

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:
(3) Are We Converted? (part 3)**

Today is our third Lord's Day on which we are addressing this topic, "Conversion to Jesus Christ." It may be easily argued that this is the most important of subjects for us to consider. This is for several reasons. First, it is an important subject because there is no great matter to which we should give our attention than the eternal destiny of our souls. As our Lord emphasized to His disciples, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Second, it is an important subject when we consider the great degree of ignorance among even so-called "Bible-believers" respecting the biblical teaching regarding salvation. There is an assumption on the part of many in evangelical churches that they understand these matters, but their understanding is sadly errant or superficial. But thirdly, our study about true conversion to Jesus Christ is also very important due to the great number of professing Christians who have apparently never experienced true conversion to Jesus Christ, but who wrongly believe that they have. These people believe they are "saved", when the biblical evidence should lead them to another conclusion. It is important that we are informed of the truth of these matters. It is important for each of us personally. May the Lord forbid that any of us be self-deceived regarding our own standing before God! May our Lord bless our study so that each of us would know how best to represent Jesus Christ faithfully to a sinful, needy world.

In our study thus far we have shown why it is easy and common for people to have false assurance of their salvation. There are externals of Christianity that can be experienced by those who are not truly converted. The unconverted can understand "the truth" that is Jesus Christ. The unconverted can believe all of the essential promises of the "gospel", even believing that they are participants and beneficiaries of those promises, when in reality they are not. The unconverted can be greatly moved emotionally in things they that they assume are "spiritual." Surely they are true "Christians", or so they think, because of the moving experiences they have or have had. The unconverted can also have "faith", even faith that seems to see God at work in their lives, and yet they do not have saving faith.¹ It is an easy thing to be deceived respecting one's conversion to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is a very difficult thing to become undeceived respecting false conversion to true Christianity. May our Lord grant us mercy and grace as we continue to work through these matters.

One of the major and very common errors regarding the Bible's teaching about obtaining salvation is the belief that it involves no effort on our part, that God only requires our "faith." "After all," it is argued, "consider **Ephesians 2:8** and **9**: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*"² But it is wrongly assumed from this that works are not necessary, "for salvation is apart from works." But this passage in Ephesians is not saying that our works are unnecessary, rather, it is a declaration that our salvation is not *earned* by our works; it is not as if our works were our contribution in the equation along with God's work, the two resulting in our salvation. But that good works are essential is clear from this very context, for we read **verse 10**, which follows verses 8 and 9: "For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" God has determined that He will save us

¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1ff; Matthew 7:21ff.

² The verb form of the words in Ephesians 2:8, "have been saved", is a perfect passive participle. The idea conveyed is that God had acted to save them in the past and that state of salvation had continued to the present time. This is one of the few statements in the New Testament in which believers are said to "have been saved," in other words, where salvation is presented as a past action that God has done on our behalf--God has saved us. In most instances salvation is set forth as a future, but certain prospect that we will one day "inherit", that will be fully "realized" on the Day of Judgment.

apart from the merit of any works we perform, but to argue that works are, therefore, not necessary, is great error. God has ordained that His people are to labor, to overcome any and all obstacles, in order that they inherit salvation.³

Let us read the Apostle Paul's personal testimony about the great effort he put forth to assure that he would experience salvation from God's condemnation on the Day of Judgment. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:15-27** of his own great attention and effort he put forth with view to his own salvation. After he wrote of his right to be supported as a minister of the gospel by those who benefitted from his gospel, he declared that he had chosen not to insist on this right, in order that the gospel would not be hindered among the people. We read beginning with verse 15:

¹⁵But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. ¹⁶For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. ***For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*** ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, ***that I may share with them in its blessings.***

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ***So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.*** ²⁷***But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.***

We see in the highlighted words Paul's concern for his own salvation. His personal salvation was tied up in his responsibility to proclaim the gospel. This is what God had called him to do. It was the path of faith, the course that he was to follow throughout his life. His faith, saving faith, was manifest by him proclaiming the gospel wherever God sent him. It was essential for him. He declared, "***For necessity is laid upon me.***" It was not an option for him. It was required of him.

He next declared, "***Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!***" This expression, "woe", is not simply Paul saying that it would be a sad or unfortunate thing, if he failed to proclaim the gospel. For him, failure to proclaim the gospel would be apostasy from faith, even saving faith. "Woe" is a description of God's impending judgment in which He pours out His wrath upon His enemies. Paul is as an Old Testament prophet that God called to warn His people of their need to escape His judgment. If those prophets had failed to fulfill their responsibility, then God would have required of them the guilt of the blood of all those who

³ People will fail to understand this if they have reduced "salvation" in their thinking to be equated wholly and solely with justification, even the forgiveness of sins. Justification through faith alone is at the heart of the gospel. Justification is the foundation of the gospel. If you are not right on justification, you cannot have the true gospel. But justification is not the whole of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of God bringing salvation through Jesus Christ to sinners, saving them from all of the effects of sin, including salvation (1) from the punishment of sin by God (our justification), (2) from the alienation of sin from God (our reconciliation and adoption), (3) from the defiling and enslaving power of sin through the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (our sanctification), and (4) from the presence of sin at our departure from this life and at our resurrection (our future glorification). To present the "gospel" as if it were solely justification through faith alone in order to be forgiven of sin is to truncate the gospel and misrepresent the nature of salvation through Jesus Christ. The angel told Joseph, "You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

perished. God would pronounce His “woe” upon those false prophets for their failure. For example, we read in **Ezekiel 13:1f** of God’s judgment on unfaithful prophets:

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²“Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the LORD!’”

³Thus says the Lord GOD: “***Woe to the foolish prophets***, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! ⁴O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. ⁵You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD. ⁶They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD!’ But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. ⁷Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, ‘The LORD says,’ but I have not spoken.” (Ezek. 13:1-7)

Paul was declaring that this would be his fate, if he failed to proclaim the gospel. In the language of 1 Corinthians 9:13, the apostle declared that the necessity of preaching the gospel was upon him. It brought no credit to him in proclaiming the gospel. But if he failed to do so, he would incur the wrath of God. He would be as guilty and culpable as those false prophets of old. He would have abandoned the faith, apostatized from the gospel in his failure to proclaim it faithfully.

We then read Paul’s words of **verse 23** that all that he did in his ministry for the sake of the gospel was with view to his own enjoyment of the promises of the gospel, ***even his own salvation***. **Verse 23** reads, “***I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.***” Here are the comments of **John Calvin** on these words:

As the Corinthians might think with themselves, that this was a peculiarity in Paul’s case on the ground of his office, he argues, from the very design of it, that this is common to all Christians. For when he declares, that his aim had been, that he *might become a partaker of the gospel*, he indirectly intimates, that all who do not act the same part with him are unworthy of the fellowship of the gospel. *To become a partaker of the gospel* is to receive the fruit of it.⁴

In other words, Paul saw his salvation as tied together with his faithful proclamation of the gospel. This was the manner in which his faith in Christ was manifested in his life. To discharge his duty to proclaim the gospel would result in him enjoying the benefits of that gospel, that is, salvation, with all those who embrace it fully.

Here are the words of the commentator, **Charles Hodge**, on 1 Corinthians 9:23:

I do all things; ‘my whole course of action, not merely accommodating myself to the prejudice of others, but in everything else, is regulated for the promotion of the gospel.’ ...Paul lived for the gospel. He did all things for it. *That I may be a joint-partaker thereof*, i.e. a partaker with others; not, *with you*, as there is nothing to confine the statement to the Corinthians. To be a partaker of the gospel, means, of course, to be a partaker of the benefits; the subject of redemption which it announces. It is necessary to live for the gospel, in order to be a partaker of the gospel.⁵

The apostle concluded this section of his epistle with these words of verses 26 and 27: “***So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.***” The apostle described his self-imposed discipline to be like the athletes who competed in the Grecian games. But where they did so in order to win a foot race, he did so with view to attaining the “prize” of his salvation.

Some try and argue that his concern was that he merely not become disqualified to preach the gospel, because of his failure to be faithful to his calling to preach the gospel. But he has more in view than being

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*.

⁵ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), p. 98.

fruitful in his ministry. Verse 25 makes it clear what is at stake. The runners in the Grecian games disciplined themselves in order to “receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” He had in view his salvation. **Charles Hodge** commented on Paul’s words,

In opposition to the fruitless or objectionless fighting just described, Paul says, “*I keep under my body; literally I bruise my body.* His antagonist was his body, which he so smote, i.e. so dealt with, as *to bring it into subjection; literally, to lead about as a slave.* Perhaps in reference to the custom of the victor leading about his conquered antagonist as a servant; though this is doubtful. The body, as in part the seat and organ of sin, is used for our whole sinful nature. Romans 8:13. It was not merely his sensual nature that Paul endeavoured to bring into subjection, but all the evil propensities and passions of his heart. *Lest having preached to others.* Perhaps the apostle means to adhere to the figure and say, ‘Lest having acted the part of a herald (whose office at the Grecian games was to proclaim the rules of the contest and to summon the competitors or combatants to the lists), he himself should be judged unworthy of the prize.’ As, however, the word is so often used for *preaching the gospel*, he may intend to drop the figure and say, ‘He made these strenuous exertions, lest, having preached the gospel to others, he himself should become a reprobate, one rejected.’ What an argument and what a reproof is this! The reckless and listless Corinthians thought that they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted apostle considered himself as engaged in a lie-struggle for his salvation. This same apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved, and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyful assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in heaven, earth or hell could ever separate him from the love of God. Romans 8:28, 39. The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other. It is only those who are conscious of this constant and deadly struggle with sin, to whom this assurance is given. In the very same breath Paul says, “O wretched man that I am;” and, “Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory,” Romans 7:24, 25. It is the indolent and self-indulgent Christian who is always in doubt.⁶

There are those who argue from this passage that a true Christian can lose his salvation. This passage will bears no such interpretation. It does testify that a true Christian must live as a Christian, in a manner consistent with the calling of the gospel, to repent of sin, turning to God, and placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. And then as a manifestation of that faith, to purpose by God’s grace to live for Jesus Christ and the furtherance of His gospel, even for the expansion and development of the kingdom of God.

The footnote in **The Reformation Study Bible** confirms this idea. On the last words of verse 23, “*lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*” is this note:

This statement has often been used as evidence that Christians can lose their salvation. The witness of the NT and of Paul in particular is that those whom God has brought to Himself are His forever (Rom. 8:28-30) because the life they have been given in Christ is eternal in character (John 5:24; cf. Heb. 7:16). What God has begun He will bring to completion (Phil. 1:6). However, it would be wrong to dismiss or minimize Paul’s concern (cf. 15:2; Phil. 3:1; Col. 1:23) by suggesting that it is merely hypothetical or relates only to rewards and not salvation. Paul was confident that absolutely nothing would be able to separate him from God’s love (Rom. 8:38-39), but he never presumed that he was saved regardless of what he did. No Christian can afford to take lightly the warnings of Scripture (10:12), because these warnings are the God appointed means by which true believers persevere to the end. Those of faith heed these warnings, as the Spirit works through them to make them will and work “for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).⁷

The point is this. We who profess to be Christian are to give ourselves wholly to this matter of living for Christ, seeking to defeat sin in our lives using the means of grace that God has given to us. The outcome

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sproul, R. C., General Editor, **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 2029.

of this devotion and diligence is glorious. This is what the Lord has declared through the pen of the Apostle Peter:

⁵But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

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 Peter 1:5-11)

Now last Lord's Day we emphasized the need to use biblical tests by which we are to assess ourselves. As **2 Corinthians 13:5** reads,

“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!”

God has given us instruction in His Word on how we may discern true from false conversion. As we stated last week, even though in external matters it is easy for one who has never truly been converted to appear as a converted person, especially when among true converted persons, the Holy Scriptures set forth in sharp relief the false from the true. Again, as we have already stated, the manner in which we may distinguish between true and false conversion is not in the knowledge of what Jesus Christ did on behalf of His people. People can believe all the right things and still be unconverted. Rather, the manner in which we may distinguish true and false conversion is in identifying the presence of *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 become quite clear. How then, may we describe a true work of converting, saving grace in the soul?

We have already shown last week that

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

But let us now consider how...

2. We may view *our 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 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 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).

This obedience to God's law must be *an inward matter*, not just an *outward conformity*. For unconverted people can order themselves so that there is an outward conformity to the commandments of God. This is what our Lord declared regarding the Pharisees, who only manifested outward conformity to God's law. Our Lord said to His disciples,

¹⁷"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you, that *unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*.

Our Lord was not saying that His people were in need of an imputed righteousness through faith alone. That is stated elsewhere quite frequently and forthrightly. He was speaking of the need for His disciples to have a practical righteousness that is wrought in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see from our Lord's words this truth:

*That external moral obedience unto the law of God, though it be much relied upon by men; yet it is no sure evidence for heaven.*⁸

Anthony Burgess revealed the problem with only external conformity to God's law.

⁸ Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: The Anatomy of True and False Conversion* (International Outreach, Inc., 1996, orig. 1652), p. 89.

...That therein this moral obedience to all the commandments of God is defective, is, that it is a body without a soul, a shell without a kernel, a picture without life, there is nothing but an outward shape of righteousness; as for a principle of regeneration, *and a new life within, that is wholly absent.* Now this was the fundamental miscarriage of the Pharisees, as appears by Nicodemus, they were wholly ignorant of original corruption. They believed not all was carnal and defiled within them, and thereupon saw no necessity of being born again, of having a new nature infused into us, and so become new creatures. And this is the rock upon which thousands split their immortal souls still. They please themselves thus, I live honestly, I do justly to everyone, I frequent the church, and receive the ordinances of God, what further thing is to be done? I thank God that no man can accuse me, nor does my conscience accuse me. But in the mean while, are miserable seduced men, and are at that very time, in the state of gall and wormwood; Paul though he walked with a *good conscience, and concerning the righteousness of the law unblamable,* yet when God enlightened his soul, what a heavy doom did he pass upon himself and called all that dung, which he judged gold once! Therefore herein is the danger of mere moral obedience, that it is all a glorious house without any foundation, a fair apple with a rotten core, a comely, beautiful face with impostumed vials.⁹

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

3. We may view our *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

⁹ Ibid, p. 90.

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.¹⁰

4. We may examine the nature of our *desires* to be evidence of true saving grace in the soul.

When a person is truly converted to Jesus Christ, he undergoes a transformation of his values and aspirations. God imparts a new heart to the ones that He brings His salvation. In doing so God imparts holy aspirations, holy desires in the hearts of His people. Before being converted, his desires were for himself and his well-being only. But upon conversion, the converted man discovers in himself new and noble desires, desires consistent with righteousness. And so, here, in the arena of our desires, that the reality of our true conversion may be ascertained.

Someone sent me a devotion recently that speaks to this matter of ascertaining true conversion by assessing one's desires. This was taken from a piece written by Archibald Alexander, entitled, "The Heart's Cry after God" (1879). It is based in the verse, "*My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!*" (Psalm 84:2). This underscores what we have been saying, true conversion is discovered in the presence of a work of God in the soul, not in outward profession or even actions.

The desires of the heart are the best proofs of salvation; and if a man wishes to know whether he is really saved or not, he can very soon find out by putting his finger upon *the pulse of his desires*, for those are things that never can be counterfeit. You may counterfeit *words*; you may counterfeit *actions*; but you cannot counterfeit *desires*.

You cannot always tell a Christian by his actions. For sometimes true Christians act in a very ugly style; and sometimes those who are not Christians act in a very beautiful way; and *hypocrites* often act the best. The whole of a hypocrite's life may be a simple counterfeit.

Nor are our words always a true test. Often the most beautiful experience, as far as *language* goes, is the experience that falls from the lips of a man whose *heart* knows nothing about the grace of God. It is possible to mix with God's children until you pick up a sort of *Christian dialect*, and talk of *others'* experiences as though they were your own. Just as a man sojourning in a foreign country will learn a good deal of the language of its inhabitants by simply hearing it spoken--so it is possible to dwell among Christians until their language is in great measure *acquired*. But talking a language does not constitute a nationality.

¹⁰ 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.

But there is one thing which cannot be picked up or counterfeited, and that is a desire. Let me know my desire--then do I know myself; for I can no more counterfeit a desire than I can counterfeit fire. One says, "Do you want to know *what* you are? Go ask your desires, and they will tell you. Do you wish to know *where* you are going? See where your desires *tend*."

A good action may be done without any love to that action. And, on the other hand, an evil action may be avoided--not from any hatred to that evil. The good action may be done from an impure motive; the evil action may be avoided simply from a selfish motive. But the desire of the soul--that is the immediate issue of the heart.

A *caged bird* cannot fly--does it therefore cease to be a bird? No; that it does not fly is because it is in a cage. Open the door--see, now, how quickly it darts through the opening, and flies, skimming through the air, heavenward. It has the bird's nature. It had *the desire for flight*, even when the cruel wires kept it in.

And so is it with the child of God. Often does he get *caged*, and if you were to judge simply by appearances, you would say, 'Surely he has not the nature of the Christian within.' Only open the door--only give him a chance of flight--and you will see then that, after all, *the desire of his soul* has been towards God, for, in the language of my text, he says, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!"

The desire of the true Christian is after *God Himself*. "My heart and my flesh cry out for--for *God*." This desire swallows up all others!

Longing after God is a more infallible proof you are God's, than your most zealous *services*, or the very best of your *actions*. These might be counterfeit--but this longing after God cannot be.

Oh what must Heaven be! If all the desires of a saint are concentrated in God--then what must the satisfaction of Heaven be when it is all God--God on the throne, God before me, God leading me, God delighting my eyes, God in my songs--the world, its cares, its sorrows, its worries, all gone--a heavenly atmosphere of God all around! How unutterably deep the satisfaction! My heart and my flesh will no longer cry out for God--but will eternally rejoice in Him!

Alexander concluded the devotion with words of a hymn written by **Philip Doddridge**:

Do not I love thee, O my lord?
Behold my heart, and see,
And chase each idol far away,
That dares to rival thee!

Thou know'st I love thee, dearest Lord.
But, oh! I long to soar,
Above the sphere of mortal joys,
And learn to love thee more! --

We might just mention three more "tests" by which we can discern if we are truly converted, in our effort to affirm that God has performed in inward work of grace in our souls. These three warrant a message, even a series of messages, but we have addressed them repeatedly in the past, so we will but mention them now.

5. We may examine *whether or not we love "the world"* to determine if God has wrought true saving grace in the soul.

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, *the love of the Father is not in him*. ¹⁶For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17).

6. We may examine whether or not we *truly love God* from the heart to be evidence of true saving grace in the soul.

This love is for the triune God. Do we love the Father, love the Son, love the blessed Holy Spirit? Do we desire to further His name and cause, to live for His glory? Do we desire that we decrease, but that He increase? Do we delight in hearing of Him, learning of Him, communing with Him? Do we do the things that He has commanded us because we love Him?

7. We may examine whether or not we *truly love our Christian brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ* to be evidence of true saving grace in the soul.

This is a true test of true conversion. The Apostle John declared, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14).

Love for our Christian brothers and sisters is present because of the regenerating work of God’s grace in the soul. Paul wrote of this evidence of salvation to the Christians in the church at Thessalonica: But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

So how do you fare? Has God wrought saving grace in your soul? Have you truly been converted? Do you have new life in Jesus Christ, the kind of life that we have described? If not, it is imperative to acknowledge your condition and begin to seek God true conversion that only God can bring a sinner to experience. Pray to God as those who were to cry out to God, “Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the LORD my God” (Jer. 31:18). Trust the Lord Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King to do a true thorough work of grace in your soul. Do not allow yourself to be deluded by others. Do not allow yourself to deceive you. May God be merciful and gracious to each of us, even to all of these in these very essential, eternal matters!

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)