

Eternal Life Test

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 13:3-6
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As you are being seated, take your Bibles and go to 2 Corinthians, if you will. 2 Corinthians 13. Let me begin by saying when I was converted some 38 plus years ago, I was in my car driving back to college and heard a Presbyterian pastor over the radio share some simple things about the love of Christ to the death of Christ for sinners, and how only Christ could bring us to a right standing before the holy God, and there in my car not knowing what was happening, I could not have explained to you how I had been converted, I could not have explained to you that my life had been born again; I had to learn that later, actually, but I knew something radical had happened and something wonderful had happened. I did come to embrace Christ as the one I loved and treasured, the one I believed in and hoped in, and then as the weeks and months went by, I learned more and more. However in churches in that day, Baptist churches in particular, there was just a very weighty and almost exclusive notion that salvation involved simply and only asking Jesus to save you. Salvation was simply on did you ask him to save you. Well, yes I did. Well, if you mean that, then you're saved. Well, I'm not against that, we just need more than that because like everything else – listen to me – Satan is the great counterfeiter. He knows how to take the same thing that is spiritually sound and reproduce it in the flesh and it's not spiritual and it's not sound.

So I would begin to wonder about my conversion. You couldn't have been more ignorant than I was in those days, and very sweet, very compassionate good folks, I know they loved Christ but that's basically all they could tell me when I inquire about, "Well, how do you really know you are born again?" "Well, did you pray that prayer or did you ask Jesus to save you?" And I thought, "Well, to be honest, that night in my car, I didn't pray that prayer." That night in my car I just wept before God and cried out to him. It was almost like it was beyond words. There was no physical action I did or act that I did. I don't know how to explain it other than it was deeper than that. Yes, a huge overwhelming sense of my sin and need and a glorious and wondrous sense of Christ as my all provision, and in faith my heart grasped him and clung to him, but as far as did you do that, I didn't do that, because they would say, "Did you do that?"

Now again, that's not wrong. We shouldn't beat those folks up because I began to teach that too because I was taught it, but then as I studied the Scriptures more and more and studied our Baptist and Puritan forefathers, I realized they didn't use those phrases or those terms in their evangelism and I thought, "Well, wait a minute, if the Bible is the

Bible and godly men have been studying it for 2,000 years, why didn't everybody use the same approach when it came to speaking to people about how you become a Christian or how you're saved?" And I began to realize studying more in church history, along the way some well intending, I'm convinced, brothers began to reduce down the flow of conversion to a few steps, if you will, on the human side of the equation. Yes, men must believe. Yes, men must repent. And yes, there is a calling on the Lord. But it's more than just quoting or stating a certain prayer or going through a certain motion, and sometimes I call that a hoop jump.

So about roughly 150 years ago is when this became very very popular. Charles Finney was very strong in the movement. I know God used Mr. Finney to save a lot of souls, but I also know that there are a lot of people who did the motions or the steps that Finney said to do that never were converted. Billy Graham, of course, used a lot of those steps and Dr. Graham's own testimony he says so very very many of those who did the thing at the end of my services were not truly converted. As a matter of fact, the statistics show that there were no real increases in church attendance even after his greatest crusades. Now, I'm not saying no one has been saved at a Billy Graham, I love Billy Graham and I love that he appealed to men to repent and come to Christ. Don't misunderstand me, but even Dr. Graham himself said there was a great gap between what people did and it showing up as fruit, lasting fruit, that is genuine converts that lasted.

So you and I many years ago began to study this together and look at this together and analyze this together, and one of the things we came up with, two parts of what we came up with was this: 1. the glory of God is on the line, we've got to get this right. We can't just do what we do, we've got to make sure it's right and true. Secondly, especially our children. Our children are far too precious to us just to quickly when they are six or seven at a camp, at a vacation Bible school, run them through a motion and say, "It's done, baby. It's over. You're saved." Folks, you might do that to your children or grandchildren but I want more for mine. I want them to know something deeper than just going through the motion.

And often when I teach pastors and when I speak on this, I'll talk about how we actually unintentionally, I think people have the best motives, but we actually created what I would call a Baptist sacrament. Do you know what sacramentalism is? Basically the Catholic Church teaches you come to church, you go to the priest, he administers the Mass and the other sacraments of the church, and through you doing those things, you secure eternal salvation. Well, Baptists kind of did the same thing. We kind of got to the point where we threw out some sacraments and if you come to the front, if you pray that prayer, did you raise your hand, did you whatever it was. I mean, the statistics are overwhelmingly clear. It has been study after study after study after study has been done on Baptist and evangelical life and we find that upwards to 70 percent of our converts, up to 70 percent of our converts do not remain faithful or even look anything like a Christian but they did the stuff we are saying you do that "gets you converted."

Now, let's be kind and let's be balanced in our spirit though, saints of God. Let's don't say that telling somebody to pray a prayer and receive Christ is wrong. As a matter of fact, I

still do that. Just don't say that walking to the front is always wrong. I don't mean that that's always wrong but here's what I do mean: if we are not careful – now listen to what I'm saying – if we're not careful, that can become a Baptist sacrament. It's something a person does in the strength of their own flesh and they go, "Phew, I finally got the nerve to walk down there. I'm okay now." And I am deeply concerned that untold millions will be in hell because some well intending person said, "If you did that, that's enough."

Have you ever noticed that in Jesus' ministry, you think if anybody got it right, Jesus would have gotten it right. Jesus left nobody with a 1, 2, 3, "Do this, do this, do this." Jesus left nobody with, "Say this simple prayer." It's just not in the Bible. It's just not there. But what he did do was he said to a man named Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you must be born again. There must be a new life. There must be something changed about you, Nicodemus." Nicodemus says, "Well, what does this mean? Am I to go back into my mother's womb and be born?" He said, "No, Nicodemus, things of the flesh are of the flesh. That's a fleshly birth you're talking about. The things of the Spirit are spiritual. Nicodemus, what I'm talking about is a spiritual birthing, is a birthing of new spiritual life that comes in." As a matter of fact, the Bible is full of this teaching.

Now, we're in 2 Corinthians 13 as the Apostle Paul is winding down this letter to this contentious and difficult church he is pastoring, and in this contentious and difficult church, they kept questioning whether the Apostle Paul was the genuine thing. They kept questioning whether he was even a Christian, much less an apostle. So as he gets to chapter 13 in what we have organized as chapters, he kind of turns the table on them and he says – I'll go down to verse 5 of 2 Corinthians 13. He says, "Test yourselves." His point is, "You've been testing me like I need you to test me but," he said, "now I want you to test yourselves and see if you are in the faith."

He elaborates further, "examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test." Paul says, "I know Christ has truly converted me. I know I have experienced the new birth. I know I've received this new life and I know that I've been called to be God's apostle. You've been putting me to the test as your pastor," Paul was saying, "now here, I'm going to turn this and I'm going to put you to the test." By the way, friends, this is sacred Scripture for all Christians of all generations. Every Christian should spend his entire Christian life to one degree or another testing himself and examining himself to see if he is in the faith. I don't mean you stay up every night weeping and in turmoil before the Lord. I absolutely 100 percent believe in the perseverance of the saints and the eternal security of the believer, but there is another side of that coin whereby we as true Christians spend our lives and continually are assessing, "Do I look like one that has experienced a spiritual new birth?" That's healthy. Our forefathers taught this and I know what it is, in our fallen nature in our flesh – listen to me – don't we want a quick little fix to make sure we get fixed or our spouse gets fixed or our kids get fixed, our grandkids get the fix, and then we could just be done with it? We don't want to have to wrestle with God. We don't want to have to pray some things through. We don't want to have to strive some along the way, but that's good and normal and right to have some of that.

"Test yourself," he says, "not just that, not only just test yourself but examine yourself," he says, "to see if you're in the faith." Now, another way I would say this is test yourself or examine yourself to see if you have the new eternal life in you. Is it there?

As we talked about earlier in this last century, century and a half, particularly of modern evangelicalism and Baptist life in particular, we find that the statistics are overwhelming that our converts and our church members do not look anything like true Christians. Nothing like true Christian. I mean, we can't find, Southern Baptists can't find 70 or so percent of their church members. Can I say something to you? If you're born again, you come to church. You just do. If you get married, you go home to your wife. That's what you do. The statistics for teenagers and children is overwhelmingly bad. George Barna is the leading researcher among evangelical Christians, leading researcher, I should say among evangelical Christians. George Barna says that beyond 80 percent of students in conservative "Bible believing evangelical churches" when they leave high school leave the church. Do you know why? They are not born again.

"Well, it's just the world and it's just college and they are sowing their wild oats." Who told you that? Find those adolescent years in the Bible, they're not there. The Bible talks about a child and then you raise a child, then you become an adult. These intervening years from 15 or 16 to 28 where you're just supposed to be wild and irresponsible is of hell and of the devil. It's not biblical. It's not God. And children who grow up to know Christ continue living for Christ. I'm not saying there can't be a time or two or a season or two of struggle, but this five years, eight years, decade-long just live like the world but yet know that, "Well, when I was in vacation Bible school, I prayed to receive Christ so I'm okay." That's not of God.

So we're losing generally our church members overall and among children, we are radically losing. Any other entity in the world that had that kind of failure rate would call a meeting and say, "Stop what we're doing. Let's reevaluate this. It's failing." By the way, have you heard, practically speaking Southern Baptists leading the way, all evangelical denominations are declining. Our missions work has declined radically and I just want to go and run through a wall somewhere because 35 years ago, though naïve and immature in many ways, I began screaming about the way we were on a wrong track and it would not be sustainable and it would cause our downfall. We were running to gimmick after gimmick, worldly thing after worldly thing, fad after fad, entertainment after entertainment, to try to get people to love Jesus. What do you think Jesus feels about that, attaching all of this worldly faddish gimmicky nonsense to him and his work to "make people think he's more desirable"? Well, what's missing in all of that? What's missing in all of this is spiritual life in the heart of the believer because – listen, once you're born again, there is a germ in there that you never get over. There is a germ in your heart, a spiritual life, that draws you toward, that has an appetite. You might slip here or there, you might wander over here or wander over there, but do you know what? You'll come back to where there is spiritual life. Here's what I'm telling you: it holds you when you are truly born again, when you have the new life.

So I want to give you this morning a test for eternal life. A test. I want you to do what I have done in studying this, I want you to test yourselves afresh. I want you to examine yourself anew. Truly like I said, every Bible study, every small group hour, every preaching service is a re-examining, "Lord, do I look like one of yours? Do I have the evidences of true spiritual life?" Well, this morning is going to be a little more thorough, maybe a little more pointed in that direction but good for all of us.

Let me just give you a few foundational verses here to get started to show how often the Scriptures emphasize this aspect of conversion being the imparting of new life into us from God. In 1 John 5:12 and 13, "He who has the Son has the life," he has the life, "he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Look, this is not talking about you in your human ability and you in your human natural strength starting a new approach to life. That's not what this is. It means God acting on you and imparting into you new spiritual life. It's not a new direction, not turning over a new leaf, it's the impartation of life into you. Brothers and sisters, we preach and teach and hold to an experiential religion. You must have had an experience of new life.

John 3:3-7 again, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, here's what you don't understand: something has got to happen to you from outer space. Something outside of you. You can't grasp it, you cannot manipulate it, you cannot create it." Are you listening to me, church leader? You can't formulate a man system to manipulate it into happening, either. Are you hearing me? You must be acted upon by God. Nicodemus says, "Well, how does this happen?" Jesus said, "It's like the wind." Well, thanks for helping us out on that, Jesus. Have you ever tried to grasp the wind? That's exactly what Jesus wanted, he wanted you to be bewildered about it. He wanted you to know, "Get your stinking little formulas and plans and systems and hoop jumps out of it. It's not like that, it's like the wind." He said, "The wind blows where it wills, it's over here one day, it's over there the next day. You don't know where it's going. You don't know where it's coming from. So it is of all who are born of the Spirit." You can't lasso it, you can't get it in a headlock, it's outside of you. God controls this. Humble yourself, proud man, this is God's work and God's alone.

I've told you this story before but it's a powerful little story. During the Civil War, some of the Confederate generals seemingly were very very devout men. I don't understand the wickedness of slavery in that era. I do know up until that time, practically the whole world practiced slavery and men of all races practiced slavery. That doesn't absolve the guilt of America. Don't misunderstand me. I'm just saying that when you're in an environment where everybody is doing it, it gets easier to sin, doesn't it?

Nevertheless, there was something of a documented spiritual awakening in the Confederate troops and I believe it was, yeah, it was Stonewall Jackson, he was particularly burdened for the souls of his men. He knew he was leading them into battle the next day and I believe it was the Presbyterian, R. L. Dabney, he asked him, he was an

eminent theologian of the day, he asked him to come and preach to his troops. Dabney preached to those men. Do you know he preached to those men the night before they were going into battle and most of them would be slaughtered, do you know what he preached to them? Do you know what he preached to them? The doctrine of election. I don't know that I would do that. And at the end of the sermon, Dabney said to those men, "I know what you're saying, you're saying if God is sovereign in this, then what can we do? What can we do?" He said, "Well, you're like a man standing in his house and he realizes his house is on fire. He's upstairs and he begins to gather some things and starts to run down the steps and as he gets to the steps, the flames are just leaping up the steps so all he can do is go to the window and cry for mercy." Sir, that's where you are. You've got to go to the window of grace and cry for mercy and say, "I can't fix this, I can't cure this, I can't cleanse myself or forgive myself, I'm just coming to the window of grace and crying for mercy."

Here's the beautiful truth that concludes Dabney's sermon and thought, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." From the human side, we understand that if God has drawn us that far, he's going to complete the transaction. My point being to you, some of the great, George Whitefield was the most prominent preacher of the Great Awakening of the central part of the eighteenth century or so, our colonies here in America had the Great Awakening, he preached all over Europe. He was a staunch believer in the sovereignty of God in salvation and that God had to impart the new life, and he used nothing of the systems we are all comfortable with today. Nothing of the walking to the front. Nothing of an inquirer or a mourner's bench. Nothing of repeat this prayer. He thundered the Gospel, called on men to repent and believe in Christ, and by the way, filled churches with his converts. Filled churches. It's historically documented.

But you and I, we are on this pilgrimage together some years ago of saying, "This has got to be fixed. I'm not comfortable as your pastor losing 80 percent of my kids to the world." If I'm losing 80 percent of my kids when they graduate as a pastor, I'm going to try to fix something and I think God has led us to a good degree to fix things. You've got to have the new life.

Ephesians 2:5, "even when we were dead." I remember Dr. Jimmy Milliken, my theological professor at seminary saying, "How dead were you?" Hello? "Even when we were dead," while being dead. Dr. Milliken, we'd egg him on. He was a great preacher. He has been here two or three times. We would egg him on until his glasses went like this down to this right here, and when they got down like this, he was really preaching. His point is dead men cannot walk aisles, dead men cannot pray prayers, dead men cannot raise their hand to be saved. Dead men have to be quickened to life to do anything.

Paul writes to the Ephesians and says, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive." The Greek construction shows you that as a lifeless spiritual corpse, God acted on you and brought new life. Now, you've got to understand, God has done something for us that we can't really handle. God has given us something of the divine perspective and it's beyond our human comprehension because on the human side, you must tell people to repent and believe and call on the Lord. They must do that, absolutely,

but he didn't just leave us there because he knew if he just left us there, we would form a few sacraments, a few hoop jumps, and we would be done with it. He wanted to let us know, "No, there is a divine side to this that you've got to wrestle with." 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ," he has turned over a new leaf, he has started a new life? No, "he is a brand-new creation, the old things have passed away, new things have come." He is brand spanking new.

In John 4:33, Jesus said an hour is coming and now is when true worshipers will worship in spirit, new spiritual life, and in truth. In John 5, Jesus said an hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live. But he didn't just say an hour is coming, he said an hour is coming and now is when the dead, that's the spiritually dead, will hear the voice, God will speak and they will come to spiritual life. Why do you do what you do? Why are you disinterested like you are disinterested? Why do you love the world? Why do you love sin? Why are you dissatisfied in church and unhappy under sound preaching and a sound ministry? Why do you run from it? It's because you are dead spiritually. There is a deficit in your soul, spiritually speaking.

That's why of all things the Methodist preacher, John Wesley, I don't agree with his theology but I liked a lot of his preaching because he preached expecting the Spirit to do the work. They asked John Wesley, "Why everywhere you go, John, everywhere you go you preach you must be born again?" John said, "Because you must be born again." Now, what's the context? The context was the Anglican church. The church of England dominated the 13 colonies and the Christian world as we know it. That was just the dominant religious presence. It wasn't Baptist, we were tiny in those days, but in the Anglican or Church of England church, you were sprinkled as a baby and put into the church and you did the thing so you were done. So these men rose up and looked at all the church members in the Church of England or the Anglican church and said, "This is bad," and they began thundering this message and saw these people come out of dead church membership into a born-again life experience with Christ.

Then, if you want to turn there with me, Ezekiel, to show you that the Old Testament, Ezekiel has a prophetic word about this necessity of new life. Ezekiel 37, what is it, right before Daniel. If you get to Psalms and go right and you get to Isaiah and then Jeremiah, then Ezekiel. Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel says, verse 1, "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones." Can you imagine such a scene? You walk out and just everywhere you see are bones lying cold, dry and dead.

Verse 2, "He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry." How dead were they? Well, if they were just bones, it's dead, but he said, "No, I want you to say they weren't just dead, they were bone dry dead." There wasn't anything left in the marrow. It's just dead upon dead.

Verse 3, what a statement, "He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.'" Do you know what the picture there is? If they can

have any life, only you, God, can do it and only you, God, know if you will do it. O God, you know. It's up to you.

Verse 4, "Again He said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD." Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"" What a picture. He says, "We'll cause things to come back to life and then they will know God, come back to life and then they will know God." Say that again, "come back to life and then you will know God." You would like to think salvation is in your hands, wouldn't you, oh proud, arrogant manipulator? Spurgeon said on one occasion, Spurgeon the most popular and revered Baptist preacher, I assume of all time, said at the end of his sermons, "Your flesh would love for me to give you something to do right now, wouldn't it? Then you could glory in what you could do." He said, "I'm leaving you with Christ. I'm leaving you with Christ."

Verse 7, "So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army." Now, you know all Old Testament texts must have an immediate application but they often have a future and more glorious application. The immediate application is Israel was devastated and destroyed by Babylon, there was nothing left but dry bones and God is prophesying as a nation, you're going to come back to life. But even more than that, as a nation one day God will bring Israel to spiritual life and she will embrace the Savior, Jesus Christ. And in more glorious fulfillment, that is the picture of all who come to life through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Over and over and over the Scriptures tell us about how men are spiritually dead and it takes an act of God to bring spiritual life.

Now, the means of God bringing this to pass are the preaching, the sharing of the Gospel under the power of the Spirit. You can have all the Gospel you want but if you are void of Spirit power, nobody is going to be born again. Nobody is going to have new life. It takes the Gospel and it takes the Spirit. The Scriptures bear out very clearly God's primary means is to make sure you, your family, your loved ones, are under strong faithful preaching of the Gospel. I told you before, I'd drive two hours one way to hear faithful preaching, and I would because I'm not arrogant enough to know with my Bible knowledge or whatever it is, that I can reach my family by myself. God's ordained we dads need to be in partnership with a godly preacher to bring our families to faith in Christ. That's the way he has ordained it to work. It's humbling on all of our parts. We have to have each other.

Here's the test: I. Each statement will begin with the phrase "more and more." How do I know, Pastor, that I've had this life? Well, let me take an overview of Scripture. Now, there are many things I'll leave out because we just don't have time, but these are many of the foundational things you should look for. 1. More and more I feel, or rather I see and I feel the weight of my sin. I see and I feel the weight of my sin. Jesus said that the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would come and teach us, and when you have received new life, you have the capacity, you have the ability to begin to see sin the way God sees sin, and that germ is in there and, by the way, everything that I'm going to tell you is greatly helped if you are under sound preaching. As a matter fact, I would say if you haven't been under sound preaching, many of these will be tiny perhaps and not developed like they need to be. But if you've been under sound preaching, these things develop and advance in your soul.

You see and feel more of the weight of your sin. 1 Corinthians talks about how we see in a mirror dimly and in our pilgrimage is that we see more and more of the truth, and that includes more and more of the truth that we are sinners and we are undone and we are ruined before our Triune and infinite and holy God. Paul told us in Romans 7 that "nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh, for the willing is present but the doing of good is not. I want to do good but I practice the very evil that I do not want to do." And you can see in Paul's verbiage there that this is a loathsome and burdensome thing. Can I ask you, saint of God, can I ask you, person under my voice this morning: have you sensed a growing in your heart of loathing and being burdened for the sinner that you are before this holy God? That is always there, at least to a degree, in the heart of one that is born again. You will not have any of this worldly trivial spirit of, "Well, we're all sinners. Nobody is perfect." No, no, you get to feeling like you're the only wicked and vile creature in the universe. "Wretched man that I am," Paul said, "who will set me free from the body of this death?"

Good night, I hadn't been converted a few weeks and I was in a Sunday school class in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and the dear Sunday school teachers, they meant well, they were trying to love me and encourage me. But I kept talking about what a sinner I was, maybe she just didn't know me like she needed to know me but she said, "Quit talking about how awful and bad you are." Actually, she should have been right the opposite. When a new Christian begins to tell you how deeply vile and sinful they feel before God, you just say, "Oh dear child of God, it's worse than you think. You don't know anything yet. But Christ is sufficient for all of it." Amen? You don't deemphasize the sin, you glorify the greatness of the Savior. A person who has new life more and more sees and feels the burden of his sin.

2. The second part of the test: more and more there is kindled in you a flame of love for Christ. More and more there is kindled within you a flame of love for Christ. As we preach through these books of the Bible and beautiful truth after truth and precept after precept of the glories of Christ, there is something in you that says, "O Christ, O Christ, O Christ, that's wonderful. You are too good. You are too wonderful. You are too loving." Every true child of God has at least the germ of a flame. Now look, here's where Satan, the great counterfeiter, gets on every one of these points, Satan can counterfeit: the

most lost secularist in the universe can hear the story of Christ and be moved emotionally. That's an emotionally moving story, that this pure Savior would come from heaven and give himself for others and bleed and die. That's very moving just in the motions of man, but it's beyond that. Now listen, it's knowing that from the foundation of the world and somehow in an unfathomable love you could never comprehend, he personally directed his redemptive power and saving work toward you. You. Toward you. Not just toward mankind, that's true, the Bible doesn't leave us there though, he wants you to know from the foundation of the world, "I had my heart set on you and I knew everything about you and I loved you still." Is there something, child of God, kindled within you, that flame of love for Christ? That's good evidence that you have experienced the new birth.

Hurrying on, number 3 in this test of eternal life: I see my need for Christ. More and more I see my need for Christ. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." What Paul is saying is more of Christ, less of me. I need him more and more and more. And as you grow spiritually, listen to this now, you realize how much more you need him as prophet, priest and king. I need him as prophet, I need to learn his truth. I need to be under sound strong Bible preaching. I need him as prophet in my life. I don't have any wisdom. I can't come up with the right things. I mess things up when I get my emotions and my thinking involved. I need Christ as my prophet. I need him as my priest, the one who died in my place, the one who interceded for me before the judgment of God, the one who right now stands at the right hand of the Father. I'm such a wretch, I must have the merits of Christ for me as my priest. And I need him as king. I need to bow before him. If you have been born again, there is at least the germ of that desire in your heart and you'll find that if you're really born again in a time of trial, he's the one you run to.

I'll never forget reading one of Spurgeon's books and Spurgeon had a lot of physical ailments and he didn't take care of himself and he was in his study one day and I think he had gout in his knee or something in his knee and he had excruciating pain and Spurgeon said, he said, "I just cried out and said, 'God, if you love me and I'm your child, why would you leave me in this pain?'" He said, "And I got busy with my studies and forgot about it and didn't realize until a few moments later the pain was gone." He said, "I'm not saying my tone was especially right but who did I cry to?" Are you with me church? Sometimes you're in anguish, sometimes maybe your tone or your spirit may not be right but who do you turn to? If you've got new spiritual life in you, you find yourself increasingly turning to Christ.

4. More and more you hate what God hates. Very simple, isn't it? More and more you hate what God hates. He has changed your heart about some things. More and more you have a growing contempt in your heart for this world. You look at this world, you look at the values of this world, you look at the priorities of this world and you begin to hate it. Do you know what? God hates this godless world. The Bible says Satan is the god of this world. More and more you hate what he hates. 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in

him." That doesn't mean we can't enjoy the common graces of this world, it means but this world system that is anti-God, this world system that glorifies in perversion and wickedness, it means we increasingly hate that and are grieved by it.

Not only the world, what about the hypocrites, those who claim to bear Christ's name but give feigned obedience? When Donald Trump acts like he's a Christian, it grieves my spirit. I agree with a lot of his positions, I'm thankful for the Supreme Court justice, we had no better choice in my opinion, but as a person, I'm grieved when he talks about being a Christian. And it should be that way in all of us when we see those who wear the label but don't seem to even desire to walk the walk. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:13, "I hate the double minded." The psalmist said in Psalm 101:3, "I hate those who fall away."

You say, "Pastor, are we okay to hate?" Obviously there is going to be a compassion for fellow sinners but we hate the anti-God purposes in their lives. By the way and this is a tricky little theological thing but when final judgment is established, God is not going to send people's sin to hell, he's going to send sinners to hell. Be careful with the phrase, "God loves a sinner but just hates the sin." I understand what you're saying, I agree with that in a sense, but he's not going to send the sins to hell, he'll send the sinner to hell. There is a divine retribution against persons coming.

We find ourselves longing for, like David said, Psalm 69:9, "zeal for Your house has consumed me." I'm passionate for God and for God's truth and I begin to have a hatred toward the things that are anti-God. I hate that stuff. I don't want to be around it. If you born again, there is at least a seed of that in your heart.

5. The converse: more and more I love what God loves. More and more I love what God loves. I love the people of God. This is such a clear clear indication of true spiritual life. In 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." Wait a minute, don't let the liberals twist this. He didn't say if you love you're okay, he said you love the brethren, that means you're okay. If you're truly born again, we will love all men but there is a special love in our hearts for those who love our Christ and love his word and love his church. If you are born again, there is at least the seed of that that grows in your heart.

You love the word of God. You want to be under the strong and true preaching of the word. You might wander here or wander there, but when it all boils down you say, "I've got to get back to strong Bible preaching. Something in me has to have that."

You rejoice when God's true church thrives. It blesses you. It encourages you to see the true Gospel going forth and true churches going forth and being established. As Paul wrote to the Romans and told them that he thanked God through Jesus Christ because their faith was being proclaimed throughout the whole world, he said, "I'm just so thankful that you guys are doing well." There is a part of you that wants to see the church do well if you have been truly born again.

Number 6 in this test, I've only got two more: the Spirit helps me in Bible study and prayer. How many times have you started to have your quiet time or started your prayer time and it was stone cold dead? Didn't want to do it. Didn't want to be there. Ballgame is coming on. Have got to get to my idol. I don't mind you enjoying your ball team, but I hope when you're watching your ball team, you can say, "Praise God, this ain't my joy. I've got a higher joy than this. I enjoy my ball team but I've got a higher joy than this." You start out cold in your Bible study, you start out cold in your prayer time, then all of a sudden the Spirit starts working and you end up with sweet fellowship, peace and joy before the Lord in that Bible study or that prayer time. Do you know what that means? That means the Spirit lives in you. That's good evidence you are one of God's.

I calculated it up when I went through this and I wrote the whole thing but when I went through this years ago with you, I calculated up that from age 0 to 19 when I was converted, I might have spent 30 total minutes in the word of God. I had a Bible, from 0 to 19, I might have spent 30 minutes in the word of God. From 19 to 57, after my conversion, 40,000 hours perhaps. How do you explain that? Something changed in me. I didn't turn over a new leaf. I didn't say, "I'm Jeff Noblit, tonight I will become a man of God." No, God acted on me. I can't produce that. It would have surely worn off before 37 years, amen?

God helps us here and you know, accountability helps because we want to do it but we're in the world, our flesh is lazy, we are drawn apart, so we encourage voluntary accountability about your quiet time and stuff and that helps us, amen? That helps us. It helps us get started and the Spirit helps us along. That's a good evidence. As Romans 8:26 reminds us, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness, we do not know how to pray as we should, the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Perhaps when we start entering our prayer times and it's cold and it's not working, then it gets warm and there becomes a joy and a sweetness, maybe that's when the Spirit kicks in and intercedes with us. I don't know but I just know he helps us.

7. Another evidence that you have eternal life: more and more I look forward to his return. More and more I look forward to his return. There is something in me that says I'm just sick and tired of this world. I'm sick and tired of the vileness, the ugliness, the dirtiness, the vulgarity, the perverseness. Are you with me? And I'm sick and tired of me. I'm so sick and tired of me. I see rottenness in me. I see selfishness in me. I see envy in me. I see greed in me. I see lust for things I shouldn't lust for in me. I'm sick of me. Sick of me and I long for that day when he will return and I will be stripped of my so-called righteousness and fully clothed finally with his. When we see him, the Bible says we will be like him. And if you have been born again, there is something in you that longs for that day. Maybe it's in the quiet night as you are falling asleep meditating on Scripture or something. I'm not saying it's 24/7, all I'm saying is it's in there because new life has come in and that new life is not of you. You have been invaded from outer space.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must pray this prayer." I'm not saying that's always wrong, that's not what he said. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must walk to the front at the end of the service." I'm not saying that's wrong, that's not what he said. It's not practiced in the

New Testament period. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must raise your hand in vacation Bible school and let them know." He didn't say that. He said, "You must be born again." In reading between the lines, I think it's almost like Jesus was saying, "Nicodemus, I know you're a Jew and I know how you Jewish leaders are, you'll make some sort of little hoop jump ritual out of this and you'll miss the heart change." Are you with me? "You'll make some little religious motion out of this and you'll miss looking for the heart change." Here's what I'm telling you this morning: make sure, make sure as your pastor, I plead with you, I'm going to the deathbed again, I've been doing that a lot lately, haven't I? On your deathbed, don't tell me, "I did that," tell me, "Pastor, I know him. I know him. I know him. I know I have received the new life." If you didn't see any of those things, and those may be fine in some ways, but they are terribly incomplete to know you're a child of God. You must be a recipient of new life. Now, some people will say this is kind of a deep and heavy message. No, this is foundational, A, B, C, starting point Christianity. It really is, we've just missed it.

A dear pastor friend a good bit older than me sat me down as a young minister and his family knows who I'm talking about. I mean when I was a young minister and he, in effect, shared with me he was in his own struggle with making sure it was the Spirit and not men and not hoop jumps, and he explained to me, "You've got to make sure it's the Spirit of God doing this work in your church and not just people going through the motions." And that started something in me and in a way I built my whole ministry on that question. Make sure it's not men's methods and men's manipulation but God is changing people's hearts through the Gospel. And if you will pray for me, I will pledge to you that I will preach with all my heart and all my being that our spouses and our children's children and our children's children's children will be born again.