

A Warning About False Assurance

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[0 : 00] Several years ago, I read a story in a Christian magazine about a man whose wife had been killed in an accident. They'd only been married a year and a half, but that really wouldn't matter, would it?

Something like that, such a tragic death. It would just be devastating. Well, as he went through the grieving process, he said it just kept going through my mind.

Where is she now? Where is she going to spend eternity? And it really bothered me. Well, the man said in the article about two weeks later, he found in a nightstand drawer a card that she had filled out at a Billy Graham crusade shortly after they were married.

It was a decision card. And on the card, she had stated that she had professed faith in Jesus. And in this article, he said, when he found that card, it gave him a sense of assurance about her. But I want you to think with me.

[1 : 24] This man lived with his wife for more than a year after they had attended that Billy Graham crusade.

But he had no assurance that she was in heaven. He was really worried until he found the card. Evidently, this man, as he lived with his wife, had not seen anything about her that made him think she was a Christian.

And because he saw that evidence in her life, he had assurance she was in heaven. So I want you to think, how could something like a decision card, just a signed card, but no evidence in the woman's life, how could that have brought comfort to that grieving husband?

Well, I can guess why. Some of you can too. Like many people, he had an erroneous understanding of what salvation involves.

He evidently had the thought, making a profession of faith is all that matters. Making, quote, a decision for Christ is what determines our salvation.

[2 : 54] Well, as a pastor for 35 years now, one of the most common ways I hear people talk about their being a Christian is, well, I made a profession of faith.

I made a decision to trust Christ. I have even known people, and maybe some of you have over the years. I've had people come up to me and talk to me and say that they lacked assurance because they could not pinpoint the exact day when they trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior.

I've even heard people talk about someone after they died, and everyone knew they lived anything but a Christian life. I've had people to make a statement knowing they didn't live the Christian life.

But say something like, but he or she made a decision to accept Christ a long time ago. As we continue our series on assurance of salvation, I want to issue this morning a warning about false assurance.

I want us to look at several passages in the New Testament that show us that assurance of salvation cannot be based upon a one-time past decision to trust Christ, but the life was never changed.

[4 : 33] I want you to turn with me, if you would, first to 1 John chapter 5. 1 John chapter 5. I want to look at a verse that we began looking at last week.

It really states one of the themes of the letter of 1 John. Not the only theme of the book, but one of the major ones, and that is John wrote the letter to give Christians assurance of their salvation.

But I want us to read verses 11 and 12 along with 13 right now. It says, and this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us all right now to have a clear understanding before this day is over, before this service is over of the true nature of our relationship to you.

[6 : 03] Help us to see ourselves as as you see us, as we really are. Speak through your word and through your spirit and make that clear to us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. First thing I want us to think about this morning is that assurance of salvation is available for all who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Every Christian should have assurance of their salvation. It's something that God desires for us. It is not being presumptuous. Some people might think it is.

It is not, according to Scripture, being presumptuous for us to think, I can know for sure that if I died, I'd go to heaven. I can know for sure that I have a right relationship with God right now.

Let's look first. True faith is present tense faith. As we think about how to have real assurance, understand, true faith is present tense faith.

[7 : 04] Look at verse 13 again. Look how it's worded. He is writing to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

John is addressing people who would be, most of them would be hearing the letter read to them. They wouldn't be reading it themselves. But John is writing a letter that he knew would be read by people or heard by people who were at that moment in time trusting in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

He's writing to you, you who right now believe in the name of the Son of God. Verses 11 and 12 tell us that eternal life is more than just a life that never ends.

I want you to look at that. Look at it one more time. God gave us eternal life and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life.

Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. A lot of times people think if you have eternal life it means you're going to live forever.

[8 : 20] They think in terms of a quantity of life. Well certainly eternal life is a quantity. Certainly it is we'll live forever. But eternal life is more than that.

Eternal life as these verses point out it's a quality of life. Look what he says specifically. God gave us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

It's all wrapped up in our relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. Whoever has the Son whoever has a relationship with Him whoever is bound to Him by faith whoever knows Him and lives in fellowship with Him we can say all these kind of things whoever has the Son has life.

Whoever does not have the Son whoever does not believe whoever does not really have a relationship with Him does not have life.

true saving faith I want you to understand it's a living faith it is a present faith that unites us with Jesus Christ in a real relationship.

[9 : 35] Look at one other thing true faith is continuing faith. The Apostle Paul stressed that salvation should never be thought of as a transaction salvation like a business deal you make a you have an agreement you sign that you will do this but you won't do that.

Salvation is not like a transaction it's not like a business deal that you make a commitment you sign the card it's a done deal then you just walk away and forget about it everything's taken care of.

That is not how we should think in terms of our relationship with the Lord. Paul deliberately stressed that a person begin that once a person begins to trust in Jesus that person will continue to trust in Jesus.

In other words saving faith is continuing faith. I want you to look at two or three examples. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 1 Corinthians 15 verses 1 through 6 or 7 that is the clearest most basic explanation of the gospel you'll find in the New Testament.

Note how Paul begins here. Verses 1 and 2. Now I would remind you brothers of the gospel I preached to you which you received in which you stand and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you unless you believed in vain.

[11 : 12] it's possible to have a false faith. I mean he says it real clear. It's possible that a person can believe in vain.

What kind of faith is that? That is a faith that you just intellectually believe Jesus is the Son of God you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and I just believe that.

Factual information for example. But saving faith is that we believe Jesus died on the cross for me. Because he gave his life for me I want to give my life to him.

I trust that he's paid the penalty for my sins. I am now his. Because of what he's done for me I love him. I want to follow him.

I want to live my life to please him. it is an ongoing faith and trust that involves love and fellowship and a desire to even obey.

[12 : 18] Paul makes it clear saving faith is something that we continue to believe. Look at another example Colossians chapter 1.

Paul is making it clear here that on judgment day only people who have continued to trust in Jesus will be saved. Look at it. And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

Let's just pause right here. Jesus died to save us as a part of saving us to change us to make us holy and blameless as time goes on.

Jesus did this in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. Look at it now. If indeed you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I Paul became a minister.

Paul's telling us in both Corinthians and here there's only one gospel. It's that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and faith in Jesus is something that begins at a moment in time but it continues if it's real.

[13 : 54] And it makes a difference in our lives this relationship with him if it's real. True faith unites us in a relationship with Jesus Christ that literally changes who we are, how we think, how we look at life, how we live life.

Look at how Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 5. He says therefore if anyone is in Christ he's a new creation. The old was passed away, behold the new has come. He doesn't say that you're a perfect creation.

He does say but a person is in Christ, he is new. There's been a change that has taken place. Now, let's just pause here and clarify something. Many people can, and I'm going to thank many people in this room, you can point to a time when you made a public profession of faith, when you made a commitment to trust Christ, and a real life changing event took place.

I mean, some of you may can remember, when you were 10 years old in your home in a certain room, one of your parents shared the gospel with you, you put your trust in Jesus right then, you called upon him to save you, he did.

There's been a change, not perfect, but a gradual over time, there's been a change in your life from that time. some of you may remember as an adult, a specific time that God worked in your life, it may have been in a church service, it may have been out somewhere, you were just out by yourself, but you understood the gospel, and you truly turned from your sins, you put your trust in Jesus.

[15 : 35] God saved you, he changed you, he's been working in you ever since then, you know it, and people who know you can see the difference that the Lord has and is making in you.

What we need to understand is that no matter how meaningful that experience was when we first trusted the Lord, if it was genuine, it was only the beginning of our current relationship with Jesus. You know, Jesus described salvation in terms of being a new birth in John chapter 3. I mean, Jesus was talking to a religious leader, a man named Nicodemus, and told him unless he was born again, he would not see the kingdom of God.

He was talking about a new birth, a work of God, a work of what theologians call regeneration, when God works to just change us within and give us the desire to turn from our sin and trust Jesus and commit our lives to him.

But let's just think of that phrase, a new birth. Most of you in here, you were there when your children were born.

[16 : 52] Some of you right there, front row seat. You were there when your grandchildren were born, some of you. That new physical birth experience, you've never gotten over.

It was just wonderful, great. It changed your life to see that birth, to see that little one that you love right now, come into your world. As important as that new physical birth experience was, it was just the beginning.

That little one that got you excited didn't stay little. He or she grew and matured, because that's what a normal, healthy, new baby will do.

It was the same thing in the Christian experience of a spiritual new birth. Every person who is born again by the Spirit of God will grow, will mature, will develop over time, and if they don't, no new birth, no new life has ever been experienced.

Now, the truth is, as people grow, just look around in this room. not a single, there's no two of us who have grown spiritually exactly the same way.

[18:13] You know, among all of us in this room, some people, over the time you've been a Christian, some people have made tremendous growth in developing more Christ-like character.

A more radical change has taken place in some people in this room than others. But everything the New Testament teaches, if there is spiritual life, there will be evidence of it.

There will be spiritual fruit, which is basically character qualities. And that will be visible in the life of everyone who has truly been born again. Now, the reason why we can be confident that this is true, that all Christians will grow and mature to some degree, is because what we're talking about is a work of God.

What we're talking about this morning and talking about the new birth, talking about salvation, this is not something that we do ourselves. You don't just decide, I'm going to become a Christian and I'm going to do my best and I'm going to believe and I'm going to obey.

No, you do not. God works in a person's life to make them aware of their need for Him, to be right with Him.

[19:25] You see, we don't seek God on our own. Read Romans chapter 3, beginning about verse 10. We seek God because He first sought us.

And when God starts doing a work in us, opening our eyes to see our need for a Savior and that Jesus is that Savior, when God starts working in us to call us to want to turn from our sin and trust in Jesus and surrender our lives to Him, we can be sure that just as He begins the work, He will continue that work.

As Paul says in Philippians 1, 6, look at it. He says, and I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you, He's talking to that whole church, all those people, will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

He's telling us that whatever God starts, God finishes. The Bible provides no assurance of salvation to people who make merely a profession of faith, but never continue to follow Christ.

If there's no signs in a person's life they have a real relationship with Jesus, there's no reason for a person to think that they have a relationship with Jesus.

[20:45] Now, I want to look at one thing that prevents some Christians from having assurance. This is going to be for some of you right here, right now. Assurance is not dependent upon your ability to recall the day and time you were saved.

You don't have to be able to look back and say, that's the day I was saved in order for you to be assured of your salvation. Everyone does not have a dramatic, life-changing experience of salvation. Don't misunderstand.

Every person who is a Christian, every person who has been saved, every person who has been born again, God worked in that person at a moment in time, brought about a new birth.

There was a time when the person passed from death to life. But everybody is not conscious of when that exactly happens.

Think about it this way. Two people from Pickens are going to travel to Raleigh, North Carolina today. One's going to drive, one's going to fly.

[21:45] The person who gets in their car out here and drives up Interstate 85, if they can make it up Interstate 85, there's not a massive stoppage.

As soon as they pass out of South Carolina, they're going to see a welcome to North Carolina sign. They're going to see a North Carolina state line sign.

And so when we drive up 85, we're going to know when we pass from South Carolina to North Carolina because it's clearly marked. If a person goes out to Pickens County Airport and gets in an airplane, and they take off up the road, they're flying just above 85.

They're not going to see that state line sign. They're not going to look down and see a line drawn between South Carolina and North Carolina. But as they fly up the road, up the way here, and they look down and they see the city of Charlotte, they're going to know I'm already in North Carolina.

They see the sign that they're in North Carolina because they see Charlotte. Now think about it. Both individuals, one in the car, one in the plane, they both leave here, they both arrive at their

destination, Raleigh, safe and sound.

[23 : 07] One of them knows the exact moment they pass from South Carolina to North Carolina. The other one doesn't know the exact time they pass from South Carolina to North Carolina, but they know when they got in North Carolina because they saw signs of being there.

Everyone does not know the day and time when they actually were born again, passed from death to life. But everyone who's a Christian should be able to look at signs in their life that clearly reveal they have passed from death to life.

They are in Christ. because they see the signs that he is changing them. The Apostle Paul is an example of someone, he had a dramatic conversion experience.

He went from being the enemy of the church, the persecutor of the church. When God saved him, he changed immediately. God changed him from the inside out immediately. He became the great apostle, leader, protector of the church.

But everyone can't look back and pinpoint such a dramatic conversion experience. This may be your experience if you became a Christian as a young child.

[24 : 32] Think with me. A lot of children grow up in a Christian home and all they can ever remember is being taught about Jesus, who he is, what he's done for them.

They go to a church, that's all they ever know, who Jesus is, what he's done. And at some point in their life, they just sort of come to realize, I trust in Jesus.

I believe what I've been taught. I don't want to sin. I'm sorry for my sins. I truly believe that Jesus, when he died on the cross, he took my punishment. He paid the penalty for my sins.

I am trusting him. But they cannot tell you when they actually started believing that, and that's okay. That's okay.

Be thankful that you didn't live such a terrible life that there was a big difference between the time you were not a Christian and became a Christian. Be thankful you don't have an Apostle Paul, Damascus Road kind of experience, if you don't.

[25 : 40] Be thankful that God blessed you with a Christian home and a Christian church. Being in that Christian home, being in that Christian church is not what saved you. God worked through the gospel as you were taught by your parents, taught by your church, as you saw in your parents and other people at church.

And God worked in you at some point to actually do, bring about that new birth. church. But it was such a, not that big a change from the way you were living before you truly trusted Jesus to when you did trust Him.

And you just can't pinpoint exactly when that took place. Don't worry about it. If that happened to you as an adult, you just can't pinpoint. The most important thing is you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ now.

Understand, the most important question concerning salvation is not when did you come to Christ, but do you trust Him now?

I want to ask you, have you turned away from your sin? Have you repented? Are you sorry over your sin, the fact that you've offended, wronged, disobeyed God?

[26 : 58] Have you put your trust in Jesus that when He died on the cross, He actually took your place, paid the penalty for your sins? Are you trusting Him now? Do you love Him?

Do you desire to obey Him? If you truly have been saved, there will be such signs that indicate you belong to Christ.

He's in your life. He's making a difference. But if you can't see those signs, you should not have salvation. You should not have assurance.

So I want to ask you as we wind this up. Can you see such signs in your life? If you died today, and your family members and friends who grieve because you're no longer with them, will they have comfort in knowing you are with the Lord?

Because we saw evidence, because they saw evidence in your life that you trust Christ, that you love Him, that you're seeking to follow Him today, that He's making a difference in your life.

[28 : 20] If you can't see any real signs of a present relationship with Jesus, I want you to ask yourself, why is that?

It has to be either that you do not know Christ, or it could be that you're in a state of rebellion right now.

that you've just sort of drifted away, or just turned around and walked away because of some sin, some issue that you are involved in now.

If you know you don't know Christ, but you want to, you want to be right with God, you want to become a Christian, you want to be saved. Admit your need right now. Change your mind about the way you've been living, living your way instead of God's way.

Put your trust in Jesus and call upon Him to save you now. If you know that you are a Christian because you have seen signs, you know the Lord lives within you.

[29 : 24] You see evidence that He lives within you, but right now you're not living like that, and you know it. And there's just a lot of guilt you're carrying around because the Lord, if you're really His child, He's not going to let you get away with living in rebellion.

He's not going to let you stay indifferent long. And if that's the case, you can't fight God and win. Give it up.

Confess your sin. Admit what needs to change. Ask God to help you to turn from it, to let it go.

Come back to Him in a renewed trust and love and commitment now.

Now, if you do have assurance of your salvation, thank the Lord for the way He has and continues to work in your life.

And be confident that He will never stop working. No matter how long you live, He'll continue to work. Because, as Paul tells us, look at it one more time.

[30 : 32] I am sure of this. We can be sure of this. That He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Dear God, make it clear to every one of us where we stand in relationship to you right now.

Father, show us if we claim to be Christians if what we call saving faith is present tense faith. Help us to see, dear God, is what I call trust in Jesus ongoing to this very moment trust in Jesus.

Help us to see, dear God, if we are yours, evidence of a relationship with you, of a relationship with Jesus.

But Father, for people in this room who do not have a relationship with you, maybe they came in here thinking they did. Maybe they had false assurance. Make it clear to them where they stand and how they need to respond now and help them to do exactly what you're calling them to do now.

[32 : 08] Let's just all be in an attitude of prayer and listen to the Lord and respond to Him. If I could help you, I'll be here in front. I'd be happy to pray with you. You listen to the Lord and you do what He tells you to do right now.

and I'll be here in front of you. I'll be here in front of you. I'll be here in front of you.