

When Salvation Is Real

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Bible Verse: 1 John 4:13-16
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We're going to turn back to 1 John 4 and I'd like to read our text as we begin. 1 John 4:13 through 16 is our text for today and in this text the word of God says this,

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

As we come to this text, I want to point out to you that it is emphasizing one of the primary themes of the entire letter of 1 John, the issue of assurance, of knowing that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that you genuinely have been saved, and this is a theme that Scripture calls us to consider quite often and it is, in some ways, the most urgent question that a person could address, "Am I truly in Christ? Do I truly belong to Him?" In 2 Corinthians 13:5 it says to examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith, test yourselves. And in 1 John 5:13, if you look look over there for a moment, you'll see as we've pointed out so many times in this exposition that one of John's primary purposes in writing is this, he says, "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." One of the blessings of true Christianity is this, is that not only can you be saved but you can know that you are saved. You can know today that it will be well for you on the day of final judgment. You can know that God has accepted you today and will never turn you away. We sang it earlier, didn't we, quoting from Hebrews 13 the Lord tells us, "I will never ever ever forsake you nor will I ever ever leave you."

So we can know these things and we are intended to know these things and with that little bit of biblical context in mind, look at the emphasis on knowledge and certainty that is given to us here in this passage. It opens up in verse 13 saying, "By this we know that we abide in Him." It's a statement that we can know that we are in Christ. And in the final verse that I read, verse 16, "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us." And so there is this emphasis on assurance that you find in the Bible generally and in this text specifically that is the topic in our consideration today. It shows us what life is like when salvation is real and that's the title of today's message, "When

Salvation Is Real." And one of the things about speaking to an audience like this and speaking to you, and I point this out from time to time, there is always this aspect that there are people across the spectrum of understanding where they're at spiritually. There are some that are confident of their salvation and that confidence is based on a reality, and you are truly in Christ and you know that you are in Christ and that's a wonderful place to be. The passage that we have before us today for you is a passage of confirmation. There are some of you that are here either knowing that you're not a Christian or if you looked at your life you would see that clearly you're not a Christian, this is a passage that brings confrontation to you, a confrontation about the reality of your life, what true life in Christ is and as you examine yourself in light of this passage, you are confronted with the reality that you're not a Christian at all and what a sad and tragic thing that that is, far more tragic than any of the events in this world, that you would be without the Savior who has made himself available to you and who calls you to himself, that you would be in danger of eternal judgment, eternal wrath, eternal condemnation from the hand of a God who is outraged at your sin and your rebellion and your rejection of him. This is a passage that confronts you and at the same time calls you to contemplate the condition of your soul that you would come truly to Christ. Then there's a group in the middle that I speak with particular affection for today, a group that Scripture would be kind and merciful to. You simply have doubts about the reality of your salvation, maybe you're saved, maybe you're not but you're earnest about it, you want to know but you just find yourself enmeshed in doubt that you cannot seem to find your way out of. Well, for you there's an element of clarification in this passage of what you should look for, and so whether we're confirming you in Christ this morning, whether confronting you outside of Christ or clarifying things for you as you work through your doubts, this is a wonderful passage for us to be able to consider together today and it's a great privilege for me as always to open God's word to whomever would hear it.

So let's look at the passage here. He says this in verse 13, he says, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us." We're opening a text that intends for us to know, that there would be not simply a mental acquisition of information here but there would be a heart assurance, a clarity of mind that says, "I know that I am in Christ and I know that Christ is in me." This is what Scripture says is to be the intended spiritual reality for every true Christian. This is not the preserve of so-called saints who have reached an excellent level of holiness. No, this is what God intends for all of his children. God is gracious to all of his children and one of the things that we need to appreciate about the love of God for his people is this, is that when it comes to his people, when it comes to his children, he intends all of them to share in all of the blessings that he gives to the family of God. He's not withholding second blessings to come to those who try harder later on in their Christian life, this is meant to be the experience of every true Christian, to have this knowledge.

And when he says in this or by this, we know that we abide in him, what he's doing is this, he's looking forward in this text to what he is about to say. He says in effect, he says, "Here is how you can know that abide in Christ. These are the things that you need to look for," and what we find in this passage is that he lays out three marks of a true Christian, three things that are true of every believer to help us abide in the assurance of

our salvation. And I don't know about you but I think it's a wonderful opportunity this morning to be able to step out of the realm of the world and all of its chaos and to contemplate eternal matters that really count. You know, the politics are going to come and go, the riots and the protests are going to come and go and people will move on to something else and they'll find something else to argue about soon enough. For us, we step outside of that realm, we come to God's word, we come to those matters that God assigns importance to and we ask the Holy Spirit now to help us and to guide us that we would understand if our salvation is real. As we come to that recognition and that settled conclusion, that it would explode on our minds and it would greatly comfort our hearts that we recognize that, "Well, that means then that I am in the realm of the love of God. That means that I am in the realm of the protection of God. That means that what happens in this earth is of only secondary consideration and importance to me because I have God as my Father, I have Christ as my Savior, I have the Spirit as my Comforter. I have things of eternal worth, of eternal value that the world knows nothing about and that the world cannot take away from me. That means I am secure. That means it is well with my soul." This is the greatest thing that we could know, and to be able to step out of the world and to look into these things is something that is like taking a drink of clear cool water on a hot and thirsty day.

So we're going to approach these three points in asking in the form of questions, I'm framing them as questions here this morning, and the first mark that you would want to look for to test your salvation is this, is to answer this question: does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Now at first that may not seem to be a very helpful question because that is, it's an intangible reality in one sense. You know, you can't look at anything physical and determine whether the Spirit of God is there, it doesn't work that way, but Scripture tells us what the marks of the Spirit of God are and tells us what it is that could look for to answer that question.

Now the Bible teaches very clearly, contrary to charismatic theology, that the Holy Spirit indwells every true Christian and that the Holy Spirit indwells every true Christian at and continuing on from the very moment of their conversion. God in his grace gives to his children himself in the person of his Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God comes to indwell every true Christian. Let me just to remind you of that have you turn to the book of Romans for just a moment, Romans 8. This is a verse that should be very familiar to your mind. If you like to highlight or make marginal notes in your Bible, this is one to have highlighted. It says in Romans 8:9, it says, "you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." In other words, every true Christian has the Spirit of God dwelling within him. If you don't have the Spirit of God, you're not a Christian. It's not that you're in some kind of limbo waiting for a second blessing to come upon you. Then in verse 10 Paul says, "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

Beloved, here's the thing that we would want to understand, among many other things. I would like to understand every word that is in all of the 66 books of the Bible but that's a lifelong quest. Here's what we would want to understand here for today, the Spirit of God is a living person. He is a person with intelligence and power and a mind and a will of his own that he shares with the other two members of the blessed Godhead, and because he is living and because he is a personal spirit, that means when he comes to dwell within us the marks of his personality start to bloom in our lives. The seed is planted and the plant begins to grow and bear fruit in a way that is certain to occur. So what we find here in this text in 1 John if you would turn back there in 1 John 4:13, what we find is this, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us," what's our knowledge of that reality grounded on? It's "because He has given us of His Spirit."

Now for some of you this is very familiar truth, for some of you newer in Christ perhaps this is fresh news to you, but as a true Christian, the Christian shares in the Spirit of God and it is part of God's gracious gift to us in our salvation. God has changed you if you are in Christ. In the language of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the language of the new covenant, God has taken out your old, stony, cold heart and he has given you a new heart with new desires that is responsive to the things of God, that loves the things of God. God has given you a new heart in your salvation. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, behold, the old things have passed away, behold new things have come." And so in salvation God has taken away the old you, even though your body is unchanged, and he has placed a new nature in you. His Spirit has come to indwell you and this is something that he does for every true Christian.

Let's look at one more passage that we've considered often in the past, Ephesians 1:13. Ephesians 1:13 and 14 where it says this, "In Him," that is, in Christ, "you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." Now God, then, what God has done for us is he has placed his Spirit within us and that's why John can say, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit." And the language of the text is like this, the way the underlying language works is this, is that at the moment of your conversion, at the moment that you were born again, God gave you the Holy Spirit and now the results of that gift continue into the present. It is an abiding gift. It came at a point in time and now the effects and the results of that are continuing on through your life and that's how you can know that you are a true Christian.

Now what does the Spirit do when he comes to indwell? How can you know that you have the Spirit of God? Well, my friends, the Spirit of God produces in you a love for the written word of God. The Scripture gives you a love for what he wrote. The Scripture gives you understanding of what he wrote. Look at 1 Corinthians 2 for a moment here as the Spirit of God helps us even now to understand his word; we are experiencing the blessing of the Spirit even as we're speaking and hearing here in this hour, in this moment. In 1 Corinthians 2:12 it says this, it says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given

to us by God." The Spirit of God is given to us freely and the reason that God gives us the Spirit is so that we could know the things that have been given to us by God. Where are those things found? They are found in his word and so the Spirit gives us understanding, he illumines our mind to understand the word and he gives us a love, he gives us a desire, he gives us a capacity for that word of God. And he says, verse 13, "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." Now watch the contrast here as the word of God interprets itself, he says verse 14, "But a natural man," a person who is not a Christian, still in his natural born state, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." The word of God is a locked box to him that he cannot open and find the riches to him. The Spirit must come first.

So my friends, as we understand God's word as it's interpreted to us by his word, we ask this question: does the Spirit of God dwell within you? Does the word of God mean something to you? Is it important to you? Do you desire it? Do you read it and understand it, maybe not with perfection but you can see something of the glimpses of the glory that are there? Does the word of God impact you? Do you desire it? Do you understand it? Is it the love of your life? That's the mark of a true Christian. That's what the Spirit of God gives to those that he saves.

Now the Spirit does something else as well. We've been speaking about the written word of God, the Spirit also points us to the Incarnate Word of God. The written word of God and the Incarnate Word of God. Jesus said that the Spirit would glorify him. "He will take what is of Mine and disclose it to you." The ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Christ and to point us to him so that the Spirit is producing a love for the word of God both written and Incarnate. My friend, do you love Jesus Christ or not? Is he preeminent in your affections and priorities or not? This is what the Spirit of God does and because he gives us that love for the holy things of God, he gives us a sense of sensitivity to sin, a hatred for sin that is remaining in us. We look back on the sin of our pre-Christian lives with horror and dismay that, "I used to be like that. That those kinds of blasphemies used to come out of my tongue. That those kinds of deeds came out of my flesh," you say to yourself. You look back and say, "I look back and I remember the false things that I believed about Christ. I remember how I claimed to know Him when I really didn't. I remember the hypocrisy with which I used to live and I look back at all of that with horror and dismay and with a sense of repentance and rejection of what I used to be." These are all marks of the Spirit of God. This is not natural for a man to look at his own sin in that way because the natural man loves his sin or excuses it at the very least. The Christian looks back at his life and says, "Oh my God, be gracious to me in light of the man that I used to be." And some of you have dramatic lives of sin that you look back on that you've turned from, some of you it's less dramatic in the world's eyes but you still see the change of your heart from darkness to light, from hatred to love.

I ask you, my friends, in light of these things, does the Spirit of God dwell within you? It is not a question that you have attained perfection. That is not the point. That is not what we're saying. It is not a matter of perfection because even the Apostle Paul said, "I find

that there is a principle of evil that dwells in me, the one who loves the law of God." We're not talking about perfection, beloved, we're talking about something that is of a different realm, of a different quality, we're asking what you love. What are your heart affections? What is your response to the word of God and the things of God? What is your response to Jesus Christ? When you hear Christ exalted, when you hear his word taught, does your heart respond? Does it leap like John the Baptist leaped in the womb of his mother Elizabeth when he heard the voice of Mary? He leaped with joy even in his mother's womb. Is there something in you that responds to God's word, that responds to the glory of Christ with joy and honor and love? Because that's the mark of the Spirit of God within you.

The true Christian reads Scripture with understanding. Inner hostility is replaced with inner peace. Jesus Christ is precious. Somehow the fruit of the Spirit however halting it may seem from time to time, the fruit of the Spirit manifests itself in your life and you long to cultivate that fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of these things being multiple aspects of the one Spirit being present in your life and the Spirit inevitably shows himself in the Christian's life with power, and that is why, my friends, John can say, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us," this is how we can know that we're in Christ and Christ is in us, because he has given us of his Spirit and the Spirit makes his presence known.

So I ask these questions with sympathy knowing the answer is yes for many of you, and in that way seeking to build and strengthen your assurance. Do you desire the word of God? Are you sensitive to sin? Do you love Christ even if you fall short in your desires? My friend, that's simply another way of asking does the Spirit of God dwell within you or not? What you have to love about this, for those of you that are wired toward introspection, what you have to love about this is how it directs your attention outward, it directs your attention upward. You hear first of Christ and then how do you respond to him? You hear the preeminence and the priority of the word of God and then how do you respond to it? Rather than simply looking for desires within your heart that are always going to be mixed and confusing at times, we look outside to see what the Spirit of God produces and ask does the Spirit of God dwell within you? It's clarifying. It's helpful. John says it's one of the ways that you can know that Christ is in you.

Well, let's build on that, then, and ask a second question here this morning: do you make a true confession of Jesus Christ? Do you make a true confession of Jesus Christ? And one of the things that we've tried to emphasize in recent months is this, is that there is a doctrinal component to true Christianity. There is a matter of what you believe to be true about God and about Christ that is essential to true Christianity. You cannot simply change your behavior and become a Christian because it's about something far more than that. Behavior change is a secondary aspect of true salvation but it is not what produces salvation. Obedience is a fruit of salvation, not the cause of salvation. Obedience doesn't bring new life, obedience is the fruit of new life.

So we have to know what it is that we believe and whether you believe in the true Christ and John makes this his point in verses 14 and 15. These are wonderful words in God's word. Verses 14 and 15, "We have seen and testify that," here is the content of our confession, this is what we testify about God and his Son, verse 14, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." And, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." This is John's second test proving the reality that you are a Christian, asking and answering the question do you make a true confession of Christ, and you see, you can't evade this question. This is the door into the kingdom of God, so to speak. Jesus said, "I am the door and no one comes to the Father except through Me." You must enter through this door of Christ and you must enter through the true door, not a trap door, if I could put it that way. You must enter through the true door and so you must respond to, you must deal with the question what do you believe about Jesus Christ? Who is he and why did he come? These are fundamental questions of existence.

You know, if you think about it, the whole concept of time is based on the reality of Christ BC and AD, the year of our Lord and before Christ, and Christ is the dividing line between the way that we measure time. Well, my friends, what we believe about Christ is also the dividing line between false Christians and true Christians, those who are lost and those who are saved. What do you believe about Jesus Christ? Well, what we find as we read God's word is this, is that the true Christian believes the apostolic message about Christ. He believes that God the Father sent Jesus Christ into the world to be the Savior of the world. He did not come merely to be an example of love to us. No, his mission went far beyond that. He didn't simply come to be an expression of something else. Jesus Christ came into the world on a mission of redemption. He came to save sinners. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came, Matthew 20:28, he came to give his life a ransom for many. And so you see there is this unavoidable doctrinal content to what we believe about Christ. What do you believe about Jesus Christ? The true Christian has in his heart and increasingly comes as he grows in God's word to be able to say things like this, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners that there ever will be. I believe that God sent Him. I believe that Christ came into the world on a mission of redemption to save sinners like me, and that the purpose of His life was to save sinners and to redeem them with His life and with His shed blood on the cross; that when He died on the cross He was dying as a Savior, He was paying the price of sin for everyone who would believe in Him. I believe that," the true Christian says. "I believe that with all of my heart. I base all of my eternity on that reality."

In the words, I believe, of the nineteenth century pastor, Horatius Bonar, "On another's life, on another's death, I rest my whole eternity. I base my hope for heaven completely on what someone else did for me. On a life I did not live, on a death I did not die, I stake my whole eternity." In other words, Christ is my representative substitute before God. Christ obeyed God in a way that I didn't. Christ died for sin in a way that I never could, and I rest my hope completely on him outside of myself. I rest my hope completely on this one who alone is the Savior of the world. The question is, is that the confession that you make about Christ or not? Jesus Christ is the only Savior that the world has and ever

will have. We proclaim him to all sinners everywhere without regard to color or status, without regard to sex, male or female.

Look at Galatians 3:28. We really need, the whole church of God needs a cleansing bath in Galatians 3:28 in its preoccupation with racial matters in our day and age. Verse 24, "the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith," and not by works. "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor," by which he means that we are no longer, here's part of your confession of Christ, hear me closely, beloved, that having come to Christ we realize that we are no longer trying to earn God's favor with our obedience to the law. Christ has fulfilled the law for us and while we seek to obey Christ in our lives, we are not trying to earn God's favor with that. It's because God has already given us our favor that we obey in a response of love, not in trying to earn merit before him. And because Christ paid the penalty for sin at the cross, we no longer fear the condemnation of the law. We're not trying to be justified by the law because we're justified by faith. We don't fear the punishment of the law because Christ has fulfilled all of that on our behalf. My friend, the question is this, do you understand something about those basics and entrust your entire soul and your entire eternal destiny to their truth or not. Do you make a true confession of Christ? That's the question.

And there's another aspect to this confession. Verse 14, the Son is the Savior of the world, that's what we've been expounding. Now in verse 15 we see the confession of his person. Verse 14 you could say was the confession of his work. Verse 15, the confession of his person and it says this, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." To confess in this context is suggesting the idea of a decisive commitment, an agreement, a wholehearted, full-throated agreement with the testimony of the word of God about the Son of God. What do we believe about this Son? He's the eternal Son who is equal to God himself. Jesus alone is the one who truly reveals the Father. In John 14:9 he said, "The one who has seen Me has seen the Father." You see, you understand this, you understand that there is a uniqueness about Christ that is of a completely different essence. There is a completely different quality to him. You understand that he is the Son of God, high and lofty, holy and exalted, separated from men, separated from sinners.

Look at the language of Hebrews 4 with me. Hebrews 4, just a few pages back in your Bible from 1 John. In Hebrews 4 it says that "we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." There is that confession and then in Hebrews 9, that in his work Christ, verse 28, has been offered once to bear the sins of many, he will appear a second time for salvation, and then in this confession of his person look at chapter 7 with me as well, chapter 7, Hebrews 7:26, "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." The person of Christ holy, innocent, undefiled, the eternal

Son of God. The work of Christ, offering himself up once for all, a sacrifice to God for the sins of his people. The Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

Beloved, what John is saying is this, is that a true Christian not only has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, you can know a true Christian by the manner in which he confesses Jesus Christ. You know, I remember, I don't like to remember it but I can remember the days before I was converted when I was claiming to be a Christian, I honestly did not have the power within me to even say the name Jesus Christ. There was a restraint within me. There was this unrecognized sense that I intuitively had that my life and my being were at odds with Christ in a way that I couldn't even say his name, let alone love him. I could not say his name. It's kind of weird looking back on it now that my life is given to proclaiming him, but I did not confess him with love, I did not confess him in doctrine, I did not confess him according to his person, I did not confess him to his work. I wanted nothing to do with him and yet somehow in the midst of that I called myself a Christian. Well, if I had been hearing a message like this in that condition, I would have had no alternative but to simply realize that despite claiming to be a Christian, I'm obviously not a Christian because I don't openly confess him, I don't confess who he is, I don't confess what he's done. There is a complete contrary dichotomy between who I was and who Christ is and there was no confession of Christ in my life, certainly no confession of love. And it's in that frame of mind that I call these things to your attention, knowing that most of you in this room have been under the teaching of the word of God for a long long time, and maybe there's a head knowledge to what we're talking about here but if you were honest, if you were honest I'm afraid that many of you would have to bow your head in shame and say, "Those things are true in my mind but I don't confess them with my heart. My heart is not engaged with Christ. I don't love Him with all of my heart. He's just a thing out there, not the deepest affection of my heart. I'm content with the things of this world if I have them. I could have the world and let Christ go." When the true Christian says the exact opposite from the bottom of his heart, "I could let the world go as long as I have Christ, this One who came to be the Savior of the world."

So friends, I hope that you can hear in the tone of my voice I'm speaking as gently as I can to you and yet as urgently as I can to you to do what 2 Corinthians 13 says, to examine yourself and to ask yourself what is the confession that you make of Christ. Do you confess him according to truth and do you confess him from the bottom of your heart with love? You see, going back to 1 John, I'm not sure where I left you as we were cross-referencing, a true confession of Christ results in obedience to him.

Look at 1 John 2:3, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. The one who says he is in the Light," verse 9, "and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him." You see, my friends, and I just have a particular, ongoing, unrelievable burden in my heart for those of you that are raised in Christian homes, that you would be content with some kind of mental acquisition of knowledge and external compliance with a few rules and regulations, without this heart love for Christ that is a manifestation of what true

salvation is. And you see, I just can't, I can't be up here and not call attention to the fact that it is entirely possible to have this mental side to your life that is divorced from any affections for Christ in your heart that leads you to confess him, to love him, and that the knowledge of Christ is the most extreme and highest priority of your life; to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind is the greatest commandment. Do you confess Christ in that way with that kind of affection?

You see, beloved, the point of this, the point of these questions does the Spirit of God dwell within you, do you make a true confession of Christ, the point is this, John has just been writing about discernment earlier in chapter 4, look at it with me, chapter 4, verse 1, he said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." The point of what he's saying here in giving us insight into the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and of this confession of Christ, is to give us discernment, to give us discernment between teachers, some who are true, some who are false. What do they teach? What do they say? What do their lives manifest? But beloved, there is also this element of discernment for you. It's a personal discernment, a realm that far too few are willing to enter into to examine themselves truly, to say, "Is this true about me?" And knowing that these are the marks of true salvation when salvation is real, the Spirit of God dwells in you, there is a confession of Christ, knowing these things gives you discernment to be able to make accurate judgments, and knowing these things, my Christian friends, knowing these things informs our assurance. It gives us a sense of confidence that our salvation is real. Yes, you are just like me. You go through spiritual ups and downs. You respond badly to situations. Sometimes your heart seems cold. Sometimes your life is prayerless. But over time there is this enduring abiding love for Christ that is the center of gravity that you come back to. There is this confession of Christ that you come back to. And when you are under the word of God, your passions are inflamed again for him. These are the things that God has given us to show us that our salvation is real.

So I ask you have you received the Spirit? Do you confess Christ in the way that we have spoken of today? John adds one more mark for our reflection and consideration, it's the third question: do you know the love of God? Do you know the love of God? Verse 16 he says this, "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." This mutual indwelling, God dwells in us, we dwell in God, and it is an abiding, continuing, ongoing reality, and this love of God and the knowledge of the love of God is another ground of assurance.

You see, a true Christian somewhere in his heart understands something of the reality that God loves him. John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." If you only think of God, and I emphasize the word only, if you only think about God as a harsh taskmaster and the rules that he has to have, and he's a cold, distant, deistic God to you, my friend, that's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible, the God of salvation in Christ is a God who has loved his people with immeasurable love, mercy, kindness and patience.

Look at Romans 5 and we all stray from this. We are all recovering legalists, you might say, but my professing Christian friend, isn't there something in your heart that realizes that there must be a giving nature of God if you are be in Christ? Isn't God someone who sought your good in Christ and showed kindness to you that you did not deserve? Isn't there something in your understanding about the nature of God like that? Because Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here we were guilty, rebellious sinners, separated from God, having no claim on him, being indifferent to him, cold to the reality of who he is, denying him, not giving thanks to him, not glorifying him. That's all convicting even now, isn't it, and yet we realize that while we were like that God was like this, God gave Christ for us. God sent his Son for us. God had compassion on our miserable sin-sick souls. God showed kindness to us which we had returned with rebellion. And you start to think through these things and you start to realize if this is what God has done, then he must be a God of great immeasurable love and kindness toward his people. And in verse 16 of 1 John 4, John is saying, "We've come to understand this. There is something that we understand that God has given of Himself, that Christ gave Himself for me, that He sacrificed Himself for me, that no one took His life away from Him, He gave it voluntarily, He laid it down of His own initiative," John 10. So that as we contemplate these things, we step back at the majesty of God, the majesty of his love, and we bow our heads in a sense of adoration and worship, "God, You have been so good to this undeserving sinner. This is an expression of Your love for me that Christ did this, and I know that You have love for me because You have given Christ for the sake of my soul."

And the Christian knows that and believes that and it's not only that God loved us at the cross, we know the love of God in our hearts. We increasingly rest in that and abide in that. Oh, beloved, let me just say that in these uncertain times, in these chaotic, this chaotic age in which we live, every one of you that names the name of Christ should find yourself fleeing to refuge to the love of God for your soul and starting to view more and more the chaos of the world from the perspective of the love of God, that whatever happens in the world, God has loved me in Christ, nothing can separate me from that love and I will abide in joy and confidence as I look out on this uncertain world and whatever happens I won't let go of that hope. Do you know the love of God like that or are you just itching to fight political battles like some people are? We have to decide what we love, beloved. We have to decide what we believe about the eternal love of God on our souls and whether that's going to frame our disposition toward life or life is going to frame our discontented disposition toward God. And as you dwell on these truths, as you meditate on them, as you look to the cross again and again and again, your attitudes and actions are increasingly permeated with this love. It is the natural life response to the love of God, to love him and to love the people that he has put in your life. You know the love of God.

So John has given us some clarity here, hasn't he? Does the Spirit of God dwell within you? Do you confess the true Christ? Do you know the love of God? Beloved, this is not an either/or thing, all three are present in some measure to all Christians. This isn't a cafeteria, I'll have the meat but pass on the potatoes. No, you embrace everything that is said here.

Now just in a word of closing here. These true tests of assurance should be contrasted with false tests of assurance. Some people will claim and point to the fact that they must have the Holy Spirit based on charismatic experiences that they have had. Beloved, if that was proof of having the Spirit, certainly John would have said it here in this passage when he's talking about how you can know that you have eternal life. It would be quite easy for him to say, "Well, it's not that hard. Do you speak in tongues or not? Do you prophesy or not? And if you do, then you've got the Spirit." The fact that he doesn't say that ought to tell us volumes about what we should be looking at to evaluate true assurance is based on. He focuses on the confession of Christ instead.

Going to another false ground of assurance that I earnestly want to protect our church from. Some will boast in just in their doctrinal ability or, you know, their mastery of certain aspects of Christian truth. Now doctrine is a good thing, I live to teach it but, beloved, what I want you to see in light of this passage is something else, is that doctrine without obedience to God, doctrine without love for God and love for his people, that's not enough. That's not the real thing because the Holy Spirit's fruit is love. It's love for God, love for his people. There are just far too many people who love knowledge but don't love like that. There's more to the reality than just mere doctrine.

So if a man is a true Christian, if a woman is a real believer in Christ, all three marks of these will be present. Not in perfection, I'll say that one more time, but as we grow in maturity, there is an increasing manifestation, consistency, maturity brings a greater understanding and character, but while it is imperfect these marks show in every true believer. My friend, does the Spirit of God dwell within you? Do you make a true confession of Jesus Christ? Do you have love for God, for other believers? Do you love your spouse? May God grant you all the assurance that produces joy and holiness in response to his word.

Let's pray together.

Father, how does the time go so quickly? How do the years go by so fast? How does an hour in Your word just seem like a flash of lightning that is here and gone? Father, we are creatures of time, You are the eternal God with eternal truth, the Father of our eternal Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that You would grant wisdom and discernment in application for every soul, Father, that You would indeed confirm true believers who would gratefully acknowledge the presence of Christ in their lives and see that You have saved them and that they would know that they have eternal life. I pray, Father, that You would confront perhaps the hypocrite that is with us today, confront the one living a double life, one person on Sunday, somebody else the other six days of the week, one person when he's seen, a different person when he's in private. O God, have mercy on them. I was like that. You had mercy on me, have mercy on them as well.

And for those, Father, who are sorting out their spiritual condition, I pray that these words from Scripture does the Spirit of God dwell within you, do you have the Spirit of God, do you confess the true Christ, do you know the love of God, I pray that these things

would be clarifying, that You would apply to us the work of Your Spirit to give us clarity that everyone, Father, under the sound of my voice without exception would find themselves on the receiving end of the mercy of Christ, the work of Your Holy Spirit, and that we would all without exception, Father, one day enter safely into Your heavenly kingdom, that kingdom which will quickly and instantly make us forget the kingdoms of this world, that kingdom for which we long, that kingdom for which we seek first of all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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