

## “What is the Gospel: Part 10”

Introduction: If a person is to be saved, he must repent and believe the Gospel. This repentance must be more than simply being sorry for sin, it must also include a turning from all sin and the putting on of all righteousness. Likewise, true faith must be more than just a belief in the facts of the Gospel, it must also include a whole-hearted acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior. But as we saw last week, no one can do this by themselves. All men are born dead in trespass and sin and are completely unable to do anything pleasing to God. “The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8). God must first intervene, and this He is pleased to do by His Holy Spirit, in the lives of His elect people, generally by means of a communication of the Gospel, in His appointed time. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Paul writes in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” and in 10:14-15, “How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” Along these same lines, we also saw that a person might be awakened by the Spirit of God, and yet still be unconverted. He might believe the facts of the Gospel, know that he is lost, and also know that he has no love for God in his heart. A person in that situation needs to know that he is to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if the Lord doesn’t grant that mercy to him right away, he needs to keep himself immersed in the means of grace, so that God might change it.

- V. The question that arises from this last point, of course, is, How can a person know if he is only awakened or if he is genuinely converted? In other words, How can a person know he is saved? How can he have assurance?
- A. What is the most fundamental thing a person must have before he can have a sound assurance?
1. He must have faith.
    - a. He must truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - b. If a person is not looking to the Lord in faith, then he might have assurance, but it cannot be a sound assurance.
    - c. What other kind of assurance is there? False assurance. The Puritans called it “carnal presumption.” They presume that they know God, but they are far from Him.
  2. Does everyone who has genuine faith also have assurance? Not necessarily.
    - a. John tells us in 1 John 5:13 the purpose for that letter. He writes, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”
    - b. He wants those who are true believers (“you who believe in the name of the

Son of God”) to know that they have eternal life.

c. Some believe this is a declaration that John makes. “I am writing to you who believe to tell you that you have eternal life.” But this doesn’t fit the facts of the book. It certainly doesn’t give you that impression when you read it. Throughout the book, he gives several proofs or evidences of how they can know their profession is genuine or false.

- (i) 1:6-7 “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
- (ii) 1:8-9 “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- (iii) 1:10 “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”
- (iv) 2:3-6 “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”
- (v) I think you get the idea.

d. There are other passages in the Bible as well that call us to self-examination.

- (i) Peter writes, “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” (2 Pet. 1:10).
- (ii) Paul writes, “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!” (2 Cor. 13:5).
- (iii) The author to the Hebrews writes, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11).
- (iv) Jeremiah writes, “Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord” (Lam. 3:40).
- (v) David even calls upon the Lord to examine him, “Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart” (Psalm 26:2).

e. Now if infallible assurance were of the essence of faith, then why would we be called by God to self-examination? If we were truly converted, we would already have infallible assurance.

f. If a person believes that he believes in Christ, he can examine his life by the evidences the Bible gives. If he passes, he can know that he has eternal life. If he fails, then he can know that he does not have it.

B. What are the things that must accompany a profession of faith, in order for that faith to be genuine faith? We’ve already seen some of them, but I would like to summarize them all under one rubric, and that is love.

1. There must be a genuine love for God.
  - a. Paul tells us that if we have the greatest extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but do not have love, we are nothing, and every sacrifice that we might make on behalf of God amounts to nothing, because we are really doing it for ourselves (1 Cor. 13).
  - b. Love is the chief fruit of the Spirit of God. Paul writes in Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Love is the fruit from which all the others flow.
  - c. He writes in verse 6 of that same chapter, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”
  - d. If we are in the flesh, we cannot subject ourselves to the Law of God, as we have seen (Rom. 8:7-8). But if we are in the Spirit, we can (v. 13-14). How can we? Because love is the fulfillment of the Law. Paul writes, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of *the* law” (13:10).
  - e. Circumcision of the heart is the Old Testament equivalent of conversion. When God circumcises the heart, it produces love for Him. Moses writes in Deuteronomy 30:6, “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”
  
2. Now that part is clear enough, but how can we know that our love for Him is genuine? How can we know that we really love God, and not simply the things that God gives us? How can we know that our affection for Him doesn't arise from the fact that we believe that He has saved us from hell and given to us eternal life? In other words, how can we know that we love the Giver and not just the gift? If someone gave us a billion dollars, I think we would all feel some affections of thankfulness and gratitude. How can we know that our love for God goes beyond this?
  - a. Now I don't mean that we shouldn't be thankful for what God gives us and love Him all the more for it. But there needs to be more than just a love which grows from His gifts. We must love Him.
  - b. One way I have tried to get people to think about this is to set up an imaginary situation, where all of the benefits of serving God are removed to see if they would still love Him. For instance, what if there were no heaven or hell? What if everyone just ceased to exist after they died? What if there were no benefits to living a righteous life here? What if you would suffer persecution with no help from God? If this was the case, would you still love and serve God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?
  - c. Is the God that you love the biblical God, or a god of your own making? Do you love the God who is infinitely holy and absolutely sovereign, who has chosen whom He will save and whom not, who will condemn all those who are outside of Christ on the day of His judgment? It's easy to love God when you consider His attributes of love, mercy and grace. But do you love His other attributes as well? Is there anything you would change about God?

- d. And what about Christ? Do you love Him for who He is? He is the One whom the Lord has appointed to judge all men on the last day. He is the One who will order His angels to cast the unrepentant into the eternal fire. Can you honestly say you love Him and wouldn't change anything about Him?
- e. And what about His Law? Do you love it, not in spite of its strictness -- that it absolutely will not allow any sin --, but because of its strictness? Do you love holiness and righteousness? Are you striving to conform to His Law, because you see in it God's holiness and Christ's righteousness? John writes, as we saw earlier, "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).
- f. Do you do what God commands, or do you only agree with what it says, that it is good? Obedience that comes from a true love to God is the strongest evidence that we are truly born again from above. The author to the Hebrews, after speaking to his audience about those who fall away, writes, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" (6:9-12). *Notice that this full assurance does not come automatically. It comes through diligent obedience in the service of the Lord.*
- g. Peter writes, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness; and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" (2 Pet. 1:5-11).
- h. A true love for God will also be accompanied by a true love and affection for everything that has to do with God: His Son, His Spirit, His Word, His ordinances, and His people. On this last point, John writes, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21). If we hate our brother who is being

renewed in the image of God, we cannot love the God whose image our brother bears.

- i. These are the different things which should be in our hearts, at least in some measure, if we truly believe.
3. The Bible teaches that we can be infallibly assured that we are His. The author to the Hebrews writes, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end . . . This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:11, 19-20). But we need to realize that there are three things that go into producing this assurance. What are they?
- a. First, there must be the promise of God. This is what He gives in the Gospel. If we didn’t have this, we wouldn’t have anything. The author to the Hebrews writes, “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us” (6:17-18).
  - b. Second, there must be the evidence of that grace we have seen to which these promises are made. They only apply to those who are born again. Those who are, who show that they are by their love for God and their obedience to His Word, may apply this promise to themselves.
  - c. But there is one more evidence. What is it? It is the witness of the Spirit. Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*” (Rom. 8:16).
    - (i) Some see this witness to be a direct testimony of the Spirit with our souls that we are the children of God. The way that He does this is giving us the confidence to address God as our Father. Paul writes in verse 15, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”
    - (ii) Edwards saw the witness of the Spirit as tied into the evidence of a godly life. Paul writes in verses 12-13, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” The fact that the Spirit is producing these works in your life is His witness that you are His child.
    - (iii) Certainly both can be true in the sense that the Spirit gives us the confidence to call God our Father when we see His working that same holiness in us.
4. What are some of the benefits of a sound assurance?

- a. Peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1-2), “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17), and “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (15:13).
  - b. This will in turn bring about a greater love and thankfulness to God, and a greater strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience.
5. Will a true assurance of salvation encourage a person to sin more?
- a. You’ve heard the caricature of the doctrine of eternal security: You mean I can sin all I want and still go to heaven?
  - b. Is this what assurance will bring? Not to a true believer.
    - (i) Paul writes, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1-2).
    - (ii) He writes to Titus, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (2:11-14).
    - (iii) He writes to the church at Corinth, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).
    - (iv) And John writes, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3), and, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:6-7).
    - (v) Assurance of faith, far from inclining us to sin, it will drive us to holiness. If it gives us an excuse to sin, then we can know for a fact that we are still in bondage to sin, and if we are in bondage to sin, Jesus is not our Lord, and if He is not our Lord, then He is not our Savior either.
6. One last question, Will assurance always be strong and certain in a person who has faith?
- a. The answer, as we have seen, is not necessarily. Assurance can rise and fall. It can be strong or weak.
  - b. What are some of the things that might cause it to weaken?

- (i) Neglecting the means of grace.
  - (ii) Falling into some special sin. David writes, after his fall into adultery with Bathsheba and consequent murder of Uriah, “Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; *then* my tongue will joyfully sing of Thy righteousness” (Ps. 51:8-14).
  - (iii) Some sudden and great temptation. Peter was tempted to deny Christ and did (Matt. 26:69-72).
  - (iv) God sometimes withdraws it to teach us to rely on Him more. Asaph writes in Psalm 77:1-10, “My voice *rises* to God, and I will cry aloud; my voice *rises* to God, and He will hear me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; in the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; my soul refused to be comforted. *When* I remember God, then I am disturbed; *when* I sigh, then my spirit grows faint. Selah. Thou hast held my eyelids *open*; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of long ago. I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart; and my spirit ponders. Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has *His* promise come to an end forever? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah. Then I said, ‘It is my grief, that the right hand of the Most High has changed.’”
- c. Will God withdraw His assurance all together? No. He will always leave us with some support, even in the worst of times and in the worst of our sins.
- (i) There will always be a seed of faith left. Jesus prayed for Peter, just before he denied Him, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).
  - (ii) Job, in the midst of his trials, could say, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him” (13:15).
  - (iii) And the Lord says through Isaiah the prophet, “‘For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the Lord your Redeemer. ‘For this is like the days of Noah to Me; when I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor will I rebuke you. For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,’ says the Lord who has compassion on you” (54:7-10).

- d. Now the difference between someone who is awakened and someone who is converted is that \*\*\*\*
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4. Now I would like for us to consider one other subject in connection with faith and repentance, and it has to do with a question that I asked earlier.
- a. The question was, Can a person believe the facts of the Gospel and not be saved? Yes. What are some examples? The devils believe and aren't saved (James 2:19). The damned souls in hell believe (Luke 16). There were those who believe for a while and then fell away (Heb. 6:4-9; 1 John 2:19). There are people in churches who believe the facts, who either tremble at them or believe that they have embraced them, who are still unconverted.
  - b. Then can a person believe in the reality of heaven, know that they are in danger of hell if they do not turn to Christ in faith, and still be unconverted? Yes, otherwise it wouldn't be possible to believe the facts and not be saved.
  - c. Now here is the important question: Can a person know and believe these things and still have no power from God to repent and believe? Yes. If he had the power to do so, he would already be saved. But as we saw, he can believe these things and not be saved.
  - d. Then does the fact that a person believes these things -- believes there is a heaven, is frightened by hell, knows that there is no other way of salvation except through Christ -- give him the ability to savingly believe? No.
  - e. Now if a person in this situation is to be saved, what must he do? He must repent and believe. Should you tell him that he must do so? Yes. Does telling him give him the power to do so? No.
  - f. If he still can't, then what should you tell him to do? To put himself in the way of salvation. Where and when does the Spirit of God work His saving work? Under the preaching and witnessing of the Gospel. So what should that person do? He should come to church, sit under the preaching of the Word, read the Word, and pray and ask God to change his heart.
  - g. If a person does these things, will he be saved? Not necessarily. If we said yes, then we would believe in a work a person can do to have God save him. The Bible says that salvation doesn't "depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16). He is not certain to find salvation in this way, but if he turns away and goes back to his old way of living and doesn't seek the Lord for His mercy, he will certainly perish.
  - h. We need to bear in mind as we go about the work of evangelism that not everyone who says he believes the facts of Christianity is necessarily saved. There are many who believe them, but who are not saved, and who need still to pray for God's mercy.
  - i. Isaiah writes, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).
  - j. Jesus said that John's ministry had this effect on men. In Matthew 11:12, He

says, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” This applies not only to those who would enter the kingdom of heaven, but also to those who already have. We must continue to strive forward against Satan, against our sin, against the world, if we are to enter into the eternal kingdom.

- k. Next week, we will consider how a person can know that he is truly born again, and delivered from death to life.