

How do I know I am a genuine Christian?

It is very important that we know whether we are true Christians because our eternal destiny is dependant upon us knowing for sure that we are in the faith. Jesus said Matthew 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”* The Apostle Paul said, 2Co 13:5 *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* The writer of Hebrews said, Heb3:12 *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”* The issue at hand in all of these verses is that we can give the appearance starting down the path of the Christian faith and come up short of the goal of eternal life. In all these verses they call us to examine our faith to see whether it is genuine or if we have deluded ourselves into thinking that we are ok.

It has been very enjoyable to study the book of 1 John in our Wednesday night Bible study because John deals with this theme of assurance of salvation. We know that this is the theme of his book because he clearly tells us it is his theme, in 1 John 5:13 he writes. *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”* (1Jo 5:13 NIVUS) John says to his readers that I have written that you might know that you have eternal life. John does not want us to be in the dark about our salvation left to wonder. The issue for John is whether or not we have the Son of God. The assurance of our salvation is based upon faith in the Son of God. In the verse just previous to verse 13 John writes, 1 John 5:11 *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* The central issue for John is whether or not we possess the Son of God by faith. This is the basis for the assurance of our salvation. John says that those who have the Son have life (possess eternal life) those who do not have the son do not possess life.

For John our salvation is based upon the possession of eternal life which is evidenced in the embracing of all that Jesus Christ is and all that he has provided for us. Salvation then is not a work of man but is very much a supernatural work of God brought about by the Holy Spirit who gives us the life that is founded upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is why John uses terms like “born of God,” and “born again.” It is John Gospel that gives us the story of Nicodemus who had a conversation with Jesus on this very subject in John 3.

For John and the rest of the New Testament writers the effect of this new life in Christ is always to bring us to the recognition of our sin and need for the gospel (repentance) and then to enable us to embrace the saving work of Christ on the cross for our salvation (faith). There is no salvation and new life apart from repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel brings us to the point of our need. We recognize that we cannot save ourselves and that we cannot even respond properly apart from the regenerating work (making us born again) of the Holy Spirit. So the first question in having the assurance of our salvation is, have we come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ by embracing the reality of my sin and seeing the cross of Christ as the only solution to my dilemma? If I answer yes to that question than John would say that I have the Son and you have eternal life.

The second evidence that John would want to see is, not only do I have a past experience with Christ, but is my faith in his saving work is continuing even through the many trials of life. New life in Christ does not give us temporary faith but an enduring faith that continues to repent and believe the saving work of Christ. That is why John says these words, 1 John 2:24 *“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he promised us— even eternal life.”* John is saying that eternal life is evidenced in an enduring faith that continues to grasp hold of the gospel. This is the basis for our continuing assurance of our salvation. Paul says the same thing in the book of Colossians where he writes, *“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”* (Col 1:22-23 NIVUS) Paul tells us the wonderful promises that are held out to us in the gospel, reconciliation through Christ, and the assurance of the possession of what God promised us, is based upon our continuation in faith in the gospel. So the second question is, am I firm and sure in my faith in Jesus Christ as the means of my salvation? Has anything moved me?

The third evidence that John gives is that the new life has a sanctifying effect in our lives. There are certain fundamental changes that take place in the life of those who have been born of God. John sees that our being born again gives us the characteristics of our Heavenly Father. Not in perfection but we as children should be growing in the practice of righteousness. Like little children we need to grow up and mature in our faith so that we more and more become like the father who has adopted us into his family. That is why John writes, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”* (1Jo 3:1-3 NIVUS). John sees certain characteristics that should be present in the life of all believers, and they are: walking in the light of the word of God (1John 1:5-7), confession of our sin (1:8-10), obedience to the commands of Christ (2:3-6), loving one another (2:7-11, 3:11-24), not loving the world (2:15-17), believing the truth of the person and work of Christ (2:18-29, 4:1-6), Not practicing habitual sin (3:4-10). These characteristics are not things that we must do in our own strength, but because of the power of the new life within us we should be growing in these characteristics.

It would be terrible for any of us to spend our lives in Church and come up short in what Church is all about really, the salvation of our souls. We need to test and to examine ourselves and make sure that our faith is firmly in the person and work of Jesus Christ and that we are growing in that faith. The Apostle Peter said this about our salvation and growth. 2 Peter 1:5 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election*

*sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* If you feel like maybe you are concerned quite trying to save yourself, turn to Jesus he will save you if you call on his name (Roman's 10:13).

Blessings

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