

Conversion

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Bible Verse: 1 John 5:1-5
Preached on: Sunday, June 21, 2020

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Well, our text for this morning's message comes from 1 John 5 and I invite you to turn there.

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

We see in this passage how precious Jesus Christ is and we see in this passage how precious true salvation is and if you sang the words of that hymn with believing hearts, you were mindful of one of the lines that stood out was the line that said, "All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood." It's a recognition that the things of this world are paltry and not worthy to be compared to the glory of Christ and to belonging to him and that is a consistent theme in Scripture telling us that there is nothing more vital to you and your eternal well-being than that you would know Jesus Christ, that you would be saved from Satan and saved from sin because to go through this world and to miss Christ, to miss the Gospel, to die in your sin is the loss of the greatest most incalculable proportion. There is nothing more vital to your soul, there is nothing more urgent to your well-being than the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christ himself said in Mark 8:36, he said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his soul?" In another place of Scripture, there was a rich man who tore down his barns so that he could build bigger barns and Jesus said to him, "You fool, this very night your soul is required of you."

It's stark and I realize that for some you don't like to hear messages about that theme, the urgency of the Gospel, because we prefer the comfortable nature of trying to live in this world and we don't want to be troubled with the realities of truth and eternal judgment and those kinds of things. Beloved, if you just think for a moment, if you just contemplate the reality of death and after death comes judgment, isn't it obvious that nothing in this world compares to the value of Christ and of knowing him? And for those

of you that are still in your sin, what is the outcome of your current course of life? What's going to become of you? What will become of your soul if you do not repent and receive Christ? What's going to happen to you? If you think that God will simply overlook all of your sin when you've rejected Christ, it does not work that way. Jesus spoke of hell as a living reality. He said that it's real, that it's painful and that it's eternal, and so the whole matter of conversion to Christ is of the highest importance and our passage this morning comforts those of us that are redeemed as we walk through this weary world, and it also functions as a warning to rebels who are still pushing Christ away.

Today the title of our message is simply "Conversion." Conversion, and what conversion is just theologically speaking and putting it very simply, conversion is a turning from sin to embrace Jesus Christ by faith and that immediately brings us to the question: have you turned from sin? Have you received Jesus Christ? Well, if you have what this passage promises you is that you have overcome the world and that it will be well with your soul in the end. If you have not been converted, you will not see the kingdom of God. Jesus made that very plain in the Gospel of John 3 when he said, "You must be born again, and unless a man is born again, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

So immediately we come to God's word and we see that we are confronted with the urgency of these matters and let me just say this, mindful that many of you if not most of you have come from Christian homes or believing homes or at the very least churchgoing homes, I want to caution you and to remind you what Scripture says, that conversion is not a matter that you receive by physical inheritance. In John 1, in fact I'd like you to turn there, the Gospel of John 1:11 and 12 and verse 13 as well, John 1:11 through 13 it says that Jesus "came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born," watch this, "not of blood," it's not a physical lineage matter to be a Christian, "nor of the will of the flesh," it's not something that you can just decide to take up for yourself because you're dead in sin and trespasses, "nor of the will of man," no one can grant it to you, "but of God." You must be born of God. You must be born again in order to enter into the kingdom and what being born of God is expressed in is in this receiving of Christ, this repentance from sin and this conscious turning to Christ and resting in him and receiving in him for your salvation.

What I want to say to you and the whole thing that I'm trying to highlight here however inadequately and weakly I am doing it here, what I want you to see is that this is a conscious turning. Conversion involves a conscious turning. You are aware of what you are doing. You are turning away from your prior life of sin and you are calling out to Christ to save you by faith. You know that your works cannot save you. You know that you are dead in sin, that you are guilty and so you call out Christ to have mercy on you and you submit to him and you receive him as Lord and Master and Savior. "Take my life and save me," that's the expression of the faith that is found in conversion. And the question then becomes: well, how do I know if I've truly been converted? After all, Scripture makes it plain that there are false Christians in the world, there are those who claim to know Christ but truly don't, they've never really been born again. Well, that's an urgent matter of spiritual concern and so how can you know if you have truly been

converted? How can you know if you are a real Christian? How can you know that you have eternal life and that you will go to heaven when you die? Well, my friend, if you struggle with those questions and you're not sure, I've got good news for you in that John in his letter, go back to 1 John 5 if you haven't done that already, John in his letter wrote specifically for people just like you to help you. He says in verse 13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

So if these texts from God's word, if these words have pricked your conscience and pricked your heart with concern and a sense of urgency, then the Lord brought you here today to hear this message in particular, maybe just specifically for you the timing of this is worked out in the providence of God. What can we say is the nature of true conversion? We're going to see three things from our text that would lead you to an assurance of your salvation or if you're not a Christian will point you safely to the path that leads to Christ, and the first thing that we want to see here this morning is the source of conversion. The source of conversion and we saw from the text in John 1 that a man is born not of the will of the flesh, not of blood, not by anything that he does, the source of conversion is God himself. God must save a man if he is to be saved because you cannot save yourself. I want those words to kind of sink and settle in. You did not save yourself if you are a Christian, and if you are not a Christian, you cannot save yourself. There is nothing that you can do to recommend yourself to God. You do not have the power to effect your own conversion. You must be born from above. It takes an act from God above on you to be saved and we see the source of conversion right from the beginning of this text. Look at the beginning of verse 1 where John says this, he says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." The underlying language that's translated here in this way, it has this sense, is that God saves a man and the effect that is produced by that is that the man believes in Jesus Christ and this is something that is an effect of conversion and God must do it. No man has the power to break free from the chains of sin, the chains of Satan, the chains of a hostile world. You must be born again and when God saves a man, when God works on a man's heart and imparts new life to him, the effect of that is that he believes in Jesus Christ.

Now there are two other critical passages in this letter that show us the effect of the new birth. Look over at chapter 2, verse 29. We see what happens when a man is born again. Verse 29 it says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." Watch the sequence here: you're born of God, God saves you through faith in Christ, and the effect of that is that there is a manifestation of biblical righteousness in your life. That biblical righteousness is the effect of a prior cause of God having caused you to be born again. You cannot reverse the sequence. You do not do works of righteousness in order to be saved, Scripture makes that very plain, "It is by grace you have been saved, that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not as a result of works lest any man should boast." You cannot do works to earn salvation. You cannot do works to bring new life to your dead heart. A dead corpse can't do anything and we are all spiritual corpses apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you see here in this verse that God saves a man and the effect of that is the production of righteousness in his life. Well, look over at chapter 4, verse 7 where you see this exact same phrase used again where John says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." You don't love other people in order to receive the new birth, you receive the new birth and love is the effect of that. God gives you a new heart. He takes away your cold, stony, hostile, unloving, hateful heart and gives you a new heart that is patterned after the heart of his own love. The nature of God is love and the one who loves shows that God has done a work in him.

Now it is the exact same grammatical construction in chapter 5, verse 1, when it says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Believing in Christ is the effect of regeneration, it is the effect of the new birth, and I like to say it this way: God did not give you the new birth because you believed in him first, you believed in Christ because God gave you the new birth. You can't reverse the sequence. Just as you can't do works in order to be born again, just as you can't love in order to be born again, the carnal, unsaved, unregenerate heart cannot believe in order to receive the new birth. It is a gift of God. It must be given to you from above or it will not happen. This is very very important because it puts you in the state of understanding what your condition is. When the Bible says that you're an enemy of God and helpless, Romans 5, it means exactly what it says, it means that you do not have the ability in your carnal state to do anything to save yourself or to recommend yourself to God or to prompt him to do anything. It must be a gift from God or it will not happen.

Now you say, "But I'm commanded to repent and believe." Yes, you are. You are commanded to repent and believe in Christ and simultaneously the Bible says that you do not have the unaided power in order to be able to do that. Well, people get kind of worked up about that. They say that's not fair, as if God owes them something, as if God was obligated to their standard of fairness. That's not the case at all. We have forfeited as the human race, we have forfeited any claim on God whatsoever. "You're saying that I'm helpless and yet I must believe and if I don't believe I can't be saved." Exactly. That's exactly what I'm saying. "If I must do it and I can't do it, then I'm utterly helpless. I can't save myself." Yeah, that's what the Bible teaches. You must be born again or you will not be saved. You say, "Well, then this makes me feel desperate. This makes me very concerned." Precisely. This means that you approach God now on the level of a beggar asking for mercy that you don't deserve, and like the sinner, like the tax collector in Luke 18 abandoning any sense of self-confidence that you can save yourself or believe with your own power, you abandon all of that and you simply call out to God, "God, have mercy on me the sinner! God, look at my miserable helpless condition. If You don't do something for me, I will be eternally lost!" And you start to get a proper sense of position in the universe. The guilty sinner doesn't approach God with a sense of pride or commanding God to do something for him, we come as beggars who have nothing to offer, nothing that we can do. We humble ourselves thoroughly before Christ and say, "You must save me or I will be lost and I cannot save myself."

Now that's the spirit of true conversion. That's the spirit of repentance. "Lord, I want to turn from sin. I want to receive You. Help me! God, I'm desperate. Lord Jesus, save my

miserable soul!" That's the spirit of true conversion and I have to ask you: have you turned consciously to Christ in something like that spirit? Have you cried out to him something like that? Because if you've been easing through life thinking all is well between you and God and you've never wrestled seriously with sin, I would be very concerned about the state of your soul. If you think that you're good enough for God, you're not saved. The true Christian knows that he is not good enough for God. We say these things not in a boastful spirit but in utter humility, "I needed the same grace that I'm commending to you."

So having laid that foundation, we see that the source of conversion is God himself. Look at it again, chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." God gave birth, God gives birth to true Christians. Just like a father and mother come together and give birth to a new child, that child did not orchestrate his own physical birth. He could not do it. He was a non-entity beforehand. You are here physically as a result of something that you did not control and that you had no power to affect. Well, in the same way, in the same realm Scripture borrows from that realm that we readily understand and say it's the same way in the spiritual realm. God must give birth or there are no children to be had.

So my friend, what God did speaking now to those of who are true Christians and to give you a sense of encouragement about what it means to be a believer, in the midst of your desperate position that we've been describing here, what God did for you is this, is that God acted upon you in a gracious way, in a powerful way to save you when you could not save yourself. Where death reigned, God, the living God did something to bring life and to impart his life to you, and so God imparted life to you where death reigned. When you had no claim on it, when you had no power to make it happen, God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ imparted life to your new heart. Somewhere along the way you read it, you heard it, that Jesus Christ died for sinners just like you. He paid the price of sin at Calvary. He was buried. He was raised on the third day. He ascended to heaven where he now reigns over all as the Lord and Master of the universe, and from that position of power calls men to come to himself for salvation based on his atoning work at the cross of Christ.

That's what God did for you, my brother, my sister in Christ, and do you see therefore what an inestimable privilege it is to be a Christian? That God had mercy on you by name? That God saved you by name? That God intended your salvation before the beginning of time? Christ died 2,000 years ago to accomplish it and the Spirit of God applied it to your heart, that's what God did for you and then all of a sudden the doors of heaven are flung open, the majesties and the riches of his grace are laid out for us. Here I was a helpless beggar with nothing to commend myself to God, hanging over the gaping mouth of hell waiting to drop in as I hung by a spider's thread, and when I was in that desperate condition, dangling in death, God put his hand under me and drew me to himself. That's the source of your conversion and what it does for us is it provokes in us a great sense of praise, wonder and awe, a great sense of love and gratitude toward this Christ who has done this for us.

So my friend, if you believe in Christ, if you love Christ, it's because God first loved you and we must have that sequence clear in our minds from the very start. Look back at chapter 4, verse 19. There is no question about this in the teaching of Scripture. Chapter 4, verse 19, "We love, because He," what? "He first loved us." Who did it first? Christ did. God did. He did it first. He was the initiating power, not you. Your salvation was his idea, not yours. Had it been left up to your cold stony heart, you would have continued to stray, you would have continued to turn away and hardened yourself all the more, and yet converting grace came upon your heart, God in mercy came upon your heart and softened it and gave you a new heart that you might believe. So you turned to Christ, my Christian friend, because God first loved you, first turned your heart to him.

Now what does that have to do with the whole matter of assurance that we were framing this in earlier? This is wonderful and once you've got this groundwork laid, then the next step toward assurance and removing your doubt is an easy one and an obvious one to make. Beloved, if God did that already for you, if he went to such great lengths at Calvary and in the work of the Spirit in order to save your soul and he's done this work already, don't you see that if God started the work in you, he will most certainly finish it? If God started the work, he will complete it. Paul said, "I'm confident of this very thing," Philippians 1:6, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it. He will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." In other words, when you start to understand the groundwork of your salvation, you realize that the outcome has to be consistent with everything that God has done up this point. If God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world, if Christ died for you at the cross and paid for your sins and redeemed you at the cross, if the Spirit of God, notice the Triune nature of our salvation, if the Spirit of God applied it to your heart, don't you understand that nothing could contradict the purpose of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the outcome? There could be no other way. To teach, to tell Christians that they could lose genuine salvation is to stand up and contradict God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit in utter contradiction of everything that Scripture teaches.

So all of that to say this, my Christian friend, you who are in Christ, it is your birthright, it is your privilege, it is your prerogative, it is even I would say, your responsibility to be confident and courageous about your eternal destiny, to realize that the God who has done all of this and has caused you to be born again, he will certainly complete it. There will be no break in the golden chain of your salvation.

Look at Romans 8:29. Notice as I read this that there is no place for anyone to drop out in the work of salvation. Verse 29, "For those whom He foreknew," God knew us before the beginning of time in the sense that he had chosen us, "He also predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." And watch this in verse 30, those "whom He predestined, He also called," this is talking about the inner effectual call to salvation, not the outward general call. "He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." Predestined, called, justified, glorified. There is no way to drop out of it. The God who saved you loves you enough to keep you. The God who purposed your salvation from the beginning having now accomplished it will most

certainly finish it. So beloved, when you understand that the source of conversion is the God of the Bible, that the source of conversion is the Lord Jesus Christ, that the source of conversion is the Spirit of God, you realize that everyone who is genuinely truly saved goes to heaven in the end. God has – watch this – God has a 100% success rate in keeping the saints that he saves. He never fails and he never will.

So knowing that, knowing the source of conversion contributes to your assurance and that brings us to our second point this morning: the sign of conversion. The sign of conversion and for those of you that have been with us through this series, this is going to sound a lot like things that we have been saying for the past few weeks. Understand something really critical about that. John is repeating himself throughout this letter, he is saying the same things over and over again because we are so slow to hear and to understand, and so he repeats things for emphasis in order to build them deeply into our hearts and our understanding. John when he wrote this was somewhere around the age of 90. He knew that he did not have much time left speaking from a human perspective here, and it was his intention as he was about to depart from this earth to leave to those under his spiritual charge, to leave them everything that was necessary for their spiritual well-being. And if, if you can picture, you know, someone that knows that they're about to die and their family is gathered around, you know, like Jacob in the Old Testament and his sons were gathered around, you're saying things of greatest urgency and you really want people to get it because you're not going to have an opportunity to say it again, right? So John here wanting people to be able to remember what the truth is after he departed and Peter showed that same concern in his epistles, he repeats himself. He emphasizes it so that we would get it and understand.

What is the sign of conversion? Point 2. Well, we could say it this way, true salvation changes a man, true conversion changes a woman, changes the young person, and changes them from the realm of sin into the realm of life and that's what John is saying here as we continue on in the last half of verse 1 down through verse 3. Look at it there at the end of verse 1, he says, "whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God." He's wanting to cultivate this knowledge, this certainty in our minds so that we would know that we are the children of God and he says it's by this we know that we love the children of God, you could insert that archaic legal word "to wit," it's by this that we know, to wit, in other words what I'm about to say answers the clause, it's "when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." Oh, beloved, look at it. Here in verse 1 he's talked about the preeminence of faith in Christ. We enter into the kingdom of God by faith and by faith alone. We receive Christ by faith and by faith alone. And when you have been born again, that faith continues and there is also an enduring result in the ethical nature of your life, in your character. There is an impact that grows ever deeper and ever broader in the nature of your life and John describes it in simple terms that he's been using throughout this letter. He says we love the children of God and we observe his commandments. Love and obedience are the sign of conversion. It's what marks the true children of God.

Now even in – watch this, my friends – even in the things that I've already said, the seeds of this were already planted by what John said earlier. Go back to chapter 2, verse 29. Go back to chapter 2, verse 29. John's been making this point over and over again and we need to be careful not to make it so complex that we miss the point. Chapter 2, verse 29, he says, "you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of God, born of Him." Chapter 3, verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." There is this unerasable effect of salvation in that it orders a man, it conditions him toward obedience and away from sin so that we cannot continue in the same life of sin that we once knew before our conversion. God has changed you. God has given you a new heart in a way that produces obedience, biblical righteousness, so much so that he says in verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil, they're obvious," it's manifest. You can't miss this, "anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." Do you see it? Righteousness and love side-by-side, joined together like Siamese twins, if I can put it that way, as the inevitable mark of true conversion. So when he goes on in chapter 4, verse 7 and says, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God," he is just simply reiterating the things that he has been saying throughout the entire letter. You could look at the early verses of chapter 2 and see the same thing. I won't go there for the sake of time.

So go back to the first three verses of chapter 5 here. Verse 2 John says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments." This is how we know that we've been born of God, we love his children and if we love his children, it's going to be manifested in obedience. Now why is this so obviously and necessarily true? This is where, beloved, theology is so critical and understanding the nature of salvation is so important. We have established that the source of conversion is God himself. It comes from the living God, the holy God, the loving God, and in salvation God imparts a new life that is fashioned after his own nature into every true believer. Well, watch this, my friends, this is not difficult. This is not difficult conceptually, the only thing that makes people resistant to receiving it is the sinful rebellion of our hearts that wants to reject any obligation to love and obedience. But it's not complex. If God is the source of salvation, and he is, and if God is holy and loving, and he is, and if God imparts the nature of his own life to us in salvation, and he does, then the life that we live henceforth after our conversion is going to be marked by those things. It's going to be marked by his love because he imparts that loving nature to us. It's going to be marked, our lives will be marked by obedience to Scripture because God is holy and he saves us to conform us to his image. He saves us that we might be zealous for good works, Titus 2 and 3. So the true Christian will reflect the moral character of God in his life even though he reflects it imperfectly. The nature of that will start to filter out just as the light of the sun filters through your window when day begins to dawn. The light comes through the window, when God saves you, the nature of God starts to emanate through your life.

Notice the verbs here, this is the sign of conversion. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. My friend, do you believe in Christ? That's the mark of one who is truly saved. Secondly, this issue of love. By this we know that we love the children of

God when we love God. Is love somehow marking your life? Is a concern for others, an empathy for others, is sacrifice for others in the name of Christ somewhere marking your life? Does it have some order of priority in your thinking or not? And then this other verb at the end of verse 2, observe his commandments. Do you see it? Faith, love and obedience being the mark, being the sign of true conversion.

Now my friend, John has emphasized those very themes, faith, love and obedience throughout the entire letter as being the defining marks of a true Christian. He is now building toward his climax. The letter is about to come to an end and what I want you to see is this – oh, this is so important on so many different levels – what you must understand is this, these three tests, faith, love and obedience, they are distinct from each other. We can understand them separately. Faith is not the same as obedience, it's not the same as love, and so there are these different aspects that are the mark of a true Christian but watch this, this is the really important part of the pivot in this message right now: while these three tests of true conversion are distinct from one another, they are inseparable from one another. What I mean by that is this, is that all three are present in a true Christian, maybe in different degrees, different levels of strength, but every true Christian is marked by faith in Christ and love for the brethren and by obedience to God. The three stand or fall together. This isn't a cafeteria where you choose one entrée and skip the other two. No, they all come together. Think about it like this. Just as multiple strands of twine are wound together to form a single rope and the more you turn and twist the rope-making machine the tighter they become together and they are wound together until you see a single rope at one level, and yet you examine it closely and you see that there are different strands that are connected together that you can trace, but they're wrapped around one another in an inseparable way, so it is, my friends, with faith, love and obedience as being the sign of true conversion. A true Christian manifests faith and love and obedience without fail and without exception.

You say, "How can that be? How can you be so certain about that? Why does John present it in such absolute terms?" Well, think with me, remember what the source of conversion is, the source of conversion is God himself, and the essence of God is single and it is indivisible. You cannot divide the essence of God so that when he saves a man, then the signs of that salvation are joined together in a single indivisible essence as well. So at the moment of conversion, at the moment of a true conversion there is true faith in Christ, there is the seed of love for Christ because you're reaching out to a Savior that you're trusting and calling upon, and there is the seed of obedience, "Save me and I will follow You." You can't separate the three and it's all there right from the very start, and as those seeds are planted together, they are joined together, they bear fruit together so that you cannot be a Christian if you say, "I reject Christ but I'm a loving and obedient person." That doesn't work. You can't say, "Well, I have faith in Christ but I don't like His people and I want nothing to do with the church." That doesn't work. "I have faith in Christ and I love His people but do you know what? I'm going to live however I want. I'm going to live in rebellion and hypocrisy and a double life because I'm gonna be my own man here and I don't like what's around me so I'm going to do it my way." None of that works. The three go together. So my friends, the signs are united because the essence of God is united.

Now go back to verse 2 here, he says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments." I've kind of approached it in one sense from the negative perspective, let's approach it from the positive perspective.

You're here as a true Christian, you're conscious that you've stumbled many times along the way, maybe stumbled on the drive in, that's always a bummer, isn't it? Yeah, I like those laughs of understanding. But the truth of your life is at the core of your life is that you do trust Christ. You long to obey even if you fall short. You do love the children of God even though sometimes we fall into conflict and division with them, but the core affections, the core priorities of your heart are ordered toward faith, love and obedience. Well, beloved, do you understand that that is the mark, that is the sign of a true Christian? Even though it's present in your heart in imperfection, the direction of your heart is all ordered toward these spiritual realities that John says, the Bible says are the mark of true Christians, do you understand that? And if that's the case, then you look at the signs of conversion and you say, "This must have come from the source of conversion. I'm a real Christian. My salvation is real. That means that my sins are forgiven and I have no fear of death because God will deliver me to heaven in the end. And whereas once I was blind, now I see. Whereas once I carried a burden of guilt, Christ has paid the price of that guilt so it is no longer on me. I am free to joy." If you see the signs of that kind of character, if you see those impulses in your life, you can reason back and say, "The source of my life must be God Himself because I didn't generate this on my own."

So Christian love, faith and obedience, they live and they die together. Now let me point out something just in passing here at the end of verse 2. This has a very practical implication for us in the life of our body. John says, "By this we know that we love the children of God." How can you know that you love God's people? Well, there is a vertical aspect of it, you love God, you love the God who saved you and you obey him. Do you realize that one of the ways that you love fellow believers is in cultivating your own sanctification and obeying God? Think about it this way, think about it from the negative perspective. If you love somebody, you don't want to grieve them with your life, right? You don't want to consciously inflict pain on people that you say that you love. You want to contribute to their well-being and to their happiness, for lack of a better term. Well, understand this, beloved, and we're just going to be kind of honest with each other here, what you need to understand and in our individualistic selfish society what, you know, where it's all about me first, we have to understand something, is that when you are living a life of sin as a professing Christian, you are inflicting grief upon the Christians that are around you. You are hurting them because your sin grieves those who love God. They know that you are dishonoring God and that grieves them. They know that you will feel the discipline of God at the very least if you continue in your sin and that grieves them. If you continue in an unbroken pattern of sin, they have to come to grips with the fact, well, maybe his confession is not a true one and he's not even saved and that grieves them even more. And if he's not saved, then he's going to go to hell when he dies even when he's naming Christ as Lord with his lips but denying him with his life and that grieves them even more.

So your sin causes great grief to those who love God. Now watch this, that's undeniable. As you serve in a church together and you see people drift off, you know what this is like, when you serve in ministry and you have the Apostle Paul said, "Who goes into sin without my intense concern." Well, do you know what? If you actually love the people that you say that you love, you'd repent and let go of your sin. You'd do it for the sake of love because you don't want to grieve those that you actually love with your sin and disobedience. You'd repent for the sake of love alone. One time back in California, I heard someone that was under church discipline tell a Christian friend, he said, "You know, I love you but I'm not going to change." No. No, it doesn't work that way. If he had loved the brother, he would repent and give up his sin. The fact that he refuses to obey is a denial of the love that he professes to have.

Christian friends, I ask you what is in your life that you are holding onto as rebellion, conscious rebellion against God? Don't you recognize that it is a contradiction of your claim to love the believers that you're joined together with here at this church? You can't have it both ways and we just come to a point where we just have to transparently repent of things for the sake of obedience to God and for the sake of love of the brethren. Without obedience your claimed love is a fiction. It's not real. It's not true. God's word has sliced open your heart and made it open before you in this matter.

Look at it in verse 3. He reemphasizes the point, "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." You know, the commandments of God, obedience to God is impossible for an unbeliever but for those who are truly saved, they're not burdensome. God gives us a heart that loves to obey him and what you do out of love is not a burdensome thing. So when God saves us, he gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit imparts the power to obey and along with that he gives joy in the obedience. We delight in what unbelievers find impossible and burdensome. It's not burdensome to us to obey Christ because we love him. It's not burdensome on a mother to get up, it might be hard but at the end of the day she doesn't mind getting up in the middle of the night to care for her little children because she loves them. She wants to care for them.

Now let's deal with a practical matter here as we deal with this sign of conversion. What if you have a besetting sin that you just can't seem to overcome? You know, and you just struggle with the same issue again and again and again? Well, when you're in that condition it's easy to just define your entire spiritual experience in relation to that one area of weakness and that can be a crushing burden to bear. What I would say to you is look at the broader context of the signs of your conversion. Remember these three things go together. Do you believe in Christ? Do you love the brethren? Do you at least want to obey even though you find yourself in weakness? You've got to be honest with yourself here. You've got to ask the Spirit of God to help you discern yourself properly. But you take them all together. Yeah, you have an area of weakness but don't isolate that from the fact that you genuinely love God's word, that you genuinely have changed since your conversion, that you genuinely do love the people of God, you do love Christ. Don't separate it from that, view it together and say, "Oh, you know what? The whole context here affirms the reality of my salvation even though I'm struggling in this one area. God,

help me here and strengthen me in all of Your graces." One area of weakness does not mean a man should question, a woman should question the totality of her salvation when you're looking at the whole picture.

You go to an art museum, not that I like to do that but I've done it a time or two just because I had to, you go to an art museum, you know, you look at the painting as a whole. You don't step up and just look at the right hand corner and just focus on that or you've lost sight of everything that the artist was trying to communicate, right? Well, step back from life, ask the broader questions and deal with your besetting sin from that perspective. Do you love God's word? Do you prefer obedience to sin? Do you find kindred souls among the people of God? Those things describe a true Christian. We should never justify our sin but, beloved, let me encourage you, sanctification is a process. God didn't save you unto perfection, immediate perfection, he saved you and is in the process of conforming you to the image of Christ. As I look at my own life, I see things where God sanctified me, some things he sanctified me immediately in, my foul mouth, other things have taken more time. But if you see that threefold sign of conversion, you can have a particular joy.

Well, third and finally here this morning: the security of conversion. The security of conversion. We've seen the source, the sign and now we look at the security of conversion and the security of conversion means this, you will certainly be saved in the end. This is what we've been saying all along, I'll just touch on it lightly therefore.

Look at verses 4 and 5. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory," it's the same word that you get Nike from, "this is the victory that overcomes the world," in the Greek it's very interesting, this is the victory that overcomes the world. There are cognate terms there. It's very cool to read in the original language. "This is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Notice the way the passage is bracketed by believing in Christ. Verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Verse 5 at the end, "he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Belief, faith is the context of the love and obedience that we've been speaking about here and what this means is that the Christ who has taken us out of the world will deliver us completely and finally from the world. My Christian friend, God has saved you out of the world and he did that by his own power according to his own purpose in Christ. He has decisively delivered you. He won't leak you back into the world. And because he saved you, that means that you have been decisively delivered from it. You my friend, have been decisively delivered from darkness into light, from sin into Christ, from Satan to the realm of light, from darkness to light, from slavery to Satan to slavery to Christ. Oh, the polar opposites are just throughout Scripture.

Notice this: three times, three times in these two verses he uses the phrase "overcomes the world." Look at it. I want you to see this in the text with your own eyes. Verse 4, "whatever is born of God overcomes the world." Victory. "This is the victory that has overcome the world," second time. Third time, "who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Three times obviously

indicating John does not want you to miss this point, the Holy Spirit does not want you to miss this point, my friend, and his purpose in it is pastoral, his purpose in it is to encourage you and affirm you and to give you joy and assurance in it. If God has saved you, then he has delivered you from the world. Yeah, you may be struggling now and the church may look weak but that is just according to the outward appearance of men. There is an inner power at work in us that cannot be defeated. Present appearances don't change the ultimate reality, Christians overcome the world.

So when God saved you, he gave you the victory. Watch this, this is so precious and I'm almost done even though I feel like I'm just getting started, everything that hindered you from salvation, your sin, Satan, the world, everything that hindered you, that kept you from coming to salvation in the first instance was overcome in your conversion. Now that it's overcome, it can't call you back. It can't bring you back is what I mean by that. You won't go back because God won't permit it. Jesus said, "I have them in My hand. No one can pluck them out of My hand. I and the Father are One." And now, Christian friend, you live in the aftermath of that victory. The championship has already been accomplished, so to speak, and we're living in the dropping confetti and the celebration of the win, looking forward to the time when that is made perfect and complete. The God who saved us from sin will deliver us from the world.

So my friends, if the storms of life are battering you right now, take heart. The voice that calmed the sea still rules the world and still rules your life. He's faithful. He'll deliver you safe to the other side so that no matter what, go in confidence, no matter what, go in peace.

Let's pray together.

Dear God, we ask You to seal these things to our hearts. We ask You to save the unbelieving, to strengthen the saints all according to Your purpose that Christ might be glorified in us and through us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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