

Signs of Genuine Faith

How do you know if you've really been saved? On the surface this may seem like an easy question, but what do you do when you start having doubts? Are doubts a sign that you haven't been saved, or are they a temptation to doubt true faith? Some people claim that when you're faced with doubts you should think back to the time when you were saved and just reclaim that moment. But how do you know if that moment was real? Do you just go by what your feelings tell you?

I'm sure there are probably some people out there who have never had any serious doubts about their salvation – but that doesn't necessarily mean they are saved. (After all, you can confidently believe in all the false gods you want, but that's not going to save you!) There are others who have been plagued with doubts for their entire life – but that doesn't mean they are lost.

We need to take this issue seriously because this is the most important question we will ever face. We *must* know the truth about our salvation. The difference between getting it right and getting it wrong is the difference between Heaven and Hell. There are many people who have been *absolutely convinced* of their salvation, but who still found themselves in Hell. They thought they were saved but they were completely wrong. How do we know this? Because Jesus told us:

Matthew 7:22: “**Many** will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Jesus said that *many* people are deceived about the true nature of their salvation. They think that they're saved, but they're not. That is what makes this issue so critical! You aren't just betting your life; all of eternity rests on this. You can't afford to get this wrong and find yourself in Hell one day, because **once you are in Hell there is no way to escape**. There are no second chances. So how can you be *absolutely* certain that you are saved? How can you know the truth beyond a doubt? Do you just have to depend on your feelings, or is there a better way?

The Bible gives us an answer, and that answer can be found in I John. In fact, one of the reasons I John was written was so that people could be *certain* that they had everlasting life:

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.”

If we want to know the truth then we need to take a look at what the Word of God has to say. Then we can know with *certainty* whether our faith is real or whether it is a fraud.

It turns out the answer to this dilemma is simple and easy to understand. How can you tell if a tree is alive or dead? You just look at what the tree produces. If a tree produces no fruit and no leaves then the chances are pretty good that the tree is dead. However, if the tree is producing apples then it must be alive – and the fact that it bears apples tells us what kind of tree it is.

People are the same way. Jesus tells us that **our lives will reveal who we really are:**

Matthew 7:17: “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt

tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

I want to emphasize that our works *cannot* save us. We are only saved by grace through faith, and our works play absolutely *no* role in that. However, when we are saved Christ *will* change us and transform us into new creatures. Genuine faith always results in a radically changed life! A person who is filled with the Spirit will *always* bear the fruits of the Spirit. This means that if we want to verify our faith, all we need to do is take a step back and examine our life:

2 Corinthians 13:5a: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."

Notice what this verse *doesn't* say. **It doesn't say to think back to the moment you were saved and trust that memory.** It doesn't say to remember the emotional high you experienced when you went to the altar and rest in that moment. No, the Bible says to *examine yourself!* That is how you will know if you are a child of God or a child of the devil.

So how do we do this? How do we examine ourselves to tell if our faith is genuine? Well, I John tells us that the life of a Christian is going to have certain characteristics that set it apart from the life of an unbeliever. Let's take a look at those characteristics and see what they have to say about our own lives.

1. Repentance

The first thing John tells us is that **people with genuine faith have confessed their sin** and asked Jesus to forgive them:

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."

There are many people who have never admitted that they are sinners and who have never gone to Jesus for forgiveness, but who are still convinced that they are going to Heaven. They think that they're good people, and since God doesn't send good people to Hell that means they are going to Heaven! They don't see a need to confess any sin because they don't think they have a sin problem. These people are greatly deceived. If you claim that you're a good person then verse 10 says you are calling God a **liar**. You see, God tells us that *there are no good people*:

Psalm 14:3: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Psalm 53:1: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.”

Psalm 53:3: “Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Micah 7:2: “The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.”

Mark 10:18: “And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.”

Romans 3:12: “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

The Bible doesn't say this in just one place; *it says it repeatedly*. There are no good people! There are only sinful people who desperately need to run to Jesus and ask Him for forgiveness and salvation. **In order to be saved you *must* confess your sins and seek Christ's forgiveness for them!** If you have never admitted that you are a ruined sinner and have never gone to Christ for forgiveness then you are not saved. It is that simple.

If you confess your sins then Jesus will forgive you. If you look to Him for salvation then you will find it. In fact, Jesus will do more than just forgive you! I John 1:9 tells us that He will “cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. He will create a new heart in us and will turn us into people who don't like sin and who want to be right and good and holy. In other words, He will change us dramatically – and those changes will become evidence that we are truly saved.

2. Surrender

That brings us to the next point. In order to be saved **you must submit your life to God:**

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.”

This verse isn't saying that Christians never sin. What it *is* saying is that all Christians have submitted themselves to the authority of Christ. Their lives don't belong to themselves anymore. They are no longer in charge. They don't call the shots and they don't live as they please. Instead they do what the Lord tells them to do. If the Lord says something is a sin then they don't do it. If the Lord gives them a command then they follow it. They don't try to justify their sin; instead they hate it and

fight it and try to win victory over it.

There are some people who don't want to submit to God. I talked to one person who didn't want to become a Christian because he like his sin and knew that he'd have to give it up. This was a problem for him because he had no intention of giving up his sin! He loved it and wanted to keep it.

It is *impossible* to be saved and have that attitude. In order to be saved you have to **repent of your sins**. The Bible is exceptionally clear about this:

Matthew 3:2: “And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 3:8: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”

Matthew 4:17: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 9:13: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance.”

Matthew 11:20: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.”

Mark 1:15: “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

Mark 6:12: “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”

This is just a small sampling of passages; there are many more. Now, repentance does *not* mean “God, I'm going to keep right on sinning and I'm not the least bit sorry about it, but I still expect you to forgive me anyway.” Repentance means that you *surrender*. You're not going to rebel against God anymore. You're going to do things God's way. You hate your sin and you don't want it anymore and you want to be different. It means you are **declaring war** on your sin – on *all* of your sin! You are giving up what you want and are living for the Lord now.

If you are spending your life striving to keep God's commandments and are pursuing holiness with all of your heart, then that is evidence that you are saved. However, **if you despise God's commandments and are living as you please then you are definitely not saved**. Those who love their sin and are **offended** when God tells them that sin is wrong are not saved. John is pretty clear about this:

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.”

Now, John is *not* saying that our works save us. He is not saying that a genuine Christian will live a sinless life. What he *is* saying is that **if our faith is genuine we will fight the sin in our life**. It's easy to hate the sin that we see in the lives of *others*; the Pharisees had no problem pointing out all the wicked things that other people were doing. But it's an entirely different thing to hate the sin that we see in *ourselves* and to fight against it with all of our heart! This doesn't mean that we are winning every battle, but it *does* mean that we are fighting the darkness we see within us with all of our strength and all of our passion. If our faith is genuine then we will pursue the things of God because we truly *want* them – Jesus has given us a new heart and we care about different things.

Take a look at 1 John 3:10. This is the key distinguishing characteristic between a lost person and a saved person. Saved people love the Lord and obey His commands. Lost people love their sin and despise God's commands. If you are living in sin and you are **unwilling to repent and turn from it** then you are not of God. The passage could not be any clearer.

Do you know who else said this? Jesus did:

John 14:15: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

If we love Christ then we will love His commandments and will genuinely want to keep them – to keep *all* of them. We may not be very good at keeping them, but it's what we want with all our heart, and as God gives us grace we seek to be ever more obedient. However, if we despise His commandments and mock them then we despise Him as well – and no man can despise the Lord and be saved.

3. Love

Do you know what Jesus said was the greatest commandment? It was to love God and to love one another. It should therefore not come as a surprise to learn that genuine Christians are characterized by **a sincere love for one another**:

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.”

It is actually a big deal to love those who love the Lord. You see, the world *doesn't like Christians*. People who love the Lord Jesus have been persecuted for centuries because the darkness hates the light and wants to extinguish it. Cain murdered Abel because he knew that Abel was more

righteous than he was and he couldn't stand that. Abel's righteous life was a testimony against him, so Cain murdered him in an attempt to silence that testimony.

People who are living in sin and who love the world are *not* going to love Christians. They are going to be at war with them because Christians stand for everything that they are against. At *best* the lost are going to view the righteous as boring, dull, and full of dumb convictions. At *worst* they're going to fight them and try to stop them from serving the Lord. They will delight in making them stumble and fall into sin.

If you hate people whose lives are characterized by holiness and you just can't stand people who are trying to live for God, then *you are not a Christian*. If you spend your time trying to put Christians down and you do everything you can to stop them from serving the Lord, then you are not saved. If you rejoice when a Christian is disgraced or when a church has a major setback, then you are on the side of the devil. *Your emotions are revealing what side you're truly on*, and it's not the side of God. People who are on God's side will naturally want His children to thrive and succeed. If you are rooting for the devil then you're on his team.

Keep in mind that love is not just words. It is also **actions**:

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?"

You may *claim* to love others, but have you ever put that love into actions? Have you ever reached out to help someone who was in trouble, or do you just berate Christians and call them fools? You can say whatever you want but your actions will reveal where you truly stand. If you wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help a fellow believer but willingly give to causes the Bible strongly condemns, then you are making it pretty clear where you stand.

If you love the people of God and you spend your time trying to help them pursue the things of God and the kingdom of God, then that is strong evidence that you are on the side of the Lord.

4. Doctrine

So let's say that you've gotten this far without a problem. You love other believers and you hate sin and everything that is evil. You've confessed your sin and you even believe in Jesus. Does that mean that you're saved? Not necessarily. You see, while it's great that you believe in Jesus, **it is critical for you to believe in the *right* Jesus**. If you create a false God and name it Jesus, *believing in that false God isn't going to save you*.

This matters tremendously. If you deny that Jesus is the divine and everlasting God and believe that Jesus is a created being then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus became a man then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus was crucified and rose bodily from the dead then you are not saved. If you deny that His death on the cross is the only thing that saves us from our sins, and instead teach that our works save us (in whole or in part), then you are not saved. In other words, in order to be saved you must not believe in *a* Jesus, but in **the *Biblical* Jesus**. Believing in the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, and the resurrection *is not optional*. I John makes this very clear.

You must believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God:

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.”

You must believe that Jesus is the Messiah, who came to save us from our sins by dying on the cross and taking upon Himself the punishment that we deserved:

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.”

You must believe that Jesus is both fully God and fully Man – that the divine came in the flesh, died for our sins, and rose again on the third day:

1 John 4:2: “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.”

You must believe that Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead:

Romans 10:9: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

There are many different 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 lived a great life and who became God. **Islam** teaches that Jesus was just a prophet. **Jehovah's Witnesses** deny that Jesus is the everlasting God. All of those religions believe in a Jesus, but they do not believe in the *real* Jesus. 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. 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.”

It is not just enough to “believe”. Lots of people believe in something. What truly matters is to *believe in the truth*. Believing in lies is not going to save you from Hell.

5. Desire

If you are a genuine Christian then that is going to have a big impact on the things that you care about. You are going to lose your interest in the things of this world. After all, you know that you're going to live forever, and you know this world is about to be destroyed – along with everything in it.

You're not going to be that preoccupied with riches or fame because you know you can't take any of that with you. Instead you are going to pursue the kingdom of God because you know *that* is going to last forever. You're going to be doing *everything you can* to spread the gospel because you know that Heaven and Hell are in the balance. Fighting the sin in your life will become a major priority. Your heart will be on Heaven because you know it's your home.

In other words, those with genuine faith will **seek the things of God, not the things of the world**. John makes 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 in I John 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. 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 are carnal things. If we spend our lives trying to obtain carnal things then we are serving *ourselves*, not God. If you are seeking to build your own riches and your own kingdom then that means you're *not* seeking to build the kingdom of God. *You cannot serve two masters.*

Do you love going to church and spending time with the saints of God, or do you find it a constant chore? Do you enjoy hearing good, solid sermons that bring you closer to God and help your walk with the Lord, or would you rather be literally anywhere else? Do you love the Word of God and spend time reading and studying it, or is it collecting dust on your shelf while you find any excuse to avoid it? Your life reveals what you truly desire *and what you don't*. Why would you think you're a Christian if the things of God are distasteful and revolting to you?

People with genuine faith will naturally 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*. The lost don't have a passion for God, and because of that they will be caught up in all sorts of things. This is how Jesus put it in the parable of the sower:

Matthew 13:22: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”

John is quite clear: those who lead self-centered lives do not have the love of God dwelling in them. If your life is dedicated to seeking the things of this world then you are on the world's side. If you are passionate about seeking the things of God then you're on God's side. **The things that you truly desire in life will reveal what side you're really on.** So ask yourself: what is it that you really want in life? That will tell you what side you're on.

6. Perseverance

There is one more characteristic I want to mention before closing. People with genuine faith **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.

Jesus described these people in the Parable of the Sower:

Matthew 13:20: "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

These people were never genuine believers at all; they were just frauds. The fact that they left the faith when hard times came is what proves that they were phony all along.

Imagine that you had a chair that, from all appearances, looked like a great chair. From what you could tell it was sturdy and well able to support your weight. It looked fantastic – but when you sat down on it for the first time, the chair fell to pieces. The fact that it fell apart the first time you tried to use it means that *it was really a terrible chair all along*. Testing the chair revealed its true nature.

When God sends storms and trials into our life, those storms will reveal the true nature of our faith. If those storms blow our faith down, that means our faith was just a house of cards all along. It wasn't real; it was just a fraud. The storms didn't destroy the faith; they instead revealed its true nature. They showed that *there wasn't any real faith there at all*. God actually did that person a favor, because He showed them that they had just been fooling themselves.

Genuine Christians have genuine faith, and that faith will stand the test of time and stand the storms of life. This isn't because Christians are exceptionally strong people; it's because God holds them and will not let them go. They remain in the faith because of the power of Christ, not due to their own strength:

1 Peter 1:5: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

How are we kept? By the power of God. That is how we can have assurance of our salvation – because it rests in the power of God, and there is no greater force in the universe.

Summary

So how can we tell if our faith is genuine? By examining our life:

- **Repentance.** Have you confessed our sins and repented of them, and gone to Jesus for forgiveness? If you have not – if you have decided you're good enough to go to Heaven without Christ – then you are lost.
- **Surrender.** Have you let go of your sin and sought God's grace to achieve victory over it? If not – if you hold onto your sin, mock God's commandments, and tell God that He has no right to tell you what to do or judge your life – then you are lost.
- **Love.** Do you love the children of God? If not – if people who seek righteousness bore and annoy you, and you prefer the company of those who are immoral and profane over those irritating Christians – then you are lost.
- **Desire.** Do you love the things of God and have little interest in what this world has to offer? If not – if your heart desires the riches and pleasures of this life, and you find the things of God boring and unappetizing – then you are lost.
- **Perseverance.** Do you hold on to your love for God in spite of all the problems of this life? If not – if you curse God and run from Him at the first sign of trouble, and believe that if God isn't giving you the life you want then God is cruel and doesn't deserve Your love – then you are lost.

Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. You may be able to deceive others, and you may even deceive yourself, but you cannot deceive God. You do not want to stand before God one day and be turned away. You do not want to hear Him say “Depart from me, I never knew you”. Make things right with God today, while you still can.