

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:
(2) Are We Converted? (part 2)**

To begin this morning I would like us to read once verse of Scripture, 2 Corinthians 13:5. We read that the apostle Paul told the “Christians” in the church at Corinth:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

Last Lord’s Day we began a new series of studies that addresses the very important matter of what the Bible teaches about conversion to Jesus Christ. In other words, what does God tell us in His Word about becoming a true Christian?

The first issue that we addressed is the common problem of wrong understanding about the subject itself. There are many who wrongly believe that they have been converted to Jesus Christ, but have never experienced this work of God’s grace in their lives. It is hard to imagine the sense of surprise, horror, and regret that “many” will experience on the Day of Judgment when they discover that they had been deluded with respect to their salvation. They thought that they were prepared and would be preserved through God’s judgment, for they had believed that Jesus Christ was their Savior, but on that great Day our Lord will disown them.

Our Lord spoke of this at the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount. We read in Matthew 7:13ff these words of our Lord:

¹³“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²²Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

²⁴“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ²⁵and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

²⁶“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ²⁷and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

²⁸And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

As we consider this common problem of wrong understanding about true conversion to Jesus Christ, it should lead to...

I. The need for self-examination, watchfulness, and obedience of all of us who profess to be Christians.

Our **Lord Jesus** warned His hearers that they should take great heed to themselves lest they come short of the salvation that God gave through Him. In the passage we read above, the Lord Jesus declared that “many” would come before Him on the Day of Judgment, having presumed that they knew Him, but He will declare to them that He never knew them.

When these come before the Lord, it is apparent that they are not wholly ignorant of the Lord and His ways. The ones our Lord described will apparently have known before that Judgment Day a number of spiritual truths. They knew that Judgment was coming and that they would have to give an account of themselves on that day. They knew and believed that Jesus was the Lord, the One to Whom they would give account, for they will call Him “Lord” on that Day. They believed that they had lived for the Lord Jesus and had given evidence in their lives that they knew Him. They claimed to have proclaimed and represented the Lord Jesus to others, even while they assumed that they were His people. They claimed to have been used of God in this work of proclamation, even unto the performance of miracles and casting out demons in His name. But He will declare to these people, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

The **Apostle Paul** had also warned professing Christians about the need and importance not to be deceived regarding their salvation. The church at Corinth was a church whose members had all sorts of serious doctrinal and behavioral problems. He declared to them in 2 Corinthians 13:5:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—*unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*”

Christians are to be a self-examining people, for there is great danger in presuming that you are a Christian, but in reality you are not.

The **Apostle Peter** taught similarly,”

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, *be even more diligent to make your call and election sure*, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:10)

Peter was writing to “brethren”, the professing people of God--Christians--that they had better take stock of themselves. They were to determine whether they were truly numbered among God’s elect, those who would receive salvation when they stood before the Lord in judgment.

Last week we sought to consider reasons why this subject of true conversion is so important. I was unable to present clearly the last reason we listed for its importance. Here it is (again): The importance of our study regarding conversion to Jesus Christ is magnified *because of the many warnings we have in Scripture of “many” who will think that they are converted when Jesus Christ returns, only then to discover they are still in their sins.* The Holy Scriptures press upon all who claim to be converted to be watchful and prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the great Day of Judgment that will then take place. When the Lord Jesus returns a second time, He will find His professing church comprised of professing believers, some of which are true Christians, some of which are not. All profess to have faith in Him. All claim to be His disciples. All are anticipating the return of the Lord. All are assuming that they will receive their full and final salvation when He comes. But not all are true Christians who profess to be Christian.

Our Lord addressed this matter. He gave the parable of a wedding procession, a practice that was common within the context of first century Jewish life. He referred to five wise and five foolish virgins who were to be ready to join the wedding party, which they knew would be happen soon, but the exact day or time was not known to them. In this parable our Lord gave a 50% ratio of professing Christians who will have salvation and 50% who will only then become aware that they do not have salvation. I do not think that our Lord was intending to give us a precise ratio of true Christians to false Christians on the Day of Judgment by referring to five wise and five foolish virgins. But do you suppose that He gave an approximate percentage? Can you imagine if the Lord returned today and only 50% of professing Christians were found

to be ready for His return and 50% were not? Half of us would enter into the joy of the Lord but half of us would be denied entrance, but the pronouncement was given to us by the Lord, “Depart from Me; I never know you!” **Charles Spurgeon** wrote of this:

Let us faint hope that we are not to gather from our Lord’s words that one half of the professing Church is composed of those whom He calls “foolish.” Yet our Savior would not have spoken of so great a proportion if there were not really a very large admixture of foolish professors with the wise professors of the grace of God.¹

In another sermon **Spurgeon** referenced this parable.² His comments were addressed to the text of **Luke 13:24**, in which Jesus said, **“Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”**

So the text teaches us. It does not say “a few may be misled,” but “many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” That many professors are deceived is clear enough from the language of Christ Himself, both here and in other places. For instance, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be like unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom; and five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” We hope that in our Churches we have not such a division this, for it were fearful to contemplate only one half as sincere, and the other half graceless, having the lamp of profession, without the secret vessel of spiritual life! Yet, so alarming a proportion as five out of ten should make us search ourselves very carefully, lest we be found among the virgins, and among the virgins having lamps, ay, and among those whose lamps are burning, and yet should be cast away as having no oil in our vessels with our lamps.³

The number of truly saved people in any given congregation is a common concern of pastors who have any measure of spiritual sense about them. We ask our Lord, “How many in our body truly know You? How many are ‘wise’ as these five and how many are ‘foolish’ as these other five?”

J. C. Ryle (19th c.) voiced concern in his day about professing Christians who were strangers to God’s saving grace. He also referenced the parable of the ten virgins.

The professing Church is compared to “ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom:” all of them had lamps, but only five had oil in their vessels to feed the flame; all of them professed to have one object in view, but five only were truly “wise,” and the rest were “foolish.” The visible Church of Christ is just in the same condition: all its members are baptized in the name of Christ. But not all really hear His voice and follow Him; all are called Christians, and profess to be of the Christian religion, but not all have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, and really are what they profess to be. Our own eyes tell us that it is so now: the Lord Jesus tells us that it will be so when He comes again. Let us mark well this description. After all our preaching and praying--after all our visiting and teaching,-- after all our missionary exertions abroad, and means of grace at home, many will be found at last dead in trespasses and sins! The wickedness and unbelief of human nature is a subject about which we all have much to learn.⁴

It would appear to me that one difference between the true Christian and the deluded professing Christian, is that ***the true Christian is moved by God’s Word, the Holy Spirit, the command of the Lord, and His own conscience, to be watchful with view to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.*** They are “blessed” for they who are watching will receive the grace of salvation in its finality and fullness. Our Lord told His disciples in **Luke 12:37** and **38**:

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Popular Exposition of Matthew* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p. 222.

² I have this sermon posted on our website.

³ Sermon by Charles Spurgeon, “*Self Delusion*”, at http://www.thewordoftruth.net/classic_sermons/Spurgeon_1_Final.html

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. Matthew* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986, orig. 1856), pp. 31f.

“Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.”

And so this problem is a great one, a far-reaching one, that there are many who believe themselves to be true Christians, who believe themselves to have undergone conversion when they have not. **Charles Spurgeon** described it this way in another place:

We shall now turn to a second point. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THERE ARE FALSE PROFESSORS (i.e. professing believers). There is an imitation of the externals of godliness, which it is not easy to detect. Art can carve a statue so that it almost breathes; and some of us in looking at very skillful paintings have mistaken them for realities. In a notable picture in the Exhibition, you may have noticed an imitation of sunlight shining under a door, so well effected, that many go up to it to ascertain if it be not really a gleam from the sun. We know that men can counterfeit coins and notes so well, that only the most experienced can detect them; and in all commercial transactions men are so well aware of the subtlety of their fellows, that they look well lest they be deceived. The vital mysteries of godliness are mysterious: the inner life cannot be perceived by the carnal eye, and the outer life of the godly seemeth to most men to be but morality carried out with care; and hence it becomes but a very simple task for a man to make himself look just like a Christian, so as to deceive the very elect. To learn by heart that which others may say from the heart--to get the outline of a believer's experience, and then to adapt it skillfully to one's self as our experience--this is a thing so simple, that instead of wondering that there are hypocrites, I often marvel that there are not ten times more! And then, again, the graces--the real graces within--are very easy to counterfeit. There is a repentance that needeth to be repented of--and yet it approaches near as possible to true repentance (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10, KJV). Does repentance make men hate sin? They who have a false repentance may detest some crimes. Does repentance make men resolve that they will not sin? So will this false repentance; for Balaam said, “If Barak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I will not go beyond the word of the Lord.” Does true repentance make men humble themselves? So does false repentance; for Ahab humbled himself before God, and yet he perished. There is a line of distinction so fine, that an eagle's eye hath not seen it, and only God Himself, and the soul which is enlightened with His Spirit, can tell whether the repentance be genuine or no. And as for faith, how easy is it to counterfeit this! Even in Christ's day, there was a faith which wrought miracles but did not save the soul; and Paul tells us that if we had a faith which could remove mountains, yet if we had not charity, it would profit us nothing. I know it, that a man may say that he is saved by faith without works; and his faith may give him comfort, his faith help him in trials, it may make him forsake some sins, and yet it may not be the faith which looks alone to Christ, and saves the soul. To imitate these things, to so cunning and well-practiced a counterfeiter as Satan, is no great difficulty.⁵

Let us pray that our Lord will help us and bless us through our study of this most important subject. Let us also pray that the right people become troubled and the right people are comforted. It was said of our Lord that He was very tender and careful not to overthrow the faith of those in whom was but weak or little faith. It is said of Him, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, until He sends forth justice to victory” (Matt. 12:10).

Let us now consider...

⁵ From Spurgeon's sermon, “*Self-Delusion*”, which is posted on our website at http://www.thewordoftruth.net/classic_sermons/Spurgeon_1_Final.html

II. Two major reasons for the self-delusion of some that they are true Christians

If I could reduce the causes of self-delusion regarding salvation, I would say that there are two major causes. The **first cause** of self-delusion is that most people believe, because this is what they have been taught that *salvation is the forgiveness of sins, and that this forgiveness is obtained for us through Jesus Christ due to what He has done on behalf of sinners through His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection in the place of sinners.* In other words, salvation is commonly viewed *solely* in terms of what God has done *apart from us* and *outside of us*. But further, people are “led to Christ” to appropriate the forgiveness of sins through faith alone in Who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for sinners. Therefore, many people believe wrongly that they have been converted, for they have come to believe they are sinners, who are without hope in and of themselves, and have come to look to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

Now one might read (or hear) that last paragraph and think, “What is wrong with this? Is this not what salvation is and how it is received, through faith alone?” But the problem is this, biblical salvation involves not only what Jesus Christ has done *on behalf* of sinners, that is His work that is external and apart from sinners, but salvation involves what God does *within* His people, transforming them into new creatures in Christ Jesus. Or as we said last Lord’s Day, *conversion not only involves faith in what God had done in Christ on behalf of His people on the cross, but true conversion involves what the Holy Spirit has wrought in the hearts and lives of His people.* Salvation includes not only the forgiveness of sins but also the new life that overcomes sin. Or another way to say it is this: salvation includes not only God’s imputation of righteousness in our positional *justification*, but He also imparts grace to His people resulting in their practical *sanctification*.

This leads us to a **second cause** of self-delusion of “many” professing Christians who are not “possessing” Christians. *Most Christians have been convinced that true “conversion” is far less than what the Holy Scriptures teach.* Many look to slim or wrong evidence to support their belief that they are converted to Christ. They have lowered the bar so that any and all who claim to be Christian are believed to be true Christians. But when we study the Scriptures, we read that the bar is quite high in its description of what constitutes a true Christian. This is a very important, even critical matter.

Now if we only considered what we have set forth thus far, we might be rather discouraged and perhaps feel incapable of sorting through these matters. One might be quick to say, “How can I be sure of myself?” “If so many are deceived and if false conversion can look so much like true conversion, how am I to know?” But we may be thankful that...

III. God has given us clear instruction in His Word to discern true from false conversion.

Now as we have already shown, the problem that evangelicals have distinguishing between true and false conversion is not in the knowledge of what Jesus Christ did on behalf of His people. This is taught and believed by most. Rather, the problem of distinguishing between true and false conversion is in the realm of failing to identify and distinguish *a true inward work of grace in the soul.* Outwardly the true and false believer is not easily distinguished. But when we examine what the Holy Scriptures declare to be the true marks of saving grace in the soul, the matters come into much clearer light and much sharper relief. How then, may we describe a true work of converting, saving grace in the soul? We might consider the following points of importance.

1. We may distinguish between true assurance of salvation and presumption, or carnal confidence.

Numerous people across our land, both in the church and out, who have assurance that they have salvation. Assurance of salvation is often believed to be an easy thing to acquire and maintain. But actually the Bible sets forth assurance of one’s salvation as not an easy thing to acquire as most assume it to be. The facts are these:

(1) ***There are some who have a true assurance of salvation, and they should have.*** This is because they examined the biblical teaching respecting these things, and have passed the tests in their own conscience regarding their condition. (I think these are much fewer in number as is generally assumed.)

(2) ***There are some who are true Christians, who do not have assurance of salvation, but they should have.***

(3) ***There are many in this world who have assurance of salvation, but they should not have.*** They have no legitimate biblical grounds for assurance, for God's Word says of them that they are without hope and without God.

(4) ***There are some who are true Christians, who have assurance, but the basis of their assurance is faulty.*** They may have a right to true assurance, but they are basing their assurance on the wrong things.

(5) ***There are those who have assurance, but it is of a weak nature, sometimes they feel assured but at other times they quite despair of their condition.***

How may we distinguish true assurance from false assurance? ***First, there is a vast difference in what has transpired in the heart of the true Christian but has not been experienced in the false convert.*** False assurance may be identified in that it exists in one who is generally ignorant and without apprehension of the depth of his sin and the danger he is in while in his sin. Such a one arrives quickly to the belief that all is well between him and His God. But he is actually blind to his true sinful condition, therefore his ground of assurance is faulty. Therefore the one with false assurance of salvation will commonly have an inordinate sense of self-love in this soul. He thinks all too well of himself. He sees no reason why God would not receive him.

Second, there is a great difference between the one with true assurance and the one with carnal confidence ***in their motivations and their perception of the ground of their acceptance of God.*** The one with true assurance is very aware of a work of God's grace in his soul bringing him to faith in Jesus Christ. But the one with false assurance, who is not a true convert to Christ, has only a natural, superficial understanding of grace. God's work of grace in his soul is not apparent because God has not been at work in that realm of his life.

The one with true assurance of salvation knows that his state is not from any worth or effort that he has rendered to God, but that he is solely a debtor to God's mercy and grace. But the superficial professor Christianity believes himself to be quite good, and that his goodness is the cause of God's blessing. He is as the self-righteous Pharisee that our Lord described: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector'" (Luke 18:11).

A ***third*** difference between the true child of God and the one who is deceived is that ***the true Christian possesses a deep seated humiliation for his sin and feels burdened because of it.*** This is how the prophet Ezekiel described the one who has experienced salvation: "Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. (Ezek. 36:31). Accompanying this sense of humiliation may be periods of doubt and struggles with unbelief regarding one's own condition. Commonly the one with false assurance never doubts but is always assured, but that on slender grounds.

A fourth quality of true assurance is that it sustains the true believer through the most difficult of life's trials. True assurance is sustained through trials because it is born of and sustained by the power of God.

So it is with true assurance, it abides though billows and waves come upon it. So that troubles will discern the truth of your graces and comforts, sooner than anything else.⁶

Peter wrote of the necessity of trials in order to discover and confirm that true, saving faith exists. We read in 1 Peter

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:3-9)

True faith will be a tried and tested faith. A tried faith gives assurance to that believer that he has God's full and final salvation promised to him and reserved for him by God His Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifth, there is a clear difference between what accompanies a sound assurance of salvation from the one who is not a true convert of Jesus Christ. True assurance comes with a genuine "fear of the Lord" which is seen in a holy concern to please and not to disappoint the Lord which the soul has embraced as Savior. The soul which has experienced true conversion continues to be humble and strives to be holy before God.

Not only may we distinguish between true assurance of salvation and presumption, or carnal confidence, but...

2. We may view obedience to God's Word as a distinguishing evidence of true saving grace in the soul.

We read in 1 John 2:3 these words: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." Obedience to God's Word, to God's commandments, to God's law, is a sign of true saving grace. But this matter needs to be understood rightly.

Obedience to God's commandments is the evidence or the effect of knowing God, not the cause of it. It may be said that there are three different ways that one can obey the commandments of God. First, there is complete and perfect obedience, which only Jesus Christ and the saints who are now in heaven can do. Second, there is imperfect obedience, but it is nevertheless sincere obedience unto God. This is the obedience of the true child of God, the obedience that John described in the verse above. And then third, there is external obedience, perhaps with some inward emotional effects, but this "obedience" is that of the one who has not truly been converted to Christ. This is partial obedience. This is obedience that is only when seen by others or only when the person "feels" like that is what he wants to do. He is not driven by a desire to please God. He does not obey God's commandments because God is the one who directed him, but because for some reason he has momentarily and partially decided he wanted to conform his life to one or some of God's commandments. But the obedience of a true child of God is born out of love for God. The Scriptures describe the Christian's obedience as "faith working by love" (Gal. 5:6).

A life characterized by obedience to God's law as expressed in His commandments is a sure indication that a person is in a state of saving grace. This is true because only the grace of God can lead and enable a sinner to keep the law of God. Paul wrote in Romans 8:7, "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is

⁶ Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: The Anatomy of True and False Conversion* (International Outreach, Inc., 1996, orig. 1652), p. 21.

not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” This implies that the spiritual mind, that which is controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is subject to the law of God, in fact, it cannot be otherwise.

We should understand that our obedience as true Christians is an *evangelical* obedience, not *legal* obedience. What is legal obedience? This is born out of thinking that one’s works are meritorious, or it is present when obedience is rendered only out of fear of punishment. But what is evangelical obedience? (1) As Christians, when we strive to order our lives according to God’s commandments, but when we fail in our obedience, and we often do fail, “for there is no one who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46), God pardons us of our disobedience through the covenant of grace that He has with us. And so He regards our sincere obedience to His law, our righteousness consists more of His of forgiveness of us than our obedience to Him. (2) Evangelical obedience involves our striving to be obedient itself to be an act of faith in our Savior to enable us by His Spirit to do the things that He commands us to do in His Word. The obedience of the true Christian consists internal and spiritual compliance, not merely outward and external conformity to God’s law. Do not misunderstand, our obedience is external, but it is also internal. We obey God from the heart, albeit imperfectly.

The obedience of the true Christian includes conformity to the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments, that which prescribes our duty before God, but our obedience is also to the last 6 commandments, which address our duty to our fellow man. It was the apostle John who also wrote, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10).

A third way in which the true and false convert may be distinguished is that

3. We may view opposition and abstaining from sin to be evidence of true saving grace in the soul.

We read in 1 John 3:9 and 10 these words,

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.”

This is not a description of a perfect man, but of a righteous man, who desires not to sin, for he has come to see sin as God sees sin, and so in his new heart or nature, he wants none of it. When it declares that “he cannot sin”, it is speaking of the tenor and habit of his life. The true Christian cannot practice sin. He cannot live in sin. Sin alarms him. Sin disappoints him. Sin discourages him.

Because of this antipathy against sin, this may be a sign that true work of saving grace has been wrought by God in the soul. Now more specifically, we might consider these points of **Anthony Burgess** (1600-1663) under this heading:

(1) This is a sign, when we perceive a settled fixed frame of heart against sin. The Christian is born of God. God has given him a new nature that thereafter governs the man’s desires and aspirations, it shapes what he thereafter loves and what he hates.

(2) This is a sign, when there is a universal repugnancy in every part of a man against sin, not only in his reason and conscience, but in his will, affections, and the whole man. Paul described himself as one who “delighted in the law of god in the inward man.” So does every true convert to Christ. He rejoices in what God has declared is true, good, and right. He has aversion to everything opposite, that which is false, errant, and wrong.

(3) This is a sign in that his fear and hatred of sinning renders it no longer possible for him to give himself over to sin. Here are the words of Burgess:

He doth not sin, neither can he sin, says the text (i.e. 1 John 3:9-10). There being a root of grace in him, it’s impossible he should sin with such a universal content of soul, as wicked men do. There is a two-fold *cannot*, one *moral*, and is no more than that which difficulty is not so. Thus 2 Corinthians 13:8,

“We cannot do anything against the truth, but for the truth.” Acts 4:20, “We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.” And in this sense, the children of god may be said, “they cannot sin”, because they have an averseness of heart to it. Secondly, there is a *cannot, absolutely*, so that the thing can never be, easily or difficulty, and in this sense the godly man cannot sin totally and finally, so as to be wholly deserted of God. As for instance of Peter, David, and others, and whether the sins of the godly may be called reigning sins. This is certain, it’s impossible for a godly man so to delight and live in sin, as the seed of grace should be quite extinct. Although the grace that is in God’s children may for a time may make no actual resistance, yet the principle of it, by reason of god’s promise, will never be fully removed from the heart... God may at times put a bridle upon the conscience of a wicked man, that he dares not (to sin), nor cannot commit such a sin, as his heart would carry him to, but this *cannot sin*, is far different from the godly man’s *cannot sin*. The one is a violent motion, the principle is from without, the other is a natural motion, and has its ground from within.

(4) This is a sign, in that hereby a godly man in some measure, and by degrees, does not only leave outward gross sins, but even conquer and crucify the inward body of sin. Galatians 5: “He hath crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof; and he is said *to crucify the body of sin, and the deeds of the flesh.*” In other words, the converted man cares about what his heart and mind give themselves to love and serve. He turns away in his very soul from those things that God has taught him to hate.

(5) This is a sign, when a man’s opposition to sin, and the leaving of it, is because of the foul nature of sin. The converted man has come to see and assess sin as God does, not as he had formerly done as one in his sin.⁷

There are other biblical criteria by which we can distinguish true and false conversions, but we will address those next week, Lord willing.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2 Cor. 13:14)

⁷ Burgess listed nine reasons this is a sign of a true convert, but time has only allowed us to address these five. See Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, pp. 34-40.