Signs of Genuine Faith

How can you tell 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 haven't been saved, or are they a temptation to doubt true faith? For that matter, how can you tell the difference between genuine faith and false faith? Some people teach that when you're 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've never had any serious doubts about their salvation. They're confident that they're saved and their confidence never wavers. Other people, however, are plagued with doubts. Some become so overwhelmed that they try to 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're 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 John establishes a set of objective criteria that we can use to determine if our faith in Jesus is actually real, or if we're just deceiving ourselves.

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

#1: Confess that they are sinners

It's impossible to be saved if we don't confess to God that we're a sinner and ask Him to forgive our sins:

> **I John 1:8-10:** "If we say that we have no sin, <u>we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us</u>. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <u>If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us</u>."

If you've never confessed to God that you're a sinner and have never asked Him to forgive your sins then you're not a Christian. Period. It's impossible to be saved by saying "I have no sins; I am perfect and need no forgiveness." In order to be saved you *must* repent and ask God to forgive your sins.

#2: 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 doing whatever they want. This doesn't mean they obey Him perfectly, for even the strongest Christians still struggle with sin. But it *does* mean that they have submitted themselves to Christ's authority:

> **I John 2:3-5:** "And hereby we do know that we know him, <u>if we keep his commandments</u>. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, <u>is a liar</u>, and the truth is not in him. But <u>whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected</u>: hereby know we that we are in him."

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

As Christians we may sometimes do a terrible job of following Jesus and we may often find ourselves struggling with sin. However, one thing true believers don't do is tell Jesus "You have no authority over me. I'm in charge and you're not."

The world hates Jesus and is greatly offended at the thought of obeying Him. There are others who may be willing to obey Jesus in some parts of their life, but insist on doing things their way for the rest. Those who seek to submit to Jesus in all aspects of their life, and obey all of His commandments, are doing something the world would never do. That's a unique trait of genuine believers.

#3: Love other believers

This means 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 among believers. What it *does* mean is that those with real faith don't hate other believers *simply because they're Christians*:

> **I John 2:9-11:** "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. 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 <u>no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him</u>."

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, <u>how dwelleth the love of God in him</u>?"

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

Some people might claim that when John uses the phrase "brother" he's actually talking about all of mankind and not just other believers. Although it's true we must love our neighbors (including those who aren't saved), I believe John is talking about something more specific in this book:

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

John specifically refers to *the brethren* (other Christians), and then equates "the brethren" to "his brother" in the next sentence. Should Christians love their neighbors? 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 in this passage John is saying is that genuine Christians love *each other*.

The world hates Christians. It despises those who love

Jesus and seek to walk in His ways. Having a genuine love for Christians is a strong sign that you're not of the world, but have been transformed by Christ. However, 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*.

#4: Believe that Jesus is the Messiah

This may seem obvious, but it must be said: if you don't believe in Jesus then you're not saved. If you deny that Jesus is both fully God and fully man then you're not saved. If you deny that Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead on the third day you're not saved. In order to be saved you must believe what the Bible has to say about Jesus:

> **I John 2:22-23:** "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. 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 4:1-3:** "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 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 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 *radically* different from the Biblical Jesus. For example, Mormonism teaches that Jesus was once a man who rose to prominence and became God. That's *not* the real Jesus because it denies that Jesus eternally existed as God, and it denies His position in the Trinity. Since Mormons deny the Biblical Jesus, I John 2:23 teaches that they're lost.

If you deny the Son then you deny the Father as well, and that means you're not saved. 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."

#5: Lead a righteous life

This is a difficult point that needs some explanation. First, however, here are the verses:

I John 3:6-10: "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 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. <u>Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin</u>; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 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 don't think this passage is teaching that genuine Christians never sin. The reason I believe 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 (I John 5:16). Therefore John believes that someone with genuine faith can sin.

So what does John mean? I think John is talking about a *particular* sin. In verse 10 he specifically talks about people who don't love each other. Later in the chapter we see this theme repeated:

I John 3:22-24: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. <u>And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another</u>, as he gave us commandment. 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 what he means. Genuine Christians are those who "believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" and "love one another." Those are the specific commandments John is talking about. Someone with real faith will believe in Jesus and love

those around them – which, in turn, is evidence that Christ has changed your heart and made you righteous.

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 don't love God and don't love those around them aren't righteous, have not known God, and (as John plainly says) are "of the devil."

So, then, a genuine believer leads a righteous life, and the proof of that righteousness can be seen by the fact that they *believe on Jesus*, *love God*, *and love others*. People who aren't like that aren't saved. If you hate God or if you hate others then you should stop and consider whether you're actually saved.

#6: Seek the things of God, not the things of the world

John made this very clear:

I John 2:15-17: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. <u>If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him</u>. 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. 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'll serve something else. These verses echo that point and emphasize 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.) aren't godly things but carnal things. If we spend our lives trying to obtain these things then we're serving ourselves, not God.

People with genuine faith will lead lives that are dedicated to serving God. They'll 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'll be caught up in all sorts of things. John is quite clear: those who lead self-centered lives don't have the love of God dwelling in them.

#7: Continue in the faith

What I mean by this is that people who have genuine faith keep that faith for the rest of their lives. When life gets hard they don't abandon Christianity for a different religion. John put 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: <u>but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.</u>"

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

Conclusion

How can you tell if you're actually saved? It's not by remembering the moment that you first came to Christ. Instead it's by examining your life. What the apostle John taught in I John is the same thing that Jesus Himself taught:

Matthew 7:16-20: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

What is the fruit of the Spirit? The apostle Paul provides us with a handy list of good fruits and bad fruits:

Galatians 5:19-25: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Paul isn't saying that committing these sins costs you your salvation. He's also not saying that for you become saved you must learn to live a righteous life. These things are *fruits!* They are the evidence of who you really are. The type of fruit that your life bears reveals your true nature. They're a reflection of you.

If you aren't saved then you'll naturally do wicked things.

That's because *you aren't saved*, and your wicked nature produces wickedness. However, if Christ has forgiven your sins and changed your life then you'll bear the fruit of the Spirit. That's because you'll have the Holy Spirit within you and He will transform you into a new person. All those godly character qualities are a *result* of being saved (not the cause of your salvation).

The only way to tell if you're truly saved is by looking at your life. Are you living a life of sin, or a life of righteousness? The type of life that you're living reveals your true nature.