow basic Christian standards does not make you a true Christian. In the Bible, a true Christian is by definition a person who has received the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is something we have to clearly understand about the grace of God.

The Grace of God Is Not Received by Good Works or Human Efforts of Any Kind

The word "grace" means undeserved and unearned mercy or favor. Verses 8 and 9 use four key statements to clarify what it means to receive salvation by grace through faith.

1. It is not *"from yourselves."*
2. It is *"the gift of God."*
3. It is *"not by works."*
4. So that *"no one can boast."*

What the Bible is saying is not just that you must trust in Christ, but that in order to trust in Christ, you must not trust in yourself, your efforts, or your works, at all. In fact if you are trusting in yourself or your effort, then you are not actually trusting in Christ.

One reason some people think they are Christians when they are not is that they do not accept this truth. They are unwilling to trust in Christ alone for their eternal life. Some people renounce their sins in order to come to Christ as Lord, but they never renounce their good works in order to place their faith in Him alone as Savior.

Many people think that they are Christians because they believe in Jesus Christ in this sense: They believe that He is the Son of God, they believe He died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. But, and this is crucial, what they are actually trusting in when it comes to their eternal life, the forgiveness of sin, their eternal salvation, is not Christ alone but Christ plus their good works, their efforts, and their life.

The Bible is not saying that good works are not necessary. It's saying you can't receive the grace of God if you are trusting in yourself or your good works. Some things God will give you as a gift of grace and only as a gift of grace. Salvation is one thing that God will give you as a gift but not as a reward for your works. Trusting in your good works or your good works plus Christ does not increase your chances of receiving grace; in fact, it robs you of the possibility of receiving God's saving grace.

Somewhere I read an old story about a missionary in India who worked near the sea and became the good friend of an Indian pearl diver. They had discussed Christ and salvation for many hours, but the Indian man could not believe that salvation could be a free gift. He believed that could come only by doing religious works. The missionary kept telling him that our redemption, our salvation, was so costly that Jesus had to buy it for us by paying for our sins with His death on the cross.

In spite of their differences, the missionary and the pearl diver became good friends. A deep bond developed. Then a time came when the pearl diver was planning to go on a pilgrimage in which he would walk nine hundred miles to the city of Delhi, on his knees, in order to gain merit with his god. He wasn't sure he would return or ever see the missionary again. Before he left on his pilgrimage, the pearl diver gave the missionary the largest and most perfect pearl he had ever seen. He explained that his own son had lost his life in getting this

pearl from the bottom of the sea. The missionary thanked him but then insisted that he pay for it.

The Indian was offended, saying that there was no price that could be paid for a pearl that had cost him his son. Then, in the midst of talking, the truth dawned on him. That was why Christians insisted that no one can pay for salvation. It cost God the death of His only Son.

Some things are too precious to be purchased, but they can be freely given as a gift. God's gift of salvation is too precious to purchase. It cost Him the sacrifice of His Son. God will give you His saving grace, but He will only give it as a gift. You can receive it only by faith in Christ.

Trusting in your good works, or your good works plus Christ, does not increase your chances of receiving grace; in fact, it robs the possibility of receiving God's saving grace.

If you think what makes you a Christian and brings you God's grace is Christ plus your efforts, then you may be thinking that you are a Christian when in fact you are not. You need to understand that good works are not good enough. They are flawed and inadequate. They cannot compensate for your failings and sins. You need to turn from trusting your good works and trust in Christ alone as your Savior.

You can receive the grace of God only through faith in Jesus Christ. That's the first truth that this passage teaches.

The second is equally important. It is this:

If You Receive God's Grace Through Faith in Christ, That Saving Grace Will Have a Deep Impact on Your Life

Ephesians 2:10 tells us, yes, we receive salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. But when we have authentic faith in Christ, we become, as verse 10 says, God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

In the book and now the movie *The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkein, a young Hobbit named Frodo is given a ring of incredible power. The ring itself is freely given. All Frodo has to do to receive it is to accept it. But although the ring is freely given, it ends up changing Frodo's entire life, launching him on new adventures and shouldering him with new responsibilities.

God's gift of grace is like that in this sense: It is freely given, but it is life changing. God doesn't require you to change your life in order to receive it, but He does tell you that if you receive the gift of His grace it will change your life. And He tells you that from the very beginning.

The gift that Christ secured for us by dying for our sins and rising again from the dead is a life-changing gift of grace. That's what verse 10 is saying. It is telling us that when we receive God's grace, we become "God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Notice that the gift of grace that God offers us through Jesus Christ is not just forgiveness. The gift of grace and salvation that He offers is not only escape from His judgment and the promise of eternal life. The gift of grace and salvation offered us through faith in Christ is not only forgiveness and eternal life but is also a new life now. A changed life, a life in which you become "God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

The salvation that God offers us through faith in Christ involves a deep transforming work of God's grace in our lives. The Greek word translated "workmanship" in verse 10 is the word *poiema*. It's the Greek word from which we get the word "poem." It's a word that is used for something created by a skilled craftsman.

The only other place this word is used in the Bible is Romans 1:20, where it refers to God's workmanship in creation. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made [the workmanship, the craftsmanship, the artistry]) so that men are without excuse. "

All of creation is God's *poiema*. And so is every true Christian. A true Christian is "God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

All of the verses that we looked at in Ephesians 2:1-10 show us what is involved in God's workmanship in a Christian's life.

1. He takes people whose condition was spiritually dead, and He makes them spiritually alive.
2. He takes people whose conduct was dominated by all kinds of sinful behavior and perspectives and breaks them free from the enslaving power of their own worst habits. He recreates them so that they are able and willing to do good works.
3. He takes people who as a consequence of their condition and conduct were destined for damnation and separation from God for eternity, and He gives them instead forgiveness and mercy.

We do not do these things on our own. We do not earn them by our works. But the fact that this is the nature of the salvation God offers us through faith in Christ teaches us two very important things. It teaches us a lesson about examining ourselves, and it teaches us a lesson about receiving Christ.

First it teaches us that if there is no evidence of God's saving grace in our lives, it is very doubtful that salvation is there. If there is no evidence of God's saving grace in your life, it may be because no saving grace is present.

Now here's where we have to be very careful. The evidence of God's saving grace in one's life is not sinless perfection. No one achieves sinless perfection in this life. Far from it. True Christians experience real struggles and fall into all kinds of sins. But you do not pass out of spiritual death into spiritual birth and new life without any evidence of new life at all.

Just look at the incredible transformation described in these verses. You don't go from being the person described in verses 1-3, "dead in your transgressions and sins, following the ways of this world . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" and then become by God's grace a person who has been made alive and who has become God's workmanship recreated in Christ Jesus to do good works without *some* difference in your life. That's inconceivable.

The evidence of God's saving grace in one's life is not perfection but a new desire, a new direction, a new dynamic. There is life where there used to be death. There is desire for God and good works where there used to be apathy and indifference.

The evidence that God has begun to work in your life is not that the work of grace is perfected in you. It isn't perfected. It won't be perfected, or completed, in this life. But if you have received God's grace there will be some evidence that the work has begun. Is God's grace actually at work in your life?

There's no need to pretend or to play games with yourself or with God. The issues are too important. Is there any evidence of God's grace at work in your life? We should be very careful about the judging each other on this issue, but we certainly need to examine ourselves.

God's saving grace isn't always obviously and impressively manifest, but when it is present it is persistent and its presence can be perceived. Is there evidence in your life that God's saving grace is present? Is there spiritual life where there was deadness before? Is there spiritual desire where there was apathy? Do you have a desire to do good works, not in order to earn God's grace but precisely because you have come to see that you could never earn God's grace but you have received it through faith in Christ alone?

God's saving grace isn't always obviously and impressively manifest, but when it is present it is persistent and its presence can be perceived.

Ask yourself these two questions: First, am I trusting not in myself but in Christ alone as my Savior? Second, do I see evidence of God's working in my life?

So the first thing we learn from the true nature of salvation through faith in Christ is that, if there is no evidence of God's saving grace in our lives, it is very doubtful that it is really there.

From the fact that God gives us salvation by means of faith alone we learn a second lesson about receiving Christ. It is this: *The faith that receives God's grace is faith that turns to Jesus to receive from Him not only forgiveness but also new life.*

We've seen in the Ephesians passage that the salvation Christ offers us includes at least three elements:

1. We were spiritually dead, and He offers us spiritual life.
2. We were dominated by depravity, and He offers us a new ability and desire to do good works.
3. We were objects of God's wrath, and He offers us kindness and forgiveness instead.

What some people don't understand is that all of these elements are just different aspects of the one gift of salvation. But the gift of salvation cannot be segmented or fragmented.

One reason some think they are Christians when they are not is that they do not understand that the gift of salvation includes not only forgiveness but new life. Maybe they have said a prayer, and they thought or may have been taught that they could receive from Christ a kind of one-dimensional salvation that brings nothing but forgiveness alone. They haven't wanted anything more than that. They haven't been willing to receive anything more than that. They haven't understood that the salvation they have asked for doesn't even exist. If they think that kind of salvation exists and that they have it, they have deceived themselves. Don't let that happen to you.

You cannot come to Christ and say, "You know I don't want to be an object of God's wrath. I want forgiveness, but that's all I want. I want exemption from the wrath and judgment of God, but I don't want You messing with the way I live my life." To come to Christ that way is to ask for a kind of salvation that He is simply not offering.

Christ offers you Himself as a Savior. And the salvation He gives you when you turn to Him and trust in Him includes His presence, His lordship, and His grace, not only forgiving you but renewing you and beginning to change you from the inside out.

Is that what you want? Sincerely wanting Christ, not only to forgive you but to give you a new birth and begin in you a new life, genuinely wanting and being willing for Him to renew and change you is a big part of what the Bible calls *repentance*. Believing the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for your salvation and trusting Him to give you His gracious gifts of forgiveness and new life--that is what the Bible calls *faith*.

If you want to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior---if you are willing to turn to Him as your Lord in repentance and trust in Him as your Savior, then do so.

For many people an important step in receiving Christ is speaking directly to God in prayer about this issue. If you want to take this step, then simply and sincerely tell God that you are turning to Christ as your Lord and trusting Him as your Savior. Prayer is just talking to God. He knows your heart and is not so concerned with the exact words you use as He is with the attitude of your heart.

The following is a suggested prayer:

Dear Lord, I know that I need Your forgiveness for my sins and Your help in my life. I believe You died for my sins on the cross and rose again from the dead. I want Your forgiveness for my sins. I want You to help me become the person You want me to be. I turn to You now as my Lord and trust in You for my salvation.

I am not trusting in my good works but in what You did for me by dying to pay the penalty for my sins on the cross and rising again from the dead. I don't want to stay the way I am. I want You to change me for the better according to Your will. I ask You to come into my life as my Lord and Savior. I ask for this in Your name. Amen.

First John 5:14-15 gives us this assurance: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him."

Receive God's gift of life through faith in Christ, and, if you have received it, cherish it, treasure it, draw strength from the amazing grace that God gives you in Christ. Live out the new life that He has created you to live.

2 "Faith And Fruitfulness"

Matthew 7:16-23 (NIV): "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

A pastor was talking to a young woman who had grown up in his church about her up-coming wedding. She was very nervous about the whole thing, so he tried to calm her down and give her a little helpful advice.

He said, "When you enter the church tomorrow, you will just be walking down the same aisle you've walked down many times before here in church. Concentrate on that. And when you get about halfway down the aisle,

concentrate on the altar, where you and your family have worshiped for so many years. And as you reach the end of the aisle, your groom will be waiting for you. Concentrate on him."

It worked to perfection. On her wedding day, the beautiful but nervous bride boldly took part in her processional, though people in the audience were a little concerned to hear her repeating to herself over and over again the words: "Aisle, altar, him, aisle, altar, him."

We're always more than a little concerned when people enter into a marriage with the assumption that they will change their partner in significant ways and the belief that the key to the success of their marriage will be the ability to do that. Of course friendships and marriages do change people. But it's usually a dangerous thing to enter into a friendship or marriage intent on changing the other person. That's just not the way most relationships work.

There is, however, one relationship which from its very inception is all about change. That relationship is the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and each individual who has truly come to Him and received Him as Lord and Savior. The Bible is clear that when Jesus Christ offers Himself to us as Lord and Savior, He is offering to come into our lives not only to forgive us but also to transform us.

We need to be changed. We need more than just an analysis of our problems; we need someone to help us change. To be a Christian is to believe that, through Christ, sins can not only be understood but forgiven, and lives can not only be analyzed but transformed.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ promised people that He would bring change into their hearts and lives if they would turn to Him and trust in Him. He promised to bring new life and a new heart. He also taught that the evidence of His presence within us would be the fruit of change in our lives.

It's important for all of us to understand this. If you are struggling with uncertainty and insecurity in your relationship to Christ, He wants you to resolve

the issue of your relationship with Him so that, without any arrogance, you can be deeply confident about His forgiveness and His presence. On the other hand, if you have deceived yourself and are living with a false security and a false confidence and think that you are fine when you are not, Christ wants you to reassess your relationship with Him and make sure that you really do get right with God.

The evidence of Christ's presence in our hearts is the fruit of change in our lives.

2 Corinthians 13:5 says: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" We need to test, to examine, ourselves to see if we are in the faith and if Christ is indeed alive in us. We need to be able to help others with this as well.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 7 can help with this. In Matthew 7:16-20, Jesus has taken His disciples up on a mountainside and is teaching them many things. One thing is how to recognize false prophets. He tells them to "watch out for false prophets." He warns them, "They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." It's right after this that Jesus says, in verses 16-18, "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

Some people have said these verses aren't about examining ourselves but about recognizing false prophets. However, that's only half true. It's true that these verses are about recognizing false prophets. There's no question about that. But it's also true that they teach us some important principles about examining ourselves.

It would be wrong to irresponsibly slap these Scriptures down on every struggling Christian and callously conclude which ones are to be written off as frauds. On the other hand, we have a right to look carefully at the lives of people who claim to speak prophetically for God. If we don't see not perfection but some fruit of real Christian character in their lives, we have a responsibility to reject their claim to speak for God. We also have a responsibility to learn from this Scripture certain principles that apply to all of us and can help in our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and bear fruit for God.

One very important principle that Jesus clearly teaches in this passage is that . . .

**It Is Inevitable That a Person's True Nature
Will Reveal Itself in Life**

Jesus teaches this by means of the little parable, or illustration, of the tree and its fruit. An apple tree bears apples. A pear tree bears pears. If a tree bears thorns, it isn't an apple tree. In verse 18, He teaches us that this is inevitably the way it is. "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit." Of course Jesus isn't just talking about trees. He is talking about people and is teaching us an important principle about people. He is saying that a person's real nature and identity will reveal itself in his life.

A Parable Is an Artistic Way of Making an Important Point in a Memorable Way

We shouldn't push this parable to a ridiculous extreme and say that no true Christian ever does a bad thing. We know that isn't true. That would contradict what Jesus Himself says in this same sermon. Just a few verses before this He gives us the Lord's Prayer, in which He teaches His disciples to pray daily and say: "Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:11-12).

In 1 John 1:8 the Bible shakes us out of any illusions of sinless perfection when it says: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Jesus is not saying all true Christians are sinless. *What He is saying is that true Christians have a new nature and that new nature will reveal itself in life.*

It's important to keep three truths in mind:

1. All Christians are not equally fruitful.

2. Some go through seasons in which it's as if it were winter, or a time of drought, and they are bare of fruit. But no true Christians fail to bear some fruit that reveals the presence of Christ and His grace in their life.

3. You don't have to be flawless to have fruit.

I recently read the testimony of one who is a Christian and a recovering alcoholic. He said something like this:

"I still have a craving for liquor. I have to fight it daily. I've heard a number of preachers say that if you still crave liquor, you aren't saved. That really makes me mad. Here I am fighting the craving for liquor, and someone tells me that this means I am unsaved! That is crazy. Being a Christian doesn't mean that we aren't tempted anymore. It also doesn't mean that all of our bad habits instantly vanish when we are born again."

For him the good fruit was not that he was suddenly completely free from his former problems and sins, but that now he was willing and able to stand and fight against those things and win.

When I came to Christ as a young man, one of the first things I noticed as the fruit of Christ's presence in my life was not a complete exemption from all the old temptations but a new anger at the temptations I used to welcome and a new willingness to fight against them.

What the Scriptures tell us is that true Christians have a new nature, and that new nature will reveal itself.

True Christianity Is Not the Turning Over of a New Leaf:

It Is the Receiving of a New Nature

As Jesus stood or sat on the mountainside and spoke to His disciples, He did not tell them that they needed to try a little harder to turn over a new leaf. He told them that they needed to receive from Him a whole new life, a whole new spiritual birth. If they did that, there would be new fruit in their lives. Ephesians 2:8-10 reflects this same reality when it says: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The Fruit That Jesus Speaks of Here Is Something Only He Can Produce in Us

His life has to flow into us and produce this fruit. In John 15, He teaches the same thing by the illustration of the vine and the branches. He says there that He's the vine, and we are the branches. The relationship is vital--the life of the vine enters the branch. Friends have influence on their friends, husbands and wives have influence on each other. Those influences can be profound. But Jesus says that when you receive Him He doesn't just influence you. He enters you--He enters into your nature, brings it to life, and begins to change you from within. When He talks about fruit here, He is picturing things that happen in your life because of His life and His Spirit at work in you.

The Fruit of Change in Your Life Is Not a Condition for Receiving Christ but a Consequence of Receiving Christ

A British playwright, Murray Watts, writes plays that illustrate biblical truths and stories. In one he tells the story of young man who had been intellectually convinced of the truth of Christianity. However he was under the impression that, in order to receive Christ and become a Christian, he had go out and start telling everyone about his faith.

This scared him. He didn't want all of his friends to think he had gone crazy. He tried to just not think about God or religion at all, but he couldn't get rid of the sense that Christ was calling him to come to Him and follow Him. When he couldn't stand all the spiritual turmoil he was in any longer, he went to an old man he knew had been a Christian for a very long time. He told the old man how this

fear of having to witness to everyone was making him afraid of becoming a Christian.

The old man sighed, shook his head, and said: "This is a matter between you and Christ. Why bring all these other people into it? Go home," the old man said. "Go into your bedroom alone, forget the world. Forget your family. Make it a secret between you and God."

The young man felt as if an incredible weight had fallen from him as the old man spoke. He said, "You mean I don't have to tell anyone to become a Christian?"

"No," said the old man.

"No one at all?"

"Not if you don't want to."

Never had anyone dared to give the young man this advice before. "Are you sure?" he asked, almost trembling with anticipation, because he so wanted to receive Christ. "Can this really be right?" he asked.

"It is right for you," said the old man.

So the young man went home, knelt down in prayer, and asked Christ to be his Lord and Savior. Then he ran downstairs to the kitchen where his wife, father, and three friends were sitting. "Do you realize," he said, almost breathless with excitement, "that it's possible to be a Christian without telling anyone?"

That's the kind of thing that often happens to people when they come to Christ. When you have Him in your life, changes take place, not as conditions for receiving Jesus but as consequences of receiving Him!

There's no cookie cutter way for it to happen or certain pattern that receiving Christ follows. Receiving Him can be very different for different people. Christ deals with each of us personally and individually and therefore differently. But when He is present in your heart, there are changes that take place in your life, not as conditions for receiving Him but as consequences. Fruit on the branch doesn't give life to the branch, but fruit on the branch shows that there is life in the branch.

The Bible Tells You to Examine Yourself to See If You Have the Fruit of New Life

"Examine yourselves," 2 Corinthians 13: 5 says, "to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" Are you alive? Is there spiritual fruit in your life?

The Lord Jesus Christ makes clear how urgent and serious that kind of self-examination is. In verse 19, He says, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." These words are strikingly similar to the words of John the Baptist recorded earlier in the gospel of Matthew. When John the Baptist came, he warned the people about the wrath of God. He called people to bring forth fruit in keeping with their repentance. In Matthew 3:10 he says, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." It is a warning about God's wrath.

Sometimes *fire* is used in the Bible to picture temporary earthly judgments. Jesus is using the word here, as He does so often in the gospel of Matthew and in other places, to describe the unending and inescapable agonies of people condemned by their sins to an eternity of separation from God in hell.

Look at your life. Do you see the fruit of Christ's presence convicting you, changing you? It's dangerous to judge each other, but it's perhaps even more dangerous to fail to examine ourselves.

Maybe you're thinking, *I'm just not sure if there is fruit in my life or not.* If you are not sure, then you need to resolve that. God tells you in the Bible that He wants His people not only to belong to Him but to know that they belong to Him. There's nothing more important than your soul and your eternity.

Maybe you need to talk to someone. Maybe you just need to talk to God. If you have never truly come to Christ, if you have any uncertainty about that, come to Him today. Jesus promises that He will never cast away anyone who turns to Him in repentance and trusts in Him as Savior.

If you have received Christ as Savior, and you see the fruit of His presence in your life, then be thankful and be fruitful for Him forever.

3 “By Their Fruits You Will Recognize Them”

Matthew 7:16-23 (NIV): By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Imagine this: You take some special and important friends out to dinner at an expensive restaurant. When it's time to leave, you give your charge card to the waitress. You chat with your friends and enjoy the good feeling that you have because you have treated them all to a great dinner. You try not to dwell on the expense. But after a while the waitress reappears, and she has the manager with her. They say that they checked with the credit card company, and your card has been revoked. You know that you don't have any cash to speak of with you so you sit there for a moment in shocked embarrassment, not knowing what to do.

Think about an even more dramatic scenario. Imagine a man in wartime running with his family to catch a plane. He has bought one of the last tickets in town from a stranger on the street. Bombs are already falling, the enemy is advancing, and he is anxiously struggling and shoving, shouting at his wife and children as he pushes through the crowd to the gate where an airline employee flanked by security guards is asking for tickets. He breathes a sigh of relief and smiles as he hands his tickets to the steward.

But the steward does not smile back. He says, "This is fake. There have been a lot of them today. It's no good." The planes drone on overhead, the sounds of destruction grow closer and closer, his plane pulls away from the terminal and leaves the man staring off at the distance, holding his worthless tickets in hand.

There are few experiences that we dread more than finding that something we were counting on has proven, to our complete surprise, to have been a false hope.

As bad as those times and situations are, Jesus warns in Matthew 7 about one that is even worse. Can you imagine this scene: You stand in the presence of God and Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment. Destinies are being decided. You want into the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ comes to the front of the group with whom you are standing, and you start to say, "Lord, Lord." But He does not smile. There is a look of incredible sadness on His face as He looks you in the eye and says very plainly, "I never knew you, go away." Slowly it sinks in that life is over, excuses are gone. This is it.

This is a passage that makes you think about and reflect on your relationship to Christ. It's a passage that naturally and appropriately moves us to ask ourselves certain questions. Do I know that I have a personal relationship with Christ? Do I know that I know Him and that He knows me as His own?"

Those are important questions, because this Scripture teaches us that . . .

Many People Have False Hopes

for Heaven and Eternal Life

Jesus says in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus makes clear that He is not just warning us about something that might occasionally but only very rarely happen to a few people. In verses 22-23 He says that many who called Him Lord and even did miracles in His name will be rejected by Him as people unknown to Him. This whole passage is a forceful warning about the danger of false hopes.

Verses 21-23 give two very common kinds of false hopes that people embrace.

The First False Hope Is Hope in a Correct Confession of Faith

In verse 21, the Lord says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."

In the Bible it's important to acknowledge that Christ is Lord. In the New Testament Scriptures the characteristic confession of true Christians is "Jesus Christ is Lord." However, Jesus Christ Himself tells us here that the correct confession of His lordship is not in itself a sure hope that we will spend eternity with Him. It is possible to confess with your lips a truth that you do not really understand, have not truly embraced, and do not actually believe.

I once heard a Christian describe his roommate this way: "He has all the right words, but none of the music in his heart." Have you ever known someone like that? Someone who, when it came to Christian faith, had the words correct, but it just seemed something was lacking. Maybe there's someone here this morning who feels that at times. You wonder if that's your situation. That somehow you've learned the words without ever getting the music to play in your heart.

It is possible to confess with your lips a truth that you do not really understand, have not truly embraced and do not actually believe.

What that Christian was saying in describing his roommate might be thought of as judgmental, but what he said needs to be considered. He said his friend had the right words with which to confess that Christ is Lord, but in spite of what he confessed, he did not seem to possess the life of Christ and the reality of the presence of Christ in his life.

Romans 10:10 says, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." The confession of our mouths is of value only if it is the fruit of true faith in our hearts.

The first false hope in which people often wrongly trust is a correct confession of faith.

The Second False Hope in Which People Often Wrongly Trust Is the False Hope of Spiritual Experiences

Jesus tells us that on the Day of Judgment some people will stand in the presence of Jesus Christ and not only confess that He is Lord but will present Him with a very impressive record of spiritual experiences and even miracles performed in His name. But He will still say to them, "I never knew you; go away."

How is it possible that someone could make such claims if Jesus can say, "I never knew you?"

There are at least three possibilities.

1. The Bible tells us that God sometimes gives amazing experiences and surprising powers to people who have not received His saving grace. In 1 Samuel 10:10, King Saul prophesies. On several occasions Jesus sends His disciples out to perform miracles. Judas was one of them, and the Bible says Judas had never truly believed in, or received, Christ. In John 11, the unbelieving high priest prophesies the true meaning of the death of Jesus.

But there's a second possibility for these claims.

2. The Bible tells us that sometimes Satan performs miracles. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus says, "False Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead if possible even the elect [the chosen people of God]." Satan can impart at least some power to work counterfeit miracles that mislead, deceive, and confuse the world and even the church.

And there's a third possibility:

3. Some such claims are simply false. Sometimes people are deceived by others, and sometimes they even deceive themselves into thinking that they have experienced, been involved in, and even done things that are supernatural and special, when the truth is that they have simply been deceived.

Ultimately it doesn't matter where these claims come from. The point is there are people who will say to Christ, "I called you 'Lord.' I prophesied! I did battle with the forces of evil, and I even did miracles in Your name!" And Christ warns that to "many" who say this to Him He will say, "Go away; I never knew you."

The principle here applies to all of our spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences, no matter how dramatic and meaningful, do not guarantee that you're right with God. You may have profound religious experiences in which you have sensed God's presence and love, you may have witnessed miracles, but that does not mean that Christ is in your life and you are right with Almighty God.

You need to carefully examine your life and faith.

Saturday morning I watched a little bit of *Ripley's Believe It or Not* on television. One of the segments was on the man known as "The Human Cannon Ball." This man gets shot from a cannon. They showed the video of the last time he had done this. The cannon goes off, and he comes flying out of the cannon's mouth. It seems he flies high and out more than a hundred feet through the air. But he misses the net. He lands with a horrible thud in the dirt and lies there like a rag doll. I would not have been surprised if they had said that he died. Can you

imagine that horrible instant when you realize that the blurry thing you just flew past was the net that was supposed to catch and save you?

Well, of course, he didn't die. In fact he was going to do it again, and they were filming it, right here in Daytona Beach. They showed him getting ready. He was so careful. They showed him measuring the exact placement of the huge air bag that would break his fall. They filled a sack with sand to match his weight exactly and fired it out of the cannon. They measured and adjusted and made sure they got it right. When the stakes are high it is important to be careful.

What Christ wants us to understand is that the issues are never more serious than when we are dealing with our eternal destiny and our relationship to God.

How careful have you been to make sure that your eternal destiny is secure and your relationship with God is sound? Don't be careless when it comes to your soul, your spiritual life, your relationship to Almighty God, your eternal destiny. There are many people who have false hopes for heaven and eternal life. Don't be one of them.

The Only Certain Hope of Eternal Salvation
Is a Personal Relationship with Christ
That Bears the Fruit of Obedience to God

The words of Jesus suggest two questions each of us should ask himself.

First, "Have I Genuinely Received Christ by Faith So That I Have a Personal Relationship with Him?"

When Christ says, "I never knew you," He does not mean that He didn't know they existed. The word *know* in the Bible is often used to describe an

intimate personal relationship. In the Bible you read, for instance, that Adam "knew his wife and she conceived." In John 10:27-28, Jesus says: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

He does not say, "I knew you once, but I don't know you now." He is not saying you can receive salvation and then lose it. He is saying you can think that you have it when you do not. You can have religion and not have a real relationship with Him.

The Bible tells us that a personal relationship with Christ as our Savior is not something we earn by our good works. It's a gift of God's undeserved grace and mercy. We enter into a relationship with Christ when we receive Him by faith. But the faith by which we enter into a relationship with Christ is not just believing certain truths about Him. It is trusting in Him, receiving Him.

One way the Bible helps us understand the nature of a saving faith is to use an interesting Greek construction that's hard to translate into English. The Bible often speaks of "believing into Jesus Christ." Scholars tell us that when you connect "believe" with that little word "into," it pictures the movement of the one who is doing the believing *onto* or *into* the person in whom his faith is resting. Saving faith is much more than a passive acceptance of correct doctrines.

Yes, you do have to believe that certain things are true. You have to believe the facts of the gospel. You have to believe that Christ died and rose again to pay for your sins and secure your salvation. You do have to believe that you need God's forgiveness and His presence in your life. You do have to admit that you cannot earn or deserve those things. You do have to believe the facts of the gospel.

But then, believing the facts of the gospel, you need to personally trust Christ as your own Lord and Savior. You turn to Him. You entrust your life and salvation to Him. You receive Him. The first question, then, is this: "Have I genuinely received Christ by faith so that I have a personal relationship with Him?"

The second question is also important:

Second, “Do I See in My Life Evidence of a Relationship with Christ Revealed by the Fruit of Obedience to God?”

In verse 21 Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." The Lord goes right to the core issue of the human heart here. He focuses on one thing. The principle He teaches is this: The best evidence of new birth is not that you are active in doing a lot of Christian or religious things but that you are doing the will of the Father in heaven.

Many people will do all kinds of good works and be very active and involved with Christian issues and ministries as long as they can do them on their terms without ever really submitting their will to God's will. Their own perspectives, values, opinions, and desires shape and color their lives instead of God's will revealed in God's word. They claim to believe in Christ as Lord and yet withhold their ultimate allegiance and submission from Him.

It's one thing to choose to do for God what you want to do for Him. It's another thing to choose to submit to God's will in areas you would not have chosen. That's the best, most searching test of new birth. The willingness to surrender your will to God's will is one of the most powerful evidences that Christ is at work in you and you have been born again.

Of course this doesn't mean that any Christian does the will of the Father perfectly and completely. We know that isn't true. Christ doesn't teach that. Far from it. (We've talked about that for two weeks). The Lord knows that even His most faithful disciples will fail, stumble, and sin. What Christ is saying is that true Christians have a new nature, that new nature will demonstrate itself in new life, and the essence of that demonstration of life will be a willingness to do God's will.

It's one thing to choose to do for God what you want to do for Him. It's another thing to choose to submit to God's will in areas you would not have chosen.

This Scripture can do one of three things in each of our lives.

First, it can confirm you as a true Christian. You listen to Christ and look at your life and you say: “Lord, I know my many sins and imperfections, and I am sorry for them. But I also know that I do trust You as my Savior. I know that I have a relationship with You that is personal. I see the evidence of Your grace and Your Spirit at work in my life. I want to do Your will. Thank You for your grace.”

Second, it can convict you as a counterfeit Christian. Maybe the whole time I've been talking, you haven't really been listening because you really don't care. But maybe you *have* been listening, and you've realized that you don't have a personal relationship with Christ. You look at your life and you don't see any evidence of a new birth and a new desire to do God's will.

If you have no real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, if prayer, and guidance and grace are foreign to your experience, then you would be foolish to assume that you are a true Christian. If you are comfortable and unconcerned while habitually carrying on with aspects of your life that you know are against God's will and about which you have no remorse or repentance, then you would be foolish to assume that you are a true Christian. If you have no real desire to do God's will, then you have good reason to question whether you have ever been born again by God's Spirit. The same message that confirms one person as a true believer convicts and condemns another as a counterfeit.

Third, it can call you to Christ and to real faith in Him. If you are confirmed in your relationship with Christ, be thankful. If you are convicted then, come to Him. Christ offers you Himself as a Savior. And the salvation He gives when you turn to Him and trust in Him includes His presence, His lordship, and His grace not only in forgiving you but renewing you and beginning to change you from the inside out.

Is that what you want? Sincerely wanting Christ not only to forgive you but to give you a new birth and begin in you a new life, genuinely wanting and being willing for Him to renew and change you, is a big part of what the Bible calls *repentance*.

Believing the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for your salvation and trusting Him to give you His gracious gifts of forgiveness and new life is what the Bible calls *faith*.

Authentic saving faith is repentant faith. There's nothing more important. Turn to Christ and trust in Him with that kind of faith. Receive God's amazing grace. And if you have received it, treasure it with thankfulness. Draw strength from the amazing grace that God gives you in Christ.

4 “Confidence In Christ”

Philippians 1:4-7 (NIV) In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

In an old blues song by B.B. King, the vocalist claims no one loves him but his mother, and she might not be telling the truth either. It's just a song, but it's based on something that's pretty common. In the relationships that matter most in life, we want and wish for a confidence and security that is sometimes find hard to find. And some of the funny ways people act in life are influenced by those basic insecurities.

In human relationship we are all aware that the best relationships are those in which we have a certain confidence. Often the best friendships are those that have been tested, have survived the tests, and remain secure. What's true in human relationships is also true in our relationship with Almighty God. God wants us not only to have a right relationship with Him, in which He is our Lord and Savior and we are His redeemed and reborn sons and daughters, but He also wants us to feel secure in that relationship.

The Bible very clearly addresses two dangers in spiritual life.

The first is a false confidence. Jesus and others in the Scriptures warn us about this. The Bible tells us to examine ourselves. When we examine ourselves we're asking ourselves questions such as: "Is faith in Christ something that is real and personal to me? Am I just a cultural, church-going, outward Christian, or do I really see a need for Christ? Have I admitted my need for His forgiveness, do I believe that Christ died and rose again to pay for my sins, and that I can have forgiveness only through faith in Jesus? Am I trusting in Him alone as my Savior? Do I want Christ involved in my life as my Lord and Savior? Do I see evidence in my life that I have been born again by His grace?"

If the answer to these questions is, "No, I don't see, feel, believe, or want those things," then what you need is not confidence but conviction. If there is no experience of faith and no evidence of grace, then any confidence you might have would be false confidence. False confidence is the first danger that the Bible warns us against.

But the second danger is the failure to have true confidence when you could and should. God wants His children to be clear, correct, and confident in their relationship to Him. You cannot fully experience, much less pass on to others, the fullness of a Christ-centered, God-centered, Spirit-filled life, if you are full of insecurity and uncertainty in your own relationship to God.

Now, the Scripture we read this morning from the book of Philippians teaches us some very helpful and important lessons about true confidence in our relationship with Christ. In verse 6, the apostle Paul writes to the Philippians, "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

True confidence in the Christian life comes in part from realizing that from beginning to end the Christian life is God's good work in you.

From Beginning to End the Christian Life Is

God's Good Work in You

Verse 6 is talking about God when it says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

True Christianity Is a Good Work That Begins with God

Verse 6 reads, "He . . . began a good work in you." Acts 16 tells the story of how Paul first came to this city of Philippi. In Acts 16:14, as Paul was teaching about Jesus Christ, "one of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God {and] the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." That is how the good work of true Christianity begins in every individual's life. You hear the message, and God opens your heart to respond.

Sure, God works through circumstances, messengers, and other means, but the point is that the work begins with God and not with you. The Bible teaches that, left to ourselves, we do not seek God. We ignore Him or avoid Him or invent our own God. It's only when God begins to work in us that we begin to respond to Him.

When we respond to God, we do not respond by setting out on a course of self-improvement, hoping He will help us and in the end accept us. We respond to Him with humility and faith, saying, "God, I need You to do a work in me that I cannot do myself, a work of forgiveness, cleansing, and transforming."

True Christianity is not a good work you do for God. It is a good work God begins and carries on in you. That's why . . .

True Christianity Is a Good Work About Which You Can Be Absolutely Confident

God wants all His people to be able to say, "I am confident that God has begun a good work in me and that He will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

There are good reasons for true believers to be confident in Christ.

You can be confident because of the Word of God. You can have confidence in the promises of God's Word. Acts 16 tells the story of how one of the first people to become a Christian in the city of Philippi was the city jailer. There you read how a dramatic set of circumstances caused him to come to Paul and ask how he could be saved. Acts 16:30-31 says, "He {the jailer} then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They [Paul and his companion, Silas] replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.'" Now, notice the confidence and certainty and assurance that was in the message from the very first day. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." It is as definite as that!

Our confidence does come from our feelings. Our emotions, our feelings, can come and go. They can be deceptive, and they are susceptible to all kinds of circumstances. But the clear promises of God in the Bible are unchangeable and absolutely reliable.

The Word of God gives us confidence not only because it is reliable but also because its message is a message of grace. In verse 7 the apostle says, "It is right for me to feel this way [joyfully confident] about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me."

The Word of God gives us confidence not only because it is reliable but also because its message is a message of grace.

In the Bible, grace is a display of God's extraordinary love that is undeserved and cannot be paid back. Grace is love that cannot and need not be earned. Grace is a free gift given to those who do not deserve it. First John 5:13 says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." If you know that you believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ, then you can be confident of your relationship to God. You can be confident because of the Word of God.

You can also be confident because of the work of God. As Paul describes salvation here in verse 6, he describes it not just as forgiveness written down in a book somewhere off in heaven but also as a good work that Christ begins to work within us. It only follows that if God has begun a good work in you there will be evidence of that good work in your life.

Paul saw the evidence in the Philippians. The word "partnership" in verse 5 means "participation in a common purpose." Paul says that they had they supported him and worked with him and had persevered in these things. He speaks of their "partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." James 2:17 says that "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Paul was confident about these Philippians because, although they were far from perfect, their faith was accompanied by action.

Philippians 1:6 says God *began* a good work in you! The evidence of your salvation will not be a work completed but a work begun!

The question that we need to ask is this: "In spite of my sins and my struggles, do I see evidence that God has begun and is continuing a good work in me?" Do you confess your sins, turn from them, and long for a better relationship with God? Is there evidence that He has begun a good work in you? Confidence in Christ comes not only from the Word of God in the Bible but also from the work of God in your life.

You can also be confident because of the witness of the Spirit of God. Paul says that the Philippians "shared God's grace" with him. One of the activities of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian is to simply make the grace of God and the reality of your redemption real to you. The Bible calls this the witness of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit may do this differently for each person, but it is real.

Carl Tuttle is a pastor who came from a broken home. He had a very unhappy childhood in which his father abused him. After he became a Christian, on occasion he particularly wanted to get away by himself and spend time some time alone with God. He decided to go out to the country, where he would have the whole day to pray without interruptions. But when he did this, he just ended up frustrated after a while. It wasn't the experience he had hoped for. So he drove home again, feeling disappointed.

After he got home, he went in to see his two-month-old baby, Zachary. He picked up his little boy, and as he held him he felt an incredible love welling up inside him. He started weeping. He began talking to his son, saying, "Zachary, I love you with all my heart. I'm always going to protect you. I'm always going to care for you. I'm always going to be your friend no matter what you do." As he stood holding his baby, feeling these things, and talking this way, he suddenly sensed that he was in God's arms and that God was saying, "Carl, you are My son, and I love you. No matter what you do, no matter where you go, I'll always care for you, I'll always provide for you, I'll always guide you."

What was happening is that the Holy Spirit was bearing witness to his spirit and assuring him that he was God's child. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

The Word of God gives us *intellectual* assurance. We know what God has promised, and we believe it to be true.

The work of God give us *inferential* assurance. We see God working in our lives, and we infer from the changes in our lives that He is graciously at work in us.

The witness of the Spirit of God gives us *intuitive* assurance. The Spirit of God simply impresses on our hearts a confident conviction that we are His children.

For some of you, one of these biblical reasons for confidence in Christ may be stronger than another. What God wants you to see is that, if you have

received Christ as your Lord and Savior, it is not arrogance to be confident of your relationship to Him. Make sure of your relationship with Christ, and then be confident of that relationship.

Now, part of the power of this passage is that it tells us not only that we can be confident in our present relationship with Christ but also that we can be confident concerning our relationship in the future.

**If God Has Begun a Good Work in You, You May Be Sure
He Will Carry It on to Completion**

That's the confidence of verse 6: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul does not say, "I am confident that you are going to hang in there." He does not say, "I am confident that you are always going to be faithful, and committed, and strong enough." Our confidence in the security of our relationship with Christ comes entirely from the fact that what God commences God continues and God completes.

There are some particularly powerful promises in the Bible about this point.

Jesus Promises That No One Who Turns to Him and Trusts in Him Will Ever Be Lost

In John 6:37-39, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

In John 10:28-29, He says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." When you receive Christ, He takes you by the hand, and He holds on to you. Your security and your salvation do not depend on your grasp of God but on God's grasp of you. What He is promising is that He will never let you go.

God Tells Us That When We Receive Jesus Christ We Are Sealed by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13 reads, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." A seal in the New Testament was a mark of permanent ownership that guaranteed security and protection. A king would take a letter, or scroll, and seal it with a seal. That seal would mark it as his possession and grant it his protection.

God does not promise you an easy trip, but He does promise you a safe and secure arrival. He has sealed you by His Holy Spirit.

God Promises That Once You Come to Christ and Receive Forgiveness, You Can Experience Judgment but You Can Never Experience Condemnation

In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, the apostle Paul gives us an illustration that is absolutely clear. He says the Christian life is like a building. Using this illustration, he makes four points.

The foundation is Jesus Christ. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." When you turn to Christ and trust in Him, you have the foundation.

The way you live your life is the way you build on the foundation. He continues: "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw . . ." Good works , expressions of love for God and for people, are like gold, silver, and precious stones, things of lasting value. Sinful and selfish things are just wood, hay, and straw.

One day, even those who have received Christ are going to have to stand before God and be accountable for the way they have lived their lives. "His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. "

Now notice what the alternatives are for the person who by faith has received Christ and therefore has Christ as his foundation. "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

God is telling us something very clearly here. He is saying you can build into your life things of value that express your faith and your love. And if you do, God will reward you. But you can also fill your life with things that are selfish and sinful and of no lasting value at all. And if you do that, when God examines your life it will be as if everything you have lived for is destroyed. Your life will have been wasted.

Notice that last sentence. "If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." Once you receive eternal life and salvation through faith in Christ, you can never lose it. Even if you lose everything else, you will not lose Christ and salvation and forgiveness.

But if God has begun a good work in you, then it is inconceivable that there will not be *some* good works, some gold, silver, and precious stones produced in your life as well. But God goes to the furthest extreme here to picture a person who has received Christ but has nothing in his life that God can reward. At the same time, He wants to make clear that our salvation is entirely of His grace and therefore it is absolutely secure from the first moment we turn to Christ and trust in Him.

In 1 Corinthians 11:32, Paul says that, as God's child, when you disobey Him He will correct you, but He will never condemn you. He writes, "When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."

So if God has begun a good work in you, He will carry it on to completion. There will be no condemnation. He wants you to know that, and believe it, and trust Him. If you do, the confidence you have in Christ will help you to live your life for Him.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. John 10:28-29

The Confidence You Have in Christ Will Help You

Live Your Life for Him

It Will Deepen Your Relationship with God

When you realize that even with problems like yours, and sins like yours, and weaknesses like yours, you can be confident because He is committed to completing the work He has begun in your life, your love for and trust in God is deepened.

The natural response of faith is to be deeply grateful and joyful. You feel watched over, protected, accepted, and guarded, and you want to know God better.

It Will Sweeten Your Love for Others

There is a lot of affection and warmth in Paul's words to the Philippians. In verse 7, he talks about his feelings for them. He says, "I have you in my heart." In verse 8, he says, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."

What are your thoughts and feelings for your fellow Christians? God wants you to look at your Christian brothers and sisters and say in your heart, "The same God who is graciously at work in my life is at work in your life. He is going to bring His work to completion in us, and we are going to share eternity together. Because of that, I feel connected to you, I care for you, I'm committed to you."

God doesn't call you to confidence in Christ so that you can be arrogant, aloof, and indifferent. Your confidence in Christ should be a catalyst for compassion and affection for others.

It Will Strengthen Your Hope for Growth

If God is faithful to carrying on in your life a work that He is going to bring to completion in spite of your failings and weaknesses, then there is good cause for confidence that God can cause you to grow and change.

He can help you overcome bad habits. He can teach you how to better love your wife, your husband, your children. He can change you in ways that you cannot change yourself. You have to believe that. You have to quit saying, "I can't change," and start saying, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

God wants you to know Him. He wants you to know that you know Him, and He wants you to be confident in Him because of His work in you. Make sure that you have received Christ through repentance and faith, and then live the new life that God is working into you with the confidence that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Discussion Questions

1. The Crucial Importance of Authentic Faith

1. Have you ever had the experience of thinking that you were a Christian and then discovering that you were not? Do you know someone who has? What happened to bring about a clear understanding and a true conversion?
2. What three things in Ephesians 2:1-10 describe our spiritual situation apart from Christ?
3. What four key statements in Ephesians 2:8-9 clarify what it means to receive the grace of God?
4. Why is it that we must not trust in our good works when it comes to our relationship with God?
5. Look up the following verses and consider how they shed light on the danger of trusting in good works or a good life: Philippians 3:8-9; Titus 3:5; Romans 4:5; 10:3-4; Galatians 2:16.
6. Some people might be tempted to think the best thing to do is to trust in Christ plus good works. Why is this wrong?
7. Why is grace life changing?

8. What are some of the changes suggested by Ephesians 2:1-10?

9. When we examine our lives, what should we be looking for?

10. Why can't we just receive the gift of forgiveness as an exemption from God's future wrath without receiving the present work of His grace to change our lives?

11. What are repentance and faith? Why are both essential to receiving saving grace?

2. Faith and Fruitfulness

1. What's the most life-changing relationship you have ever had? Why was that relationship so life changing?

2. Why is it important to realize that our relationship with Christ has to be life changing? What difference might that realization make in your life?

3. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Scripture tells us to examine ourselves. When we examine ourselves, what are we looking for?

4. If Matthew 7:16-20 is speaking primarily about false prophets, what relevance does it have to the rest of us?

5. In Matthew 7:18, Jesus says, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit." Does this mean that Christians can't sin and non-Christians can't do anything good? Why? What does it mean?

6. How can we be honest and balanced in looking for the fruit that proves the reality of faith, without going to an unhealthy or unrealistic extreme?

7. Look up the following verses and consider how they shed light on the relationship between true faith and good fruit: Matthew 3:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:3-6; James 2:14-18.

8. The Scriptures stress that the fruit of change in your life is not a condition for receiving Christ but an inevitable consequence of receiving Him. Why is it important to keep this distinction clearly in mind?

9. What fruit have you seen in your life as a result of your relationship with Christ?

10. What important lesson have you learned about faith and fruitfulness?

3. By Their Fruit You Will Recognize Them

1. What is it about this passage of Scripture that should call us to carefully reflect on our lives?

2. How does this passage show us that many people have false hopes for heaven and eternal life?

3. What two sources of false hope are mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23?

4. Why is a proper confession of faith not in itself a sufficient source of hope in relationship to God?

5. How could someone make a profession of Christ as Savior, and make claims of profound spiritual experiences, if they do not really belong to Him?

6. What are the two key questions that each of us should ask himself? Why are both questions important?

7. What does Christ mean when He says, "I never knew you?" Doesn't God know everyone?

8. What is the significance of the fact that Christ will say, "I *never* knew you"?

9. What is the significance of the fact that the Bible often speaks of believing *into* Jesus Christ?

10. Why is doing the will of God a core issue for the human heart? Can you share and discuss an example of when you found it difficult to do the will of God, but you did God's will because of your faith in Him?

11. What are the three key things that this Scripture can do for us?

4. Confidence in Christ

1. In what relationship do you have the greatest confidence? Why are the best relationships built on confidence?

2. Some people might think it would be safe to be unsure of one's relationship with God. Why is it important spiritually to be confident in Christ.

3. What evidence does Scripture supply to convince us that God wants us to be confident in Christ?

4. In what sense is Christianity a good work that begins with God? Why is it important to realize this?

5. How does the Word of God impart confidence in Christ?

6. How does the work of God impart confidence in Christ?

7. How does the witness of the Spirit impart confidence in Christ?

8. Which of these has meant the most to you? Why?

9. What does the Scripture tell us to give us confidence about our future as Christians?

10. Reflect on the following scriptural promises and discuss what they contribute to your confidence in Christ: John 6:37-39; John 10:28-29; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 1 Corinthians 11:32. Which of these promises do find particularly powerful? Why?

11. How can confidence in Christ help you live your life for Him?

Quoted by Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1996), p. 19.

Leon Morris discusses this in an extended note in his commentary on the gospel of John. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp, 335-37.

Told by Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 67.