

Signs of Genuine Faith

Here is a question for you: how do you know if you've really been saved? On the surface this seems like an easy question, but what do you do when you start having doubts? Are doubts a sign that you have not been saved, or are they just a temptation to doubt true faith? For that matter, how can you tell the difference? Some people claim that when you are faced with doubts you should think back to the time you were saved and reclaim that moment. But how do you know if that moment was real? Do you just go by what your feelings tell you?

There are probably some people out there who have never had any serious doubts about their salvation. They are confident that they are saved and that confidence never wavers. Other people, however, are plagued with doubts for their entire life. Some become so overwhelmed that they get saved again, and again, and again. To them the question "How do you know?" is very frightening.

As it turns out, one of the reasons the book of I John was written was to help people know if they are actually saved:

I John 5:13: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

I don't know if its contents will answer everyone's doubts, but I John does go a long way toward establishing some objective criteria that we can use to determine if our faith in Jesus is actually real.

According to I John, people whose faith in Christ is genuine...

Point One: ...admit that they are sinners. In fact, we cannot get saved at all if we don't admit to God that we are a sinner and ask Him for forgiveness:

I John 1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

I can say unconditionally that if you have never admitted to God that you are a sinner and have never asked Him to forgive you for your sins, then you are not a Christian. Period. There is no such thing as a saving faith that says "I have no sins; I am perfect and need no forgiveness." In order to be saved you *must* repent and ask God to forgive you for your sins.

Point Two: ...submit to the Lordship of Christ. This means that those with genuine faith acknowledge that Jesus has authority over them and they must do as He says. Genuine believers seek to obey God and follow His commands, instead of simply doing as they please. This does not mean that they obey perfectly, for even the strongest Christians still struggle with sin. But it *does* mean that we have submitted ourselves to Christ's authority:

I John 2:3: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

In other words, *you cannot be saved if you have rejected the authority of Christ*. All of those who look at Jesus and say "Don't you dare tell me what to do!" are not saved. There is no such thing as salvation that rejects Jesus as Lord.

As Christians we may do a terrible job of following Jesus and we may often find ourselves struggling with sin, but the one thing that true believers do *not* do is tell Jesus "You have no say in my life whatsoever. I am in charge and you are not."

Point Three: ...have a love for other believers. This means that people with genuine faith have a heartfelt love for other Christians and try to help them. Now, this doesn't mean that all Christians are easy to get along with or that there won't be arguments or disputes. However, it *does* mean that those with real faith *do not* categorically hate other believers *simply because they are Christians*:

I John 2:9: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

I John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

I John 3:17: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

If you find yourself hating other Christians *because* they are Christians then you are not saved. Despising people because they have faith in God is a very strong sign that you have never known God at all. Genuine faith will naturally give you a love for other Christians. This doesn't mean that you are always going to feel warm fuzzy feelings whenever you're around them, but it does mean that you will seek their welfare and do what you can for them.

Now, some might argue that when John uses the phrase "brother" he is actually talking about all of mankind and not just other believers. I do not believe this is the case. John is actually very specific about what he means:

I John 3:14: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

Notice how John specifically refers to *the brethren*, and then equates "the brethren" to "his brother" in the very next sentence. Now, should Christians love other people? Of course – Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself, and He was definitely referring to all of mankind. But here, in this passage, John is *not* referring to all of mankind. What he is

saying is that genuine Christians love *each other*.

What makes this sad is that all too often those who call themselves by the name of Christ show contempt for their fellow Christians. John says that anyone who hates his fellow Christians “is in darkness even until now”, and later on he goes further to say that those who are full of such hate *have never known God at all*.

Point Four: ...believe that Jesus is the Messiah. This may seem obvious, but it still must be said: if you do not believe in Jesus then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully God then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully man then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus was crucified and then rose bodily from the dead you are not saved. In other words, in order to be saved you must not believe in *a* Jesus, but in the *Biblical* Jesus:

I John 2:22: “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”

I John 3:23: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

1 John 4:1: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

I John 4:15: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

There are many ways to deny what the Bible has to say about Jesus. Many cults talk about a person whom they call “Jesus” but who is actually *radically* different from the Biblical Jesus. For example, Mormonism teaches that Jesus was once a man who rose to prominence and became God. That is *not* the real Jesus because they deny that Jesus eternally existed as God and they deny Jesus' role in the Trinity. Therefore, since they deny the Biblical Jesus, I John 2:23 states that they are lost. If you deny the Son then you deny the Father as well, and that means you are not saved. It is not any more complicated than that. As John said:

I John 5:12: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

Point Five: ...lead a righteous life. This is a very difficult point that will need some explanation. First, however, here are the verses:

I John 3:6: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not

seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

I know this may seem counter-intuitive, but this passage does *not* teach that Christians never sin. It is *not* saying that if you sin then that means you're not a Christian. The reason I know this is because later in the book John tells us that if we see a fellow Christian caught up in sin we should pray for him so that he can be rescued from that sin. Obviously, John believes that someone with genuine faith can sin.

So what does John mean? Well, it's worth noting that John is talking about a *particular* sin. In verse 10 John specifically talks about people who do not love each other. Later in the chapter we see this theme repeated:

I John 3:22: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

This is the same language that we saw earlier, but here John explains precisely what he means: genuine Christians are people who “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” and “love one another.” Those are the commandments that John is talking about. Someone with real faith will believe in Jesus and will love those around them – which, in turn, constitutes a righteous life.

What did Jesus say the two greatest commandments were? To love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. A person with true faith will do that, and a person whose faith is counterfeit will not. Those who do not love God and do not love those around them are not righteous, have not known God, and (as John plainly says) are “of the devil.”

So, then, a genuine believer leads a righteous life, and that righteousness consists of *believing on Jesus, loving God, and loving others*. People who do not do this are not saved. If you hate God or if you hate other people, then you should seriously stop and consider whether you are actually saved.

Point Six: ...seek the things of God, not the things of the world. John made this very clear:

I John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Christ told us that no man can serve two masters; we will either serve God or we will serve something else. These verses echo that point and reemphasize the fact that we *cannot* love the things of this world and the things of God at the same time – we will either love one or the other. The reason for this is because the things that this world has to offer (pride, lust, ambition, fame, riches, power, etc.) are not godly things but carnal things. If we spend our lives trying to obtain these things then we are serving ourselves, not God.

People with genuine faith will lead lives that are dedicated to serving God. They will have little interest in “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” because their priorities are different. However, the lost don't have that passion for God, and because of that they will be caught up in all sorts of things. John is quite clear: those who lead self-centered lives do not have the love of God dwelling in them.

Point Seven: ...continue in the faith. What I mean by this is that people who have genuine faith keep that faith all their lives. They don't abandon it when life gets hard, and they don't abandon Christianity for a different religion. John puts it this way:

I John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

People whose faith only lasts for a short time before it is discarded never had genuine faith at all. As John says, the fact that they drifted away is proof that they were never really a Christian in the first place. Genuine, saving faith is something that sticks with you for life.