

Eternal Life Test

True Church Conference 2020

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5-6
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Appreciate Brother David in the work up there in Rutherford County, one of the fastest growing areas in America actually, so we praise the Lord for that and, um, one of the ways that Anchored in Truth missions works is as partnership churches that have been with us a while, then they begin to take ownership of the church plants and we stand behind them financially and with guidance, so Brother Jono Sims, that's his church plant out of ?? Mills, but we're partnering with him to support that and actually Trevor Davis at Great Commission Church in Olive Branch, Mississippi was kind of being the primary mentor for Chris Twilly's church. Good stuff there, Trevor. And praise the Lord for the good things God's doing there. Maybe that's something you'd like to get on. Now here's, here's what I want to tell you, brothers and sisters, brothers mainly, planting one church will kill you. It's overwhelming and that's why the Apostle Paul had networks of churches helping and we need each other, and it's, it's come a day where we can't just simply go by denominational lines, we gotta go by truth lines, those who are committed to the truth as we're committed to and partnering together.

Ah, Acts 2. Go there real quick and I'm gonna spend about 30 minutes. We, we've already talked and we've had two sessions from Hebrews 6:4-11 on unmasking false regeneration. I hope that's as helpful to you as it has been for me to study it. It's just opened the door and turned on some lights for me. Um, I know Brother David Brown's committed to this as much as anybody on the earth but when he said, "You know, pray that the Holy Spirit's working on some," well, you know how you find those the Holy Spirit is working on? You just witness to everybody. You urge everybody to repent and believe and, um, we don't know who's associated with the Spirit and who's gonna be associated then regenerated, we just, we're supposed to appeal and plead with all men everywhere to repent and believe. If they do get saved, we know a sovereign God did it but he wants us to do that part. Ah, you know, Spurgeon used to say that, ah, he didn't know who the elect are. He said if God had put a yellow stripe on their back we could just run around and pull the shirttails up and see who had a yellow stripe and we could witness to them, but we don't know so we're gonna urge all men everywhere to repent and believe and the warrant of faith is the Gospel. We're gonna tell them, "If you'll repent and believe, God will save you." Alright? Is that good balance? No hyper-Calvinist in Anchored in Truth fellowship. Alright, just Spurgeon. In fact, we're Five Point Spurgeonists.

Alright, this session we're gonna talk about those the Lord adds, discerning the fruit of regeneration, and this is something we began to do years ago here and I just want to kinda go over it with you how we approach this. We've had wonderful teaching from Tom Haskil about the new birth, a work of the Spirit. We've been thoroughly through that now in Hebrews 6, but when you're counseling a seeker, what might that look like? Well, um, a Puritan that, ah, I believe it was Thomas Boston, I gleaned some things from some of his writings years ago and developed most from him what I'm gonna share with you this afternoon about 30 minutes.

But in Acts 2, verse, um, 37, um. No, not verse 37. Verse 39, I'm sorry. Peter is preaching and he says, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off," Jews and Gentiles, "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." Then look at verse, ah, 47, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by days those who were being saved." So our job as the under-shepherds of Christ's church, not our church, we must be faithful to the Chief Shepherd. We are the stewards of another's property so we're only to allow into his church those he adds, and he's given us good Scripture to guide us in that process. Ah, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 and reminds us, Paul writing to the Corinthians said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

So how can we discern those that God is bringing into his church, that God has changed, that God has saved, that God indwells? Um, I've got a little phrase that I like to use and that is: if you're going to die and live, you must live before you die. You better have possessed new life here if you expect to keep dying or living rather, after you die.

1 John 5:12-13, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 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." Now we're not talking about a new approach to life out of the energies of the flesh, we're talking about possessing a new life, a new birth.

John 4:23, "But an hour is coming, and now is," this is talking about those who are spiritually dead, "when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth," the Holy Spirit must come in, must make his residence in a life and only then can a person begin to grasp the truth and be a true worshiper of God. If you add those who have not been born again, who the Spirit does not dwell in, you're adding false worshipers into your congregation. So this is an important thing for us pastors to labor over and pray over.

You know, in my early years as a pastor, I was told the easiest, simplest, hoop jump nonsense. I was troubled by it but I didn't know what else to do. Should not the entrance into God's church be a primary concern of ours? Does it not merit weighty study and wrestling and praying and discerning and learning? Nothing is more important than God's church.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he's a new creation," a new creature, he has new life." And on and on we can go but we've all talked about this.

Colossians 1:10 tells us as Paul is speaking about the Colossian believers, "so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work," and here's the phrase I want to focus on, "increasing in the knowledge of God," or more and more should you be experiencing the things of God, the knowledge of God, what God's doing in the earth and what God's method or that's not a good word, what God's provision of salvation is and what it looks like more and more. So if I'm counseling with someone, I'll use this outline and I'll look as we're counseling, this is very careful that we stay balanced here, I'm not looking for a full bloom or fruit, I'm looking for the seed of these things, and I want to tell them, "Do you sense in your soul at least the seed of this kind of desire in you?" And I'll show them the Scripture because I want them to tell me God has done this, because in conversion it's not what you've done, it's what he's done.

So more and more, number 1, more and more I ask them, "Do you see and feel the weight of your sin? More and more do you see and feel the weight of your sin?" The Bible promises the Holy Spirit will come to those who are God's and will help them, and when you're converted, the Holy Spirit comes in and he begins to reveal the holiness of God, and in contrast he begins to reveal the sinful, wretched condition of your totally depraved soul. Now they're not gonna be able to define sin and define depravity, but trust the word of God, show them the Scriptures. One of the things I, I, I urge pastors all the time and you ask my church members, we preach a strong and weighty doctrine of sin in this church and you know what I've found? The more I labor on weighty thorough preaching on the doctrine of sin, the more my people love their Savior. You know people love their Savior, keep telling them how much he saved them.

One of the first conferences I went to decades ago was Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven" something. I think his purpose was to ruin the church. You can tell him I said that, by the way. Because one of his main points in that whole conference was, "Quit telling people they're sinners." Why don't you just say quit preaching the Gospel? I don't care how big his numbers are in California. It just don't matter to me. It's a false Gospel that leaves out a weighty presentation of the doctrine of sin and you want that new believer to be able to tell you, "Yes, pastor, as you read that text, that's me." You want to at least see the germ of the reality of it increasing of their feeling the weight of their sin. They should be seeing more and more of the darkness of their hearts.

How many times have you seen a young Christian saying, "I, I, I must not be saved. You just wouldn't believe what the thoughts I have sometimes, the difficulties." I say, "Well, that kinda makes sounds to me like you have been saved. You knew they were wrong before because you had a natural conscience and the law of God is in your heart, but it seems to really trouble you now." That's the germ of conversion in there. They should be seeing their ever-present lust to disobey. Paul said, "I practice the very thing that I do not want." They should see that their burden, their sins are a burden and they're beginning to

loathe them. That's what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 11:28 when he said, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." The Psalmist said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me." Paul again says, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?"

And I told you just briefly in an earlier message how in my conversion in my automobile listening to the radio, um, I, I immediately sensed, I just can't, the only way I could describe it was like a beam of light shone through the top of that '72 Cutlass Oldsmobile and just love from God flowed through the top of that car. That's the way I felt. I was overwhelmed with the love of God through Jesus Christ, but in the following weeks I can't even describe to you how heavily I sensed my sin and wretchedness before him, so much so I had a good godly Sunday school teacher and she meant well but she said, "Quit talking about how bad you are." I said, "But I am. But I am but I know Christ has forgiven me." So don't expect in an capacity to be able to define or explain but just the evidence, there's a seed of realization that, "Yes, I, I see and feel the weight of my sin."

2. More and more there's kindled in me a flame of love for Christ. Now this takes a while. Um, you do love Christ but, brothers and sisters, a person's gotta know who he is before they can love him. Faith comes by hearing, hearing the things about Christ. That's why preaching is so important and, and, and I meant to mention this before I even started the outline but, brothers and sisters, here I'm not saying we do it exactly the right way but here it's almost inconceivable to us that we would receive you by baptism if you haven't sat under the preaching of the word for a good season. That's really our major seeker counseling is hearing the preaching of the word of God and things start going off in their hearts, what I call it, the Holy Spirit's doing this work, it's the amen of the Holy Spirit. So here's something and the Spirit in the heart says amen. That's true, and those amens keep affirming the truth of the word of God in all of these areas I'm talking about.

Now I'm not saying it's required that a person attend for so long. I'm not saying we require so many sermons be listened to. I mean, we would baptize somebody right away if they could from an open Bible tell us, "Yes, pastor, that's happened to me. That's where I am." We've just found that it almost always takes some time. Jonathan Edwards, I guess humanly in the last several centuries, is one of the few men who saw a real special awakening or work of God and Jonathan Edwards would tell you that, um, in a, in an unusual outpouring of the Spirit, you may be able to discern quickly if someone is truly converted as a pastor, but he said that would be rare and unusual. Typically it's a process.

Now my folks don't want it to go quick. Like my parents, they, they would rather us spend time and pour the word into that child before we baptize them. But again, there's no time thing here. There's no thing of, "Well, we've gotta have 8 meetings or 3 meetings." It's very possible you meet one time with a church elder and you have clear evidences of the new birth and we would schedule you for baptism. Now we would do more studies because we want them to study what baptism means so it would have the fullest meaning to them when they get into the baptistery water. So it's possible after one session but typically it's several and sometimes it's several months and sometimes it's several years.

There's kindled in me, more and more there's kindled in me a flame of love for God. The love of God, Romans 5:5 again, "has been poured out within our hearts." When I first came to this church and it would have been 40 years ago because I attended a while before I came on staff as the, as the youth guy and the associate pastor, the pastor at that time was Bob Pittman and he was an expository preacher and he was preaching through the Gospel of John. Now I'm a brand new Christian and, I mean, I had far more zeal than I had common sense or wisdom. You probably couldn't tell that by my personality, can you, when I preach? But, um, boy, the blunders I made. I, I called Nicodemus, Nicotamus. I didn't know anything. I honestly didn't know anything and, and I was so excited and I was so glad to be saved, and I sat out there and Bob Pittman would preach John and he would preach Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and Brother Jono, I'd sit back there and say, "Well, that's good but you need to teach us these principles for to make our lives successful." I'd love Joel Osteen or somebody in that day because I'm a baby Christian, but you know what? He kept preaching Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and months rolled by and pretty soon I've seen, "I gotta get back to church. I want to hear more about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." I had the seed of love for him but it's gotta grow under the word, guys. Are you getting what I'm saying? That's why we, our pulpits have to be true to the word of God so that we're presenting the Jesus the Spirit will cause them to love. They can't love him if they don't know him. If they're gonna know him, they need to hear him preached. Faith comes by hearing and how shall they hear without a preacher?

I, I just thought about this the other day. Of course, loving God includes, or Christ includes loving the word of God, of course, and, ah, I, I got to thinking I was converted at age 19 and I would guess in the 19 years before I was converted, I might have spent 30 minutes reading the Bible. I mean, over the whole 19 years. And the last 41 years, I've probably averaged that every day because there was kindled in me a love for God and his word. Now I'm, my job is to study and preach so don't, don't sit out there and be legalistic, "Well, I only got 12, 5 minutes a day so I might not be saved yet." No. Don't do that. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about there's kindled in you a love for the word of God and a love for Christ.

3. More and more I see my need for Christ. My total and desperate need for Christ. I need him as prophet. I need his word, his wisdom. I need him as priest. I understand that he's the only intercessor and connector with me to God the Father in salvation. I need him as king. I see the need to bow before him.

Let me read to you, um, from our Confession of Faith. We have the New Testament Confession of Faith here and we've added a little bit more in the areas of sovereign grace. But this is a great statement but I want to talk about it and I want you to hear this. On repentance and faith, Article VIII, "We believe that repentance and faith are sacred duties and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on him alone as the only and all-sufficient Savior."

Now brothers and sisters, that is a wonderful statement on repentance and faith but you can't use that in counseling a new believer. I just understood all of that a few months ago. And you want to know the truth about it? I'm still understanding more about it. But if you explain to them in counseling from the Scripture Jesus is our prophet and he's revealed his wisdom, his truth from the word, they'll say, "Yeah, I know I need more of that." And Jesus is our, our priest. In other words, he connects us to God and only through his death for us on the cross can we be forgiven. "Pastor, I know that's true." And Jesus is our king and, and we ought to bow before him as Lord of all. "I fail at that so much but, boy, I want to be that way." See what I'm saying? They get the doctrine as you teach it to them and understand it. They see their need for Christ.

I think one of the things that we ought to look for is they, they run to him. This is all under the more and more I see my need for Christ, they run to him in time of trial. He's just the one we run to when crisis comes now that we've come to know him. It, it, it's amazing how, how we grow in things but at the beginning we don't have them. I try to discipline myself to pray about my material stuff this way, "God, You own my farm, well, You and the bank, You own my cars, You own my house, You own my clothes, You own the furniture. It's Yours. Now I enjoy it and I'm grateful I get to enjoy it but it's Yours." Can I be transparent with you? I leak. I, I find myself some days not quite there and have to humble myself and kinda fight my way back there. And as a young believer, I remember distinctly I couldn't really pray that. I just kinda wasn't there. But if you asked me, "Brother Jeff, is that, is that in your heart?" Boy, I want to be like that. That's where I want to be.

So you're looking for the seed of it, not the full blossom of it or the full bloom of it. I'm asking the Lord now as I've just turned 60, my prayer is, "God, I want to be effective for You in my old age. I want to be effective for You in my old age. Now I'd like to have good health if You'd see fit. I'd like to enjoy my grandkids for 2-3 decades if You'd see fit. I'd like to have some more good vacations with my wife, my kids, my grandkids if You'd see fit. But if You don't see fit, if You just let me be effective for You that's the main thing." I hadn't always been able to do that and sometimes today if I haven't stayed up-to-date in humbling myself and seeing the things that matter, I'll get, I'll, it'll leak out and I got to get it back in again. So don't look for full-orbed maturity, you're looking for the seed of these things.

4. More and more I hate what God hates. Boy, I think this is an important one. More and more I hate what God hates. I, I'm growing in my contempt for the world. This is evidence of spiritual life. I'm talking about increasingly you see this world system as just vain and worthless, and you see the values and the pleasures of this world. You, you're burdened about the shallowness out there in this world and all the pride and the idolatries and just the overall vanity in it all. There ought to be a seed of that in a person who's received new life.

1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Now the love the world here doesn't mean that occasionally you have too much enjoyment in things that don't matter for eternity.

And by the way, God intends for us to enjoy common grace gifts. Sometimes guys just try to act too spiritual and it's obnoxious. I'd rather a guy enjoy a common grace gift greatly but praise God for it, than a guy that sits around and looks like he's been sucking on a green persimmon and just, you know, just, "Well, I don't do that. I'm too holy." But there's not a settled pattern of love for this world in the child of God. Did you get that? A settled pattern of love for this world. And it grieves us,

I, I, I'm a, I'm a Tennessee Volunteer football, basketball, you name it, that's what I am. Amen. I heard an amen out there. I don't, I don't get many of those around here. I've never gone to Neyland Stadium, God is my witness. No, you're not less spiritual if this doesn't happen to you, okay? I've never gone to Neyland Stadium to a football game when 2-3 times during the game I look around and don't say, "Is this not the stupidest thing in the world?" All of this money, commotion stuff. It's true about the Aggies too. No, Tom says it's not true about Texas A&M. He graduated from there. And here's what I'm saying, there's something in you that says, "Thank God we can enjoy these things but thank God this isn't my joy." There's a seed of something and look for that seed, that evidence of more and more I hate what God hates. And I'm not saying God hates a clean football game but there are things in the world God certainly does hate and that's the world system of dishonoring God and living for, excuse me, living for pleasure.

Psalm, um, 119:113, the Psalmist said, "I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Your law." Hate. There's an indignation that begins to grow as we grow closer to God. We get an indignation, ah, toward those especially those who give feigned obedience to the things of the Lord.

Psalm 101:3, "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me." Wow. Pretty strong, isn't it? But I think that's the righteous hate, it's a righteous anger. You ought to be troubled about those who, who play and toy with the things of God.

Psalm 69:9, "For the zeal for Your house has consumed me." We, ah, my daughter played college basketball and there were several lesbians on the basketball team and, by the way, I had them stay in my home. Not sharing a bedroom, um, but we loved them, we hugged their necks, and especially Anna Claire faithfully shared the truth with them and they loved her for it. You see all this stuff about, "They're gonna hate you." They will respect you if they know you're genuine. And then one of the, the girls just put on social media that she has broken up with her girlfriend and repented of that sin and she said, "We can't, we can't, if we're Christians we can't say all these other things are sins," and I'm amplifying what she said here, "but God only whispers about this." She said, "That was wicked and sin too."

Brother Tom Haskel, how much danger is being done when men of high influence in Christendom tell us to minimize the wickedness of sins? That little girl might not have been saved if she heard that kind of testimony. I know God's sovereign in salvation but we have a responsibility. But she's come out now and repented of that and you can see in

her heart, "I'm beginning to love what God loves and I'm beginning to hate the things God hates." You should see a seed of that in a person who's born again.

Well, number 5, more and more I do love what God loves. And of course, we've said enough about it. I'll not belabor it but we love his church. Brothers and sisters, you're just gonna have to get it in your heart and mind he loves his church so much more than anything else. As far as it's possible, we're to do good to all men but especially the household of the faith. You should see a seed of love for the church.

When I was first converted, I, I lived in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and I, I was baptized at the First Baptist Church of Lawrenceburg. Boy, I'm thankful for some good and godly people that encouraged me there but on Wednesday night nobody went to church. But I did. On Wednesday night I went to church with about 18 senior adult ladies. I, I just had a, something in my heart. I wanted to be at church. I wanted to be with God's people. There ought to be a seed of that in there.

IV. More and more the Spirit helps me in Bible study and prayer. More and more the Spirit helps me in Bible study and prayer. In other words, have you ever noticed when you start praying you can start out so cold? You can start out so lifeless but if you'll stay at it, the Spirit warms your heart and it becomes a joy.

John 14:26 reminds us, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said." The Holy Spirit helps those who belong to the Lord so talk to that seeker and say, "Do you find that you don't want to pray sometimes but if you start praying, your heart gets warm?" Now only a child of God gets that. The seed of that ought to be in there. I

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness," Romans 8:26, "we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Can I be just transparent to you, with you? Sometimes preparing to study to preach is a woeful drudgery. It's hard. Because I have an OCD idolatry problem, I'm prone to over-study. I'm prone to just, I, I, I have a joke with all the guys who do the screens and stuff around here, they'll say, "Why don't you get it to us earlier?" I'll say, "Because I never get a sermon finished, I just run out of time." And honestly I get some of the best insights in the last couple of hours. I could literally have 20 hours in it and the best insights come together at the end. I don't want that outline already set. I want the outline to be last. But I'm telling you, if you do that for a while, you gotta have a break, and thankfully my elders and my church allows me to take breaks when I need them. Now sometimes studying is just a woeful drudgery because, you know, I don't care how tired I am, how worn out I am, Brother Jono, if I open that book and pray and study that text, it's not long before I'm saying, "Praise God, this is good stuff. Praise the Lord, this is wonderful stuff." And you know how sermon preparation is, it's gotta be born in the study and then when you preach it, it needs to be born again.

Well, VII., more and more I look forward to his return. There should be the seed of that in a child of God. As he grows, it's gonna get stronger but there outta be a seed of that. I

long to be stripped of my own righteousness and be clothed with his. Again, "Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." One day he'll return and save me from me. He'll save me from me. Don't you get sick of you? We get sick of each other sometimes, but I get sick of me more than I get sick of you. Oh, praise God when he'll clothe me in his righteousness. There outta be the seed of that in a new child of God who's experienced the new birth.

"Blessed are those," Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." And Hebrews 11:10, "for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." He was looking for something more. I'm telling you, it's great to enjoy the stuff God gives us and at the same time know that we've got something far better than this stuff.

On my farm there's a, a creek. It's called May Branch. It runs down the edge of the property there and May Branch never runs dry. It'll get a little less in the late summer but May Branch never runs dry and that's kind of a picture of, of, of the indwelling presence of God. He's the fountainhead of our soul. It may get a little bigger but it's always there. Now there's a hillside coming down into May Branch and I have many freshwater springs that come out and they flow into May Branch, and this time of the year they're all flowing. They're all flowing in there. But for the child of God, the many springs that flow into the major spring in the valley of our soul, they're polluted. One's polluted with pride and one's polluted with conceit and one's polluted with lust. But praise God, they minimize at times and they lighten up at times and they go dry at times, but there's one main stream that never runs dry, the fountainhead of Jesus Christ, the indwelling presence of God, and as we mature in Christ, those other little tributaries that are polluted should get drier and drier. But Brother Jono, you know what I found? About the time I think they're getting dried up good, one'll start gushing again and I have to fall on my face and say, "Wretched man that I am." But thank God, thank God, thank God, the fountainhead of God always flows down the main valley. It never runs dry.

That's what you're looking for in a child of God. Now here's what's gonna happen in counseling, they're gonna put all their attention on one of those streams, think, "I must not be saved because this stream of conceit or this stream of pride, this stream of lust is there." Well, is the stream of God's presence there, though?

Now I've given you seven things to look for and let me say this: don't make this a mathematical type equation, like they've got to get four out of the seven. They may only have two, I don't know, and be really saved. All I'm telling you is the Bible doesn't give us enough to make this some little formula but this has helped me greatly because it's a joy beyond joys when that man or that woman, that teenager, whoever it is, looks at me and says, "Pastor, I, that's me," and they tell me from the word of God they have truly been born again and have new life.

Well, I hope these things have been a help to you as we do the best we can for the glory of God in his church to unmask the tragedy of unregenerate church members. Now there

is an absolute essential balancing truth and that's called corrective church discipline because you can't keep them all cleared out on the front end. It's gonna happen and, and, and you make a mistake if you think you gonna be 100% there. But God has a provision for removing from his church those who, in effect, remove themselves by open, brazen, unrepentant sin. Brother Jono Sims is gonna deal with that and he's uniquely qualified because for the 20 years he's pastor, he has been totally faithful in this discipline in his church, and his church and he himself have received the blessings of faithfulness there. So he'll preach that for us tonight, alright?