

Conversion: Its Source, Sign, and Security

You Call Yourself a Christian

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Bible Text: 1 John 5:1-5
Preached on: Sunday, March 10, 2013

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You know, there is nothing more vital than the knowledge of God and what I mean by that is that there is nothing more significance in your life than to have a certainty and an assurance that you are a true Christian; that you truly belong to this Christ who is building his church. No matter what comes about in this world, if you don't know Christ, it does you no good in the end. Jesus went out of his way to emphasize that in his teaching. He said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" in Mark 8. You might remember the story of the rich man in Luke 12 who tore down barns in order to build bigger barns and in the process of that when his soul was called to account prematurely, he wasn't expecting it, and the Lord said to him, "You fool. This very night your soul is required of you," and he had to, as it were, leave his barns behind and enter into judgment unprepared.

Well, our great desire as we meet together week by week, our great concern is that you as a Christian would be confident of where you stand so that that sense of judgment that is coming would not hold fear for you but that you would be confident in the reality of your salvation. And for those of you that don't know Christ, our great prayer is, our ongoing earnest plea before God is that he would open your hearts and help you understand the lost condition of your soul because we don't want you to share in the brief earthly benefits of meeting together and then be sent away to a different judgment than where the rest of us in this room are going. We love you too much not to warn you about that reality and to warn you about that coming danger. The most important thing that you could know is that your salvation is real and that is why this letter of 1 John was written in the first place. You must know God and the knowledge of God lies behind this passage this morning. This is a passage that comforts the redeemed and it confronts the rebel with the realities of spiritual life.

Look at chapter 5, verses 1 through 5 with me which will be our text for this morning. 1 John 5, beginning in verse 1, where John says,

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

Do you see that word there? We know. He wants you to know. He wants us to know. God wants you to know that your salvation is real. Look over at verse 13. I know I'm interrupting the reading of the passage right at the start but you must to see the great emphasis on this. Chapter 5, verse 13, we'll be there in two weeks, Lord willing, "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." This certainty, this assurance is the coming climax of this entire letter; it's what is intended to be the result of this teaching that John has given us through the first four chapters.

Chapter 5, verse 2 again,

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?

It says right there in the passage that true Christians overcome the world. True Christians are victorious. True Christians win in the end. If you haven't been here through the whole course of the teaching, early on we said and I repeated it from time to time, that John wrote this letter so that Christians could achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world and we see as you go through this book over and over again, that there are many spiritual threats to the well-being of a Christian. There is the threat of false teachers who come and teach false doctrines and cloak it perhaps in Christian terms but in the middle of the bait is a nasty hook that will pull you away from God. False teachers are a danger to our spiritual well-being. There is a danger of self-deception. There is a danger of loving the world that John addresses. So over and over he just systematically goes through and shows us the threats to our spiritual well-being so that we could recognize them and avoid them and therefore walk through this world in a victorious way as we go to our heavenly home. That's what I want to do, isn't it you? Don't you want to walk faithfully with Christ? To love him and to walk with an assurance that death could come at any moment and it would be well with your soul? What else could we compare in value to that spiritual assurance?

Well, John is writing to help us, in the entire letter and as we come to this passage, we see that his emphasis there at the end, the Christian overcomes the world. It's victory. He has overcome the world. He has overcome the world. Three times he says it and what you should see and as a true believer, what should flame up hope in your heart and give motivation to persevere is this promise from God's word that true Christians overcome the world. This passage gives us three certainties that lead us to that assurance. It's not a blind promise that we make as we say that to you as a true Christian. We say on the authority of God's word that you will overcome the world; that you will triumph spiritually in the end no matter what the particular obstacles may be that you're facing right now. But what you must understand, in order to enter into the enjoyment of that assurance, in order to enter into the reality of that and have it shape and solidify the

foundation upon which you stand, what you must do is understand why that is true; why it must be that way that true Christians would necessarily overcome the world without exception.

Why can we say that? Well, that brings us into the realm of Christian theology. It brings us into the realm of biblical truth. Why can we say that for sure? This passage gives us three reasons to understand that and the first one that you're going to see as we look at these first five verses is that we can say with certainty that true Christians overcome the world because of, 1: the source of their conversion. The source of their conversion. Where did your salvation come from? Where did this originate? If you understand this foundational principle, it will open up vistas of understanding, whereas before you were just seeing trees, this reality about the source of your conversion will lift you up and help you see the forest and the surrounding landscape so that you can have confidence that this overcoming faith belongs to you and that it will most certainly never fail. It's because of the source of your conversion and the source of your conversion, beloved, is God himself. If you're a Christian, it's because God originated that and brought that to pass in your life.

Look at verse 1 with me again. A Christian we can say very simply is someone who believes that Jesus is the Christ; that Jesus is God's appointed Savior for mankind and they have rested in Christ alone for their salvation. If you're a Christian today, you believe that. You agree with what I just said. You said "Amen" even if you didn't verbalize it; even if you didn't pound the seat in front of you and say, "That's what I believe." Well, if you're here today like that, if that's the heart conviction that you listen to these words with, well, let me tell you where that conviction came from: it wasn't from your own wisdom, that conviction came from God himself.

Look at chapter 5, verse 1, it says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." That means that God gave birth to us. As true Christians, God did the work of salvation in your life. He gave spiritual birth to you much in the same way as your biological mother gave birth to you. God gives birth to true Christians. He does a work in their hearts. He changes their heart of stone into a heart of flesh and then they come to Christ because it's what they want to do. We've said many times in chapter 4, verse 9, that we love, we didn't say this, the Apostle John did, that's an important distinction, isn't it? We love because he first loved us. God took the initiative to you. If you are here in Christ, it's because God originated that. God is the source of your salvation. It had to be that way, beloved, because you were just like me. You were just like me and every other sinner that's been born since the fall of Adam. You were born into sin. You were born with a nature that was disposed against God; that did not seek after God; that did not want God. Read Romans 3:10 to 18 if you have any questions about that and realize that Paul there is describing a universal condition of humanity.

Well, how is it, beloved, how is it that you got out of those chains of darkness when Satan had blinded your eyes, 2 Corinthians 4, if you were a hater of God, not seeking after him, not understanding, and Satan had blinded your eyes, how did you ever get out of that miserable condition? How is it that you could say when you were born like that by

the scriptural testimony that every man is in that natural condition, how is it then that you now find yourself rejoicing at the fact that Jesus is the Christ and that you believe in him? Don't you see that it wasn't from any powerful thing that you did? Don't you see that it wasn't you making a decision out of your own wisdom and own power? There had to be a supernatural powerful deliverance to bring you out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and that's what this passage is telling us. If we stand here today or in your case, if you sit here today, and you say from the depths of your heart, "I believe that about Christ. I trust him. I belong to him. I love him," what this is verses saying is that spiritual condition in which you find yourself is a result, a product of the original work of God in your heart. It came from him, not from you. Jonah 2:9, salvation belongs to the Lord. He is the one who gives it. He dispenses it. He brings it about. He brings it to pass. That does a couple of things to us: it humbles us. Oh, does it humble us. You embrace what the Bible says and you realize that, "I have been the recipient of mercy to be in this blessed position. This is not a spiritual achievement that I did on my own. Salvation is by grace through faith, not as a result of works, lest any man should boast." It is a gift of God, it says with great emphasis there in Ephesians 2. Gift of God it is, is how that passage reads.

So all of that to say that if you're a Christian here today, it's because God gave birth to you. The God who made the universe by his hands, who has sustained it from that moment of creation to the very present, the God who will one day bring all things to a great climax in Christ, that God is the God who gave birth to you. That God is the one who sent Christ to save you. That God is the one who offered his life in the person of his Son to pay the price for your sin. This was all something he did, it wasn't something we did for him or to him to provoke a reaction. He took the initiative with you. God alone acted in grace to bring about in your soul life where death had once prevailed.

Now, this is all context. This is all the foundation. Remember, the tone, the theme of John's passage here is that true Christians overcome the world. This isn't just theology in the abstract about the originating source of salvation. John is making this point, follow me beloved, he is making an emphasis about the source of your conversion in order to produce a spiritual result in your heart and what he's doing is he's saying that the source of your conversion is from God himself and because it comes from the omnipotent power of God, the one who started the work will perfect the work; he will keep the work. And because God is the source of your conversion, you can have confidence that his power will guarantee the final result that you will overcome the world in the end. You see, people who think that they participated in their own salvation, they can't live with that same level of confidence. If you think that you contributed to your salvation in some way, if you think it was your good decision, then do you know what? The ultimate outcome of that for you is going to be is uncertainty about your salvation. That is necessarily going to happen because you find mixed in what you claim to be your faith an element of self-reliance and you intrinsically know in your own conscience whether you would admit it to man or not, you know in your own conscience that you cannot please God and you cannot keep God on your own, you cannot keep yourself in Christ on your own, I should say. And to the extent that you're relying on anything that you did as the proof or the generating cause of your salvation, you are doomed to a lack of assurance

because you're relying on the flimsy rod of man rather than the firm pillar of God. You're leaning on that which can only pierce you in the end. But for those of us that understand that our salvation came from God and we trust what he has revealed in his word to tell us the truth about salvation, we rely not on ourselves but on what he has revealed, then when you understand the objective reality, the objective truth of the fact that salvation came from God, then you understand that that means that you will have to overcome the world because God does not fail in his purposes. He intends for you to overcome the world. He saved you and therefore he will keep you and the outcome is secure. The outcome is confidence as a result of this. Don't you see it? Where you think your salvation comes from is inextricably linked to your assurance about the result, the ultimate result.

So when we say God is sovereign in salvation, we say it not only because that's what the Bible teaches, we say it because we understand that this has a pastoral impact on the way Christians live in the midst of a hostile world. This isn't the product of our hands and therefore because it's not from us, the result lies in the one who started it, the one who started it was God. He's omnipotent even over the devil and he saved me now and he's going to save me forever. I'm going to overcome the world in the end. Praise be to God. And you see, when that train starts to run on the tracks of your mind whether you've got narrow gauge track or broad gauge track, I don't know, when that train starts to run on the track of your mind, there is an engine of assurance that is driving the reality of your life. Praise be to God. God is the source of our conversion and therefore it has to come out perfectly in the end. That's the assurance and the grace in which we live.

But how can you know that God has done that work in you? We see the source of conversion but how can you know that that's real in your own life? Well, that brings us to our second point this morning. How can you know that you belong to him? You look for the sign of conversion. You look for the sign of conversion and I love this point as John expresses it here. If you're taking notes, let me just give you a very simple explanation of what that means. The sign of conversion is a transformed character that reflects the character of the God who gave spiritual birth to you. The sign of conversion is a transformed character that reflects the character of the God who gave spiritual birth to you.

Now, we've said that the outcome has to be certain if God is the source of our conversion. We talk about the outcome, let's bring it back into the present because that's what John does here. The sign of conversion is a transformed character that reflects the character of the God who gives spiritual birth. Now, watch this, this really isn't complicated, this really isn't difficult; it's very clear and logical to follow. If God is the one who gave birth to you, then just like your physical characteristics reflect those of your biological parents, so in the spiritual realm your life will reflect the spiritual character of the one who gave birth you. That makes perfect sense, doesn't it? If God gave birth to you, then somehow you're going to reflect the nature of God in your life. Somehow in one way or another, not in perfection, but there are going to be family resemblances to God amongst his children just as there are family resemblances in your circle of biological family. There is some manner of physical resemblance, well, in the spiritual realm it's the same way. A

person whose life is arrayed against the desires and holiness of God has no claim on knowing his character no matter what kind of decision he claims he made in the past.

But follow me here, who is this God that gave spiritual birth? What is he like? You see, you can't get away from theology. You can't get away from theology and if you're a Christian, you don't want to because theology, biblical theology is what informs your life. It's what shapes reality. It's how you know the truth about the condition of your soul. Well, theology, the Bible, let's say, teaches us that God is holy, that God is love, and that God is true. God is a righteous God. He's a loving God as shown at the cross of Calvary. He is a true God as he has spoken in his word. That's the nature of the moral character of God. He's not arbitrary. He's not a liar. He's not ungracious. He's holy and he's loving and he's true. Now, watch this, beloved, what this means for your life and for the condition of your soul: the one to whom God has given birth will reflect the character traits of God himself in his life or her life. I don't want to leave out the ladies here. If God gave birth to you, you're going to look like him in one manner or another. That's what this passage teaches. The sign of your conversion is a life that increasingly resembles the character of God. It has to be that way. If God is the source of conversion and if God is holy, righteous and true, then the one to whom he gives birth is going to reflect those character traits.

Look at verse 1 with me again and watch how this flows, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and," here are the consequences that flow out of being born of God. There is a connector there, the word "and." These two things are joined together, the source of conversion and the sign of conversion. "What can we say, Apostle John? What can we say about this one who's been born of God?" We can say this based on the authority of the Scriptures: the one who is born of God, "whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." Look at verse 2, "By this we know that we love the children of God, 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." Notice the verbs here, beloved. Notice the verbs. Whoever believes, there is the attribute of God's truth being put on display. God has said this, God is true, and we believe his truth. You believe in response to that. There is truth that animates your character. There is truth that animates your convictions. This is not a matter of passing interest. No, these are convictions that you believe that are the rock of your soul and that you would not let go of no matter what. You believe these things from the depths of your heart because God is true and you get animated about it in one degree or another because you as a Christian share the life of God who gave birth to you. He's a true God and you get animated over the things of his truth. A love for truth marks a true Christian. Notice the verbs: believes, chapter 5, verse 1; verse 2, love, by this we know we love the children of God. There is belief, there is love, and at the end of verse 2, observe his commandments, there is obedience that reflects the righteousness of God.

John has emphasized the themes of love and obedience and truth as the marks of a true Christian throughout this entire epistle. You can read it for yourself and see it, "By this we know that we have come to know him if we love God and keep his commandments. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." He's emphasized this

repeatedly. What he has done up until now, we won't take the time to go through this. I invite you if you have any question about this to just read the epistle of 1 John a few times and you'll see what I mean. What John has done up to this point in the first four chapters is he has gone back and forth; he has woven things together and he would start with this one strand of obedience and he would discuss it for a while and then he would discuss the issue of love and he would discuss and explain that for a while. Then in chapter 4, he started to really emphasized the importance of truth when he said, "Test the spirits to see whether they're from God." So you see the love, the obedience and the truth discussed separately throughout the course of the epistle.

Well, watch this, what he's doing now is he's weaving those threads together to make a single rope. Those three things are wrapped around one another in what he's saying here and they become like multiple strands of twine, woven together, wrapped together to form a single rope. These character traits of belief, love and obedience form a, watch this, oh, please watch this, form a single indivisible unit by which you can know whether you are truly saved or not. While these three tests of love, obedience and truth are separate analytically, they are indivisible in the life of a true Christian. They are an indivisible unit of assessing the reality of true conversion. Now, watch this, stay with me here, they are indivisible by which I mean that all three are present without exception in one degree or another in the life of every true Christian. You can't have one without the other if your conversion is real because, always listen, when I use the word "because" really pay attention then: all three must be present because of the source of your conversion. Because God is one, because God has these characteristics, these attributes, perfectly and indivisibly in his very nature, therefore when he gives birth to you, when he imparted his life to you, he imparted a life that was indivisibly marked by love, truth and righteousness, and because it comes from one source, one indivisible life is imparted, then the three attributes that John has been emphasizing will all be present in the life of a true Christian. You can't have one without the other. Oh, that's so important. Let me say it again: this love, this obedience, this truth, those three things are indivisible signs because they all flow from the indivisible life of God. This is what God is like. God is the source of your conversion, you're going to reflect the character of God in those three ways. His character is true, it is loving, it is righteous.

Now, I want you to realize what we just did here. What we just did here is just really, really important because we are defining salvation and we are defining the marks of salvation by starting with God and his character than starting with what you see in your life. That is so important. You have to understand salvation as God sees it. You have to understand it from a God-centered perspective before you start to evaluate your own life. Because of who God is and because of what he does, then you know what to expect. If you start with what you've done or decisions that you've made or prayers that you prayed and then try to work your way back up to God, you've got bad glasses on; you're going to see it wrongly. But when you start with the character of God, then you know what to expect and you've separated out the nature of salvation from your personal experience of it. You have to start with the truth before you try to apply it to your soul.

But here's what John is saying, look at verse 2 with me again, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." You see, there is the love of the brethren and the obedience of keeping his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. A true Christian welcomes that kind of instruction. A true Christian whose spiritual life is pulsating with the nature of God, a true Christian who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him is going to have a natural affinity for what John is saying here. "Well, of course I want to love God's people. Why wouldn't I? They are my kindred brethren, they're my kindred friends. We share everything in common. We have a common destiny. Of course I love them." There is a sense in which your nature produces this even apart from the commandment of God. It's just natural. And when you obey God, when your heart is oriented toward that and you want to be responsive to his word, you realize you fall short, you know that your life has elements that fall short of the glory of God, but when you get down to your real man, when you're out from under the influence of temptation and you're just able to assess who you really are at the core of your heart, you say, "If I could obey God perfectly, I would. I love obedience to God more than I love sin. It's just that this sin clings to me and I can't completely get rid of it but, oh, if I could, I would," and you see what your heart desires are. You see what is animating your life. God commands us to love the brethren and you say, "That's what I want." When you obey God, it's consistent with the deepest desires of your heart.

Look at what he says again in verse 2 and here's where I want you to see how this obedience and love is tied so closely together that you can't separate them. This is really remarkable the way John joins these things together in verse 2. He says, "By this we know that we love the children of God." How can you know that you are loving the brethren that are in your life? We love the children of God, "when we love God and observe His commandments." Wow, that's not what you'd expect. You know, you love the children of God when you give something to them or you sacrifice for them or whatever. John here says that your love for the children of God is shown by your obedience to God himself. Your willingness to obey God is a reflection of, it's interlinked with your love for the people of God. It's remarkable. He joins those together.

Let's think about it from the converse of things. If you harbor unrepentant sin in your life, let's get really personal, if you harbor unrepentant sin in your life, you do not love the people of God. Your sin grieves those who love him. If you loved them, knowing that true believers, oh, follow me with this because this just shapes life in a local body, if you loved the people of God, you would recognize that they aspire after holiness; that the thing that really motivates a child of God is the glory of God; that they want to see God glorified and God is glorified when his people love him and obey him. Now, watch this, if you know that to be true about the people of God in general, then you would understand that your stubborn, unrepentant sin is a grief to their heart. It grieves the people of God when they see professing Christians living in open unbroken sin because it's so contrary to the nature of a true Christian. "How can you do that? Don't you see that you're disobeying God? Don't you see that you're grieving his Spirit? Don't you see that this hurts the body of Christ? Oh, my friend, don't you understand? You're breaking my heart." Well, someone who loves a true Christian is never going to want to persist in that

and say, "I can't do that to my fellow believers. How could I live that way? How could I do that to the people that I love?" You see, if you loved the people of God, you wouldn't try to view your sin in isolation from them, you would realize that sin in the body affects the whole body and you'd say, "I've got to repent of this if for no other reason out of love for the people of God."

I think about that as a pastor, you know, you realize, we're all in this boat together; we all experience temptations and struggles and all that, right? You know that. I can honestly tell you that my life and my motivation to pursue holiness and to keep on the narrow path has often been fueled and motivated by the fact that I realize that if I sin it's going to hurt you. I can't go that direction. I can't let my life get off the rails. I can't let myself get into that which would disqualify me morally from the pastorate because it would hurt you. Well, just understand that that's the way all of us should be thinking about the priority of holiness in our lives. When you sin, trust me, it grieves your pastor. It grieves those around you that love God and are pursuing holiness and that's what John is saying here. Look at verse 2 with me again, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments."

Back in my former life, back in 2,000 miles West wherever that place is, it's hard to remember these days because I'm so happy to be here with you, I was going through a church discipline situation with a guy. I don't remember all the details and the details aren't important, but I was appealing to him saying, "Brother, don't you see that you're in sin? Don't you see that this is wrong? It's a violation of God's word?" He said, "Look," he said, "I love you too but I'm not going to change." That's a crock, if you want the theological term for that attitude. You can look it up in any theological dictionary, crock, you know, a man who claims to love God's people when he's still in sin, and if you don't find it there, let me know, in your theological dictionaries. That's a crock. That's an utter fallacy. That is hypocrisy at its worst to say, "I love you but I'm not going to change. I'm not going to let go of this sin." It would be far better to say simply, "I'm not going to let go of this sin," rather than play the part of a hypocrite and say that you love a fellow Christian when they're calling you to repentance but you say, "I'm not going to change." You can't love somebody and intentionally inflict that kind of profound grief upon them, can you? Where is love in that? That elevates and prefers your sin over the body of Christ and the joy and unity and harmony of God's people? Oh, do you see that your personal private sin is a disruptive force in the love and harmony and the unity of God's people and if for no other reason, you should let go and repent of sin for the sake of the love of God's people whose heart affections are upon you and desire what's good for you and pray for you.

That's one way to picture it. We're just kind of meandering here a bit. That's one way to picture it, to picture the fact that as you are out in your little realm of sin, to remember this, that there are Christians in your life who are on their knees or with their heads bowed, begging God to work and to deliver you from that, saying, "God, help them grow spiritually. Produce holiness in their lives. Save them. Deliver them from that sin." And the reality, the recognition that the people of God lift up before God their heartfelt petitions on your behalf in the midst of your rebellion, should cause your heart to melt

and say, "I can't keep living this way. I can't continue on in this sin because to do so is to betray the people of God. I love them too much to do that." That's the way a true Christian views his sin. And those of you who had believing parents, perhaps that are gone these days and you lived through your spell of rebellion and you know that it broke your parents hearts, you know exactly what I'm talking about, this hardly needs exposition. Those of you who sinned or are sinning against Christian parents should realize the grief that that causes. Oh, it's not that they're angry with you; it's not that they would abandon you, their prayers will go on as long as God gives them breath. But the reality of the love that Christians have for you changes the prism through which you view sin. Without obedience to God, your claim to love the people of God is a fiction. So we need to take these things seriously. We need to take these things seriously.

But look at verse 3 as we move on here, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." His commandments are not burdensome. When God saves us, he gives us his indwelling Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us and the Spirit imparts the power to obey. These commandments, the word of God, is impossible, it's a closed book to the understanding of the unbelieving and it's also an impossible burden for them to keep because they don't have the power to do it. Well, understand, oh, oh, understand that when God saves you, he doesn't change the standard of his word, rather what he does is he gives you new life and the power to carry it in a way that you couldn't before. He gives you the power to live righteously in a way that you didn't have before. That's why it's not burdensome, it's because God in his salvation has done a work in your heart to enable you to carry these things out because now they're consistent with your desires.

But notice this: it's more than just the indwelling Spirit, it's the matter of your whole heart affections. Look at verse 3 with me again. Look down and read it with your own eyes, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." When God calls us to obedience, when we see the way of the Christian life laid out before us, a true Christian doesn't rebel against that; a true Christian doesn't resist that or find it irksome. A true Christian has such a great love for his heavenly Father who is the source of his conversion that he says, "It's my delight, Father, to honor you and to obey you even when it's difficult because I love you so much, I love you so much that I'm glad to obey." In other words, it's not contrary to the desires of a true Christian to follow, honor and obey the word of God, he delights in it because he loves the Father who gave that word to us. So love lightens what would otherwise be a burden.

In the earthly realm, I've seen this so many times as people are in the throes of death, this isn't the best analogy, all I'm illustrating is the point that love is happy to embrace duty. So many times as I've walked into situations where people are on their deathbeds and, you know, their bodily functions are no longer under their own control and they're thrashing about and all of that, there's no resistance to that. You see family members over and over again gladly caring for those otherwise distasteful responsibilities, glad to do it because they love the person and want to minister to their needs. You know what that's like. You don't reject that and resist it, you realize their helplessness and a family shares

in that and they accept it and their hands tenderly care to the needs. All I'm saying is that it's love for that dying person that causes them to do that which they would object to with someone else.

Well, from that low human level, understand that for the true Christian, when it comes to seeing what God requires in his word, the true Christian runs to that. The true Christian loves that. The true Christian embraces that because they love the author of the word and his word is not running counter to their nature and desires like it used to in their unconverted state. As one who has been born again from above, you have the same sympathy in seed form in your heart to the one who gave the word in the first place. It's consistent with your desires. It's consistent with your love. And because you love God, you want to obey his word even if it's hard. That's the mark of a true Christian. That's a sign of conversion. That love for the brethren, that love for God's word, that love for obedience, that desire, that pleasure that comes from obeying him, it's all wrapped around like strands of DNA that form the spiritual DNA of a true believer. These things are just woven throughout the fabric of Christian life and we're happy to show our devotion through our obedience to what God wants us to do. It's not a sacrifice to lay down an aspect of your life for the sake of obedience to Christ. You don't even view it as a sacrifice. You say, "Well, of course, that's what I would do. Of course. This is what God's word requires. Do you expect me to do something contrary to God's word when it's so clear? Please." It's not a sacrifice, it's the love, it's the delight of your heart.

Now, let me bring all of this together. The fact that this is indivisible has a really important application for those of you that struggle with assurance and that question your salvation and I want you to listen to me really carefully on this. People who question their salvation, Christians, let's put it this way, who question their salvation are often discouraged because they have a besetting sin that they just can't seem to overcome and they start to view their entire Christian experience through the prism of that one ongoing besetting sin and failure in their lives. Now, a life that's utterly dominated by sin in every respect is the life of someone who's not entitled to assurance but, look, the Lord understands that we are creatures of flesh, he knows our frame, he knows our weakness, and here's how you apply what we've been talking about, this indivisible nature of these three affirming marks of a true Christian: what this means is that you have to step out of the realm of that besetting sin and think more broadly about the nature of your life and the nature of your conversion. If you simply focus on one predominant area of failure to the exclusion of everything else that is in your life, yes, you're going to find that you've got plenty of reason to doubt your salvation. But, beloved, what you have to understand is that you step back and you take a healthier, broader, more informed, complete perspective about the whole landscape of your life. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God sent from heaven in order to save you from your sins? Is your life marked by that truth? Do you stake your eternal well-being on that? Do you love the people of God? Do you serve them? Do you want to be with them? Do you find your kindred spirits in the midst of the people of God? Do you love the word of God even though you realize you fall short of its call on your life? Well, you see, a true Christian can look at those things and say, "Do you know what? Those things, that broader context is true. Now, there's a spot, there's a stain that still needs to be cleaned out of the fabric of

my life but the overall seamless garment of my life is consistent with this indivisible unit that I see out of 1 John 5 of desires for love, desires for obedience, and desires and commitments and convictions of truth." You see, you view it comprehensively, not isolating it down to one particular besetting sin and then saying, "That defines everything about the spiritual reality of my life."

John gives us multiple grounds by which to test the reality of our conversion, not just one. You let the totality of Scripture inform your spiritual self-assessment. You take them all together. You don't isolate one from the others. That changes an awful lot because, you see, while that besetting sin may be inconsistent with your Christian testimony, a deep reverence for God's word, a love for Christ, a love for his people, areas of obedience, areas of commitment, those things are spiritual realities that don't come from your flesh and that do not come from Satan. So if you see these marks, you are entitled to biblical assurance of your salvation while you deal with the ongoing ramifications of that particular besetting sin in your life. This changes everything. God intends you to know that your salvation is real. So you step back and you say, "What's the whole picture? What's the indivisible sign?" And then you assess it from there.

Now, hold onto your hats. Any hats in here? No, me either. If you see the sign of conversion and I'm deliberately using the singular, the sign of conversion shown in the threefold reflection of the character of God in truth, righteousness and love, if you see the sign of that conversion and you see it growing in your life even though it is still immature and yet imperfect, if you see the transformed character that reflects the source of conversion, if you see the transformed character that is the mark of a true Christian, watch this, point 3, you are entitled by birthright to point 3: the security of conversion. The security of conversion. The security of conversion means that everyone who receives the new birth will overcome the world and certainly be saved in the end without fail and without exception. That is your birthright. That's why we have taken so much time to explain this; to talk about the character of God and the marks of a true believer. It's all leading to a pastoral point for your spiritual well-being. It's all about you enjoying the realities of your salvation. It's all about your security.

Look at what John says in verse 4. He said in chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," well, now he picks up on that phrase "born of God," having in between explained the signs, the marks of what true conversion looks like, now he does a "therefore," as it were, and shows what his point has been all along. Verse 4, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and 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?" Oh, beloved, watch this, the new birth has taken us out of the realm of darkness and put us into the family of God. We have been decisively, you if you're a Christian, have been decisively delivered from the realm of Satan. You have been delivered from darkness into light and now what John is saying, because you find yourself in that position now, you can know for certain what the future holds for you before it happens. You can know that the future holds for you an overcoming victory over this world that is arrayed against your spiritual life. You triumph in the end. Victory belongs to you and will most certainly be your final experience of the

outcome of your salvation. Look at what he says. He says it three times in two verses because he knows that you are prone to miss the point so he repeats himself again and again in order that you won't miss it. Look at verse 4, "For whatever is born of God," 1, "overcomes the world; and this is the victory that," 2, "has overcome the world – our faith. Who is," 3, "the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Beloved, look, I know that you sometimes feel really weak in your Christian life and there are times where you just blow it and you're dealing with confession and the confessing of the same sin again or you're uncertain about where to go and it seems like everything is just weighing you down, speaking more broadly, we look out at the broader Christian church and we see weakness, we see a lack of commitment, a willingness to compromise, a love for entertainment over a love for the truth of the word of God, and we say, "This is the church? Look at it." Our influence is dwindling. Politically the church doesn't have the influence that it once had in our American culture and you see weakness in your own spiritual life. That is precisely the time that you and I have to come back to this reality of the word of God. True Christians overcome the world. Period. This is not subject to qualification or dismissal.

No matter how weak the church may be at the moment, Christ will prevail in the end. He said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." So while it may seem that it's low tide for the Christian church today, the tide is going to come back in. One day the tide of spiritual victory is going to wash over everything and there will be no doubt that Christ has fulfilled his word. "I built my church and here she is in her triumphant glory." No one will question it then. And what's true on that global scale, beloved, is going to be true in your life too if you're Christian. The general will become specific. In your times of weakness, understand that the power of God is undiminished. He who began the work in you will complete it and you will end up in glory perfected, glorified, sharing in the glory of Christ, having perfectly overcome this miserable, rotten world that is opposed to your spiritual well-being because true Christians overcome the world. Three times. If God said it once it would be enough for us to believe it. He didn't say it just once here. He didn't say it just twice. He said it three times so that we could not miss the point. This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith, and our faith comes from the God who gave birth to us and therefore its victory and its overcoming power is assured. Your salvation could no more fail than if Jesus Christ himself could fail. Christ saved you, he cannot fail, your salvation cannot fail. It is indestructible and that is the assurance that undergirds your life as you go through this world as a true Christian. Christ has won the victory. His cross was a perfect salvation. "It is finished," he said. If it's finished then it's not going to be reopened for further appeal.

Beloved, do you see it? Do you see the great assurance and confidence and serenity and peace that that speaks into your troubled heart? No matter what, if you're a Christian, leave this place in confidence. No matter what, go in peace.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, yours is the voice that calmed the sea and yours is the continuing spiritual power that has the ability to calm the human heart. Help us to seek you, help us to be faithful to you, and as we do that, manifest your faithfulness to us in response. Father, for those that are here that don't know Christ, we pray, once again, we will pray and plead for them as long as you give us breath, Father, that you would save them and bring them into your kingdom by your great power. Bring them to Christ. Call them to Christ. Place upon their hearts the irresistible urge to come to Christ for salvation. Salvation belongs to you, O Lord. We ask that you would accomplish your purposes and save those who are in our midst who don't know you and be gracious to them as only you can be. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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