

How Can I Be Sure That I Am a Christian?

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[0 : 00] a drugstore, go in Walmart, any kind of pharmacy, and buy an over-the-counter drug like Aleve. It takes a lot to get into it. They're packaged securely today. You know, this box, you got to break it open. You got to get the little box out or the little bottle out. You think you're going to just open it? I can't even open this. It's got another seal here. Everything today, every kind of medication that you can just walk in and buy over-the-counter, some bodies, every company basically has gone to great lengths to make it secure. How many of you know why it's like that today? Raise your hand. Only old people raised their hands.

Did you notice that? No, not really. Not really. Back in 1982, some crazy psycho in Chicago put cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules in some bottles in a drugstore. One lady took one of those cyanide-laced pills, thinking it was Tylenol, and it killed her. Before the whole thing was over, seven people, seven people lost their lives, thinking that they were taking Tylenol, a pain reducer, fever reducer.

But it was laced with a poison that killed them. You know, there is an important lesson about faith in that tragic story.

And that is, it's not enough to just sincerely believe something. Those people were as sincere as they could be in going in there and thinking that that bottle labeled Tylenol, that it would help them. But as it turned out, they were sincerely wrong. Because what was in it killed them. Faith is only as good as its object.

[2 : 37] Faith in faith is meaningless. Just being sincere about believing something, that can even be fatal.

Faith is only as good as the object it's placed in. That Tylenol tragedy helps us to understand it's important to know what you believe in.

Who you believe in. It's important for every one of us from time to time to just examine, investigate what it is that we believe.

You know, the Bible actually commands us to do that. The Christian faith is probably the only faith known to humanity.

It teaches us, don't believe blindly. Don't not think. The Christian faith says, look carefully at who you believe in, what you believe.

[3 : 49] Test it. I'll give you an example. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Christians now, Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, second letter.

In chapter 13, verse 5, he's coming to the end and he tells them, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

Or do you not realize that this about yourselves, that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test.

Now think about what he's saying here. Paul is writing to church members like us. Not writing to people out on the street, people who wouldn't even profess faith or might have some casual faith. Paul is writing to people who profess faith. They're meeting as a church in the city of Corinth. He says, examine yourselves to see whether you are truly in the faith.

[4 : 55] Test yourselves. Well, Jesus makes an even more startling, take you back kind of statement about genuine faith in Matthew chapter 7, beginning in verse 21.

I want you to turn there with me. That's where we're going to spend most of our time this morning. Matthew chapter 7, beginning in verse 21. Last week we had John Blanchard here.

And you probably were not aware of this, but he actually preached two different messages. He preached one in the first service from the book of Philemon. And he did a topical message and basically walked through several passages in this, the second service.

But they were both basically the same, or rather they had the same theme, made the same point. We need to make sure that we understand what it means to be a true Christian.

In both messages, he gave a description about what Christians believe and how Christians behave. Well, I want to take what he said last week, that thought.

[6 : 12] Know what you believe. Examine yourself. I want to turn that into a short series of studies on the subject assurance of salvation.

What I'd like for us to do is look at several passages of Scripture over the next few weeks, and they'll most all come from the book of 1 John. A little book toward the end of your New Testament. 1 John. And as we do this, I want us to answer the question, how can I be sure that I am a Christian? I want to begin, though, not with 1 John, but with what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7, one of the most sobering and disturbing passages in the entire Bible.

I want you to think, as we read this, Jesus is speaking to professing disciples. This is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is seeking or is preaching to, teaching these who are following Him.

And He makes it very clear in what we're going to read. There are some people who think they're right with God, but they are not. There are some people who think on Judgment Day, they're going to be welcomed into heaven, but they will not be.

[7 : 36] And that should get our attention. Let's read it. Matthew 7, verse 21. Jesus says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Think about what He's saying. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, only those who do the will of my Father. Verse 22.

On that day, this is Judgment Day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and cast out demons in Your name and do many miraculous works in Your name?

Then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness, or you evildoers even. There is no greater need than that anyone has than to know that we have eternal life.

There is no greater need that you or I, anyone we know, there is no greater need that a person can have than to know for sure that they have eternal life.

[8 : 54] and to know as much as we can that our family members are truly Christians and right with God.

We want to know that if we're Christians because if they're not, we want to be able to pray for them, talk to them, encourage them, actually share the gospel with them.

As we begin this study on assurance, I want us to start out by noticing three kinds of assurance found in the Bible. First, right here in Matthew chapter 7, there is undeserved assurance, or we can call it this, false assurance.

Jesus is pointing out here, some people have assurance, they call Him Lord, but they shouldn't have that assurance.

They have false assurance, undeserved assurance. Now what kind of people are Jesus talking about here? People who profess faith in Christ, but their faith did not result in obedience.

[10 : 04] Look at verse 21 again. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, not everyone who proclaims, professes, I'm their Lord. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, that's the one who will. He's talking about a false, or a faulty, profession of faith here.

Here's what Jesus is wanting us to know. People who truly know Him, people who truly have a relationship with Him, people who really have true, saving faith, trust, confidence in Him, will also desire to please Him and be like Him in that they want to know and do the will of God.

See, that was Jesus' food. That's what fueled Him. That's what kept Him going in this world. He wanted to know the will of His Father. He wanted to do the will of His Father. He wanted to bring glory and honor to His Father and all that He did in this world.

And if we are His followers, we'll want to know the same. You know, Jesus taught us to even pray that way. In Matthew chapter 6, in verse 10, we see that a part of the model prayer Jesus taught us, His people to pray, includes this statement.

[11 : 36] As we pray, we pray to God, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus teaches us to pray that way because that's what we want.

That's what we desire. As God's people, we want to please God. We want His will to be done. In other words, Jesus is telling us here that real Christians don't just talk about what they believe.

they live out their faith. And a part of living out their faith is seeking to know and do God's will. Now let's be real clear about this.

Some people may get the idea, well, Jesus is teaching about some kind of working your way to heaven by doing God's will. Well, no, that's not what He's saying at all. Jesus in no way is de-emphasizing the fact that salvation is by the grace of God, it's unearned, it's undeserved, it's by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, through faith in who He is and what He's done for us. But what Jesus wants us to understand, what Paul emphasizes so much when he talks about faith, is that real faith, if we truly do trust in Jesus, His Spirit will come to live within us and make a difference in us, make a change in us, and the Spirit of God who lives in every Christian will cause us to want to put our faith into practice, into action, to do God's will.

[13:12] Now when you think about God's will, some people think in terms of some kind of special thing God has for me. Usually, the majority of times, overwhelming majority of times, when God's will is mentioned in Scripture, it's talking about God's moral will, how He wants us to live.

God's will as a man is to be a godly husband to your wife, godly father to your children. God's will is that you not compromise His Word, His truth, biblical morality, as you do your work, as you do your job, even if they expect you to, people that hired you.

God's will is very practical. It's living the way that He's called us to live because as Christians indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that's our desire.

That's what we want to do. Now, genuine faith is a visible faith. It will be seen.

And any faith that is not seen, in other words, if people can see you and they don't see any signs that you're a Christian, you're not. James says it this way. Look at James 2.17. Really, the whole book of James is about how faith works.

[14:34] Faith is visible. Faith produces fruit. But look at this. Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. It is non-existent.

So, Jesus is warning us about a faulty profession of faith. But He's also here warning us about a faulty expression of faith.

Look at verse 22. He's warning us about substituting sensationalism for substance. Look at that verse again. On that day, judgment day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not do all kinds of miraculous things?

Prophecy in Your name. Preach in Your name. Cast out demons in Your name. And do many mighty works in Your name. Jesus is talking about there are people.

At that day and time, they claimed to be His followers, and they preached. They cast out demons. They actually performed miracles.

[15:41] But Jesus is saying they were not really His. They had no relationship with Him. They're going to be condemned on judgment day.

This goes to show us miraculous signs do not necessarily mean that God's involved. You can look at it throughout Scripture.

For example, in Moses' day, in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh had his wizards and magic guys who could perform a lot of the same miracles that Moses did under God's command.

You see that in other places in the Old Testament. Prophets, false prophets doing miraculous things. You see that in Paul's ministry. He encountered this in Acts chapter 19 for an example. Jesus even said throughout history up until He comes back to this world, miracle workers will be found. Look at it in Matthew 24, verse 24.

[16:49] Jesus says, For false Christ's little sea and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray if possible even the elect, even true believers.

There are some people who are empowered by the devil. There is spiritual warfare that goes on in this world that sort of what we call behind the scenes.

and there are people who are doing some amazing, miraculous things in the power of the devil. And Jesus is talking about people who are actually deceived and deceiving people.

They're not seeking to do what they do for God's glory. They're seeking to do what they do for their own or some other unacceptable means, reason. Jesus is emphasizing just another way here in verse 22 that our faith, real faith, will result in us being obedient to God, doing God's will, living very practically daily a life that pleases God, that meets other people's needs, that serves other people, that upholds the truth, living an honest life, living a godly life.

And I want you to note what Jesus says to those who think that a mere profession of faith or some kind of experiential miracle, sensational thing is the key to salvation.

[18:37] Look at verse 23, the last verse we read. And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Jesus. These are some of the most chilling words in the Bible, aren't they? Jesus will say to somebody who thinks they're his follower on judgment day, I never knew you.

Jesus is not talking about somebody losing their salvation. You see that. He's describing people that he never had a relationship with, people who never were saved.

I never knew you. How could somebody be deceived like that? How could somebody think that they were true followers of Jesus when they were not?

How does this happen today? How is it that there are people today who claim to be a Christian, but they're not? There's no real evidence in their life.

[19:37] No godly character. No doing God's will. Probably a lot of reasons could be cited, but here's one. They have a faulty understanding of what salvation is.

You know, some people equate, and especially this is found in some Baptist churches. Some people think that salvation is somehow or another equated with, in a service like this, at the end of the service, walking down an aisle and taking a pastor by the hand and saying something to him. That's the dumbest thing that's ever been brought up in church life. To actually think that by just standing up and coming down and shaking the pastor's hand, that makes me right with God somehow.

Or some people think because they have an emotional experience. They come to a church service the way things are, maybe something's said, a story's told, music and such, and they just break down, you know, they're thinking some good thoughts.

And they're just sort of overcome with emotion. You know, I would never let you see this, but sometimes I can become overcome with emotion with certain country songs.

[20:50] I can cry. It just touches my heart. But it's not some kind of spiritual experience. It's an emotional.

Touch your heart, touch your feelings, make you feel a certain way that absolutely does nothing to change your life. And because you had got emotional in church one Sunday and you walked down the aisle and shook a pastor's hand, and somehow or another you wound up getting baptized, that does not make you a Christian.

That does not in any way equate to salvation. And you can't find it anywhere from Genesis to Revelation in your Bible that anything like that is what it means to become a Christian.

Now, it could be, I don't want to discount this in any way, it could be that this morning even, the Lord could speak through this message.

The Lord could just work through his spirit in your life to cause you to realize I'm not a Christian, but I want to be saved. And you right there where you're sitting right now, you just think to yourself, you say to God, I hate my sin, I want to turn from my sin, and I really do believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for me.

[22:02] And I trust him right now as my Savior. And when this service is over, you walk down the aisle and you tell me, I have put my faith and trust in Jesus this morning. You confessed your faith here, you want me to tell people here, or you want to tell people here, that's fine.

That is, you walking down the aisle and telling me or telling the congregation, that's just an external way of expressing what internally happened. And every Christian should be baptized in a baptism or in a pond or a church or a lake or river or somewhere, every Christian.

See, that's the New Testament way for Christians to make it known that they are followers of Jesus, to be baptized. But you know what baptism actually literally does? It just gets you wet or cold.

Baptism is just a symbol, it's a picture of what happens when a person truly trusts in Jesus for their salvation. You go down in the water, it symbolizes you've died to the old person you were before you came to know Christ.

You died and been buried, that old person. You come up out of the water, it symbolizes the new life that you have when you put your faith and trust in Jesus to save you. Jesus wants us to understand real salvation.

[23:23] salvation. It's not these external, emotional things that we sometimes equate with that.

Salvation is a gracious work of God in which He works in a person in their mind to cause them to think, in their heart to cause them to feel.

At some point in their mouth to cause them to profess faith. And God so works when He does all these kind of things, He changes us and our lives will show it by our desire to know and do God's will.

A person is saved when God convicts them of their sin, that they are separated from Him because of their sin. And God, when He convicts a person, He's not just making it known they're sinful.

Every one of us in here, we know we're sinners. You find the sorriest human being you know. The person who would just say, I hate God. And they would say, yeah, I know I'm a sinner. Knowing you're a sinner means nothing.

[24 : 25] That's just, you're an idiot if you don't think you're a sinner. You've deceived yourself. You're a liar to yourself if you don't think you are a sinner. We all know we are sinful people.

But when God truly is one who makes that known, makes it aware, we feel guilty. We feel broken. We have dishonored, offended Him, broken His laws.

And if God's doing that work in us, we'll want to stop it. We'll want to change our minds. We want to turn from that kind of thinking and living.

That's repentance. When God works in us to save us, He convicts us of our sin. He gives us a desire to repent, to turn from it, change our mind. And God really does open up our spiritual eyes, so to speak, and causes us to see that when Jesus died on the cross, He died for me.

He paid the penalty for my sin. And I trust Him. I love Him. I'm committing my life to Him. That's how God works to save a person.

[25 : 33] And when God does this in us, we not only trust Jesus as our Savior, as John Blanchard talked about last week, we simultaneously will submit to Him as the Lord, the master, the boss of our lives.

You see, if we really understand that Jesus gave His life for me, we want to give our lives back to Him in return. He's bought us. Paul talks about that with His life.

And so real salvation is a trust in Jesus. It's a commitment to Him. It's a love for Him. That will in some way, or a lot of ways rather, change who we are.

It will never make us perfect in this world. We'll still have that sinful nature. We're still going to come up short. We're not going to do God's will perfectly. But we'll have the desire to.

And we will, because God motivates us from within, we'll want to do His will. We'll put forth the effort to do it. That's how the Holy Spirit will work in us.

[26 : 32] Now, Jesus is telling us here in Matthew 7, some people have false, undeserved assurance.

You need to ask the question of yourself. Is He talking about me? Next, we're going to deal with in this series, not today.

Well, the second kind of assurance we're going to deal with is uncertain assurance. It's possible to be a Christian but lack assurance. That's why John wrote the book of 1 John.

1 John chapter 5, verse 13, says this. Look at it on the screen. 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.

He wrote that because evidently he knew there were people, Christians, who didn't know, who wondered, who struggled, who doubted. Most Christians doubt their salvation at some time or other.

[27 : 35] It doesn't make you an inferior Christian or less spiritual Christian. I truly believe that if a person thinks and understands what God has called us to do, how He's called us to live, and we have experienced at times in our life a true desire, a love for following Jesus, being like Him, I truly believe that when we fail to do that, when we, as some people would use the word, when we backslide, when we move away from the Lord, when we become indifferent, I think it's very natural at that point in time to doubt our salvation.

I don't think God's going to give any person true, confident assurance if they're living in indifference or rebellion against Him.

That's just not how it works. We're going to be learning that, seeing that in the book of 1 John over the next few weeks. We're going to look at some of the reasons why people may have doubts and how to deal with our doubts over the next few weeks.

There's a third kind of assurance. Our goal in this series is for all of us to have or develop undisputed assurance, good assurance, confident assurance.

John's telling us the reason he wrote the letter, just what we read in verse 13 of chapter 5, is to give Christians assurance of their salvation. We can and we should, if we're Christians, have assurance that we really are children of God.

[29 : 15] If you struggle with a lack of assurance, the first and best thing you can do is read slowly, carefully, prayerfully this little book of 1 John.

That's where we're going to spend most of our time in the next few weeks. Now I want to ask you, as we begin this series, this study, what kind of assurance do you have?

Do you have an undeserved assurance, a false assurance that God's made known to you this morning? Or if you suspect this is true, you really need to get serious about this and ask God to clearly reveal to you where you stand with Him.

Don't go through this day without spending some time with Him. Spending some time in 1 John. Don't try to justify yourself.

This is one place where you want to be honest with God and hear Him and be clear. And make sure you're right with Him. Do you have an uncertain assurance?

[30 : 25] Don't rest. Don't be satisfied with that. Don't give up and say that's the way it's going to be. No, it doesn't have to be that way. Having uncertain assurance, doubts, will rob you of the joy and the satisfaction, the confidence that you should have as a child of God.

It will keep you from serving God in a meaningful, productive kind of way. So again, read 1 John. Hopefully you have an unquestioned assurance, confident assurance.

And as you read the book of 1 John, if you are God's child, it should just be affirming to you. I want to end this service by asking you to bow with me in prayer right now.

I want to direct a prayer. Please bow. Heads bowed. Eyes closed. Some in this room most likely are not Christians and you know it.

And I want to ask you right now, if that bothers you, if you don't want to be that way, if you want to have a right relationship with God, admit to Him that you don't.

[31 : 40] Turn from your sins. Change your mind. Put your trust in Jesus and call upon Him to save you right now. Some in here are Christians but you lack assurance.

Don't just accept that. Ask God to speak through His Word and His Spirit to give you confidence. Ask God to help you to do that as you read through the book of 1 John.

Some in this room have good assurance because you are a committed Christian. I want to encourage you to thank God for that and ask Him to help you to grow and to mature and become a source of strength and encouragement and help to others.

Father, help us to know what we need to do individually so that we might respond appropriately. Work in us.

Help us to know and help us to obey you now. And in an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord and you obey Him. I'll be here at the front and be happy to pray with you.

[32 : 58] Help you in any way. If you think that would be helpful at this time.