



Series: Exploring Christianity: The Foundations of Our Faith

Title: How can I be sure I'm a true Christian?

Passage: 1 John 5:11-21

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Introduction:

- These past few weeks, we've been looking at the foundations of the Christian faith.
- And we saw how we can trust the Bible, because it's historically true, and because it's the only book that can change the sinful heart.
- Then we saw how God is one, in three persons.
 - We may never fully understand the Trinity, but because God is love, we saw how God has to be triune.
 - That means, he didn't create us because he was lonely.
 - He created us, because of his love.
- Then last week, we saw how the death of Jesus Christ, gives us a righteousness that we could never gain on our own.
 - We saw the great price that Jesus paid.
- This morning, as we continue in our series, we're going to learn how we can grow in our assurance of faith.
 - We'll see how we can know that we have eternal life.
- And this matters, because even true believers, will find themselves doubting their salvation.



- When you struggle with sin.
 - When growth is slow.
 - When you feel disappointed by life.
 - When trials shake your life.
 - You may wonder if your faith is real.
 - You may wonder if God still loves you.
 - Do you ever feel unsure about your salvation?
- If that is you, remember this, just because you doubt, doesn't mean you're not a Christian.
 - You can have faith, and still doubt.
 - Faith is belief in Jesus Christ.
 - But assurance is confidence about your faith in Jesus Christ.
 - To put it another way, faith believes the work of Christ, assurance is the confidence that you believe.
 - And although, every Christian has faith, not every Christian shares the same level of assurance.
 - Listen to Hebrews 6, verse 11:
 - **And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end.** Hebrews 6:11
 - The writer wants his readers to have full assurance.
 - That means, they lacked full assurance.
 - Some people will enjoy greater confidence than others.
 - And so, remember, just because you lack confidence, doesn't mean you're not a Christian.
 - Furthermore, if the writer in Hebrews states that he wants his readers to have full assurance, that means we can grow in our confidence.
 - If you lack confidence, it's possible for you to grow in assurance.



- Most religions don't give their followers assurance of eternal life.
 - But the Bible is clear God doesn't want us to live in constant fear and anxiety.
 - Rather, he wants us to live with joy and peace, knowing that our salvation is secure.
 - John writes in 1 John, chapter 5, verse 13:
 - **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.**
 - God wants us to know that we have eternal life.

- Now, in the book of 1 John, there are three ways, that John says we can grow in confidence.
 - Three ways that assurance grows.
 - He writes about faith, obedience, and love.
 - And as we look at these words, we'll see how they can help us grow in assurance.

Point 1:

- So, first, you can know that you have eternal life, by remembering the confession of your faith.
 - In other words, assurance grows, as you remember the truth that you believe.

- 1 John 4:3 states:
 - **Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.**



- 1 John 4:15 states:
 - **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.**

- The verses both teach that if you confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, you can know, you belong to God.
 - **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

- My kids will ask me, “Dad, I’m not sure if I’ll go to heaven.”
 - “Is there a way for me to know that I have eternal life?”
 - And I’ll say to them:
 - “Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you, and rose from the dead?”
 - And they’ll say:
 - “Yes, we believe in Jesus Christ.”
 - And I’ll say:
 - “Then you can know you’re saved.”
 - “You just need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for you.”
 - And they’ll respond:
 - “That’s it, that’s all I need to believe?”
 - And I’ll say:
 - “That’s it.”
 - And they’ll say:
 - “Okay, that makes me feel better.”
 - “I just wanted to make sure.”
 - And then, a month or two later, they’ll will ask me again.
 - And I’ll say it again, and it’ll reassure them again.
 - And that’s exactly what John is doing here.
 - He’s reminding them of their confession.



- **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

- At times, you may feel that you need to do more, to be saved.
 - But the Bible is clear.
 - You're not saved by what you do.
 - You're saved by what Christ has done for you.
 - And when you put your faith in Christ, the promise of God is that you have eternal life.
 - Listen to Romans 10, verses 9 to 11:
 - **If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." Romans 10:9-11**

- How can we grow in our assurance?
 - By looking to the promise of God, that if you confess, that Jesus is Lord, you'll be saved.

- And so, if you're struggling to believe, let me ask you:
 - ME: "Do you confess, Jesus to be Lord?"
 - ME: "Have you settled in your heart, that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, who died and rose again?"
 - THEM: "Pastor, yes I do, but..."
 - ME: "Listen, there is no but...if that is your confession, then you're saved by the blood of Jesus Christ."

- You can know that you belong to Christ, because of your confession of faith.



- Now, someone may say:
 - “Pastor Tom, I’ve made a confession of faith, but my faith feels too weak.”
 - “I just don’t feel confident about my confession.”
 - “I believe in Jesus Christ, but I’m scared that my faith will fail.”
 - Have you ever felt your faith is too weak?

- If that is you, you need to remember that it’s not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith, that is able to save you.
 - It’s not about the greatness of your faith, but the greatness of God’s grace, that saves you from sin.

- Imagine, three people are flying in an airplane.
 - And the first person is flying for the first time, and is scared, that the plane is going to fall.
 - They’re sweating, they’re anxious, and they’re holding on to their seat, as hard as they can.
 - Can’t even eat the meal.
 - And next to the anxious person, imagine a person who’s not as worried as the first person, but still a little concerned.
 - This person isn’t sweating bullets, but wants to land as soon as possible.
 - And then, next to the semi-anxious person, imagine someone who flies every day.
 - And as the plane is taking off, this person is calm, and focused on getting work done before the plane lands.
 - Let me ask you this:
 - “What happens at the end of the flight?”
 - All the passengers arrive at their destination, at the same place, and at the same time.



- They're all equally safe.
 - One person was really anxious, another semi-anxious, another, not anxious at all.
 - But they all got to the same place.
 - Why?
 - Because it wasn't the strength of their faith in aerodynamics, but the power of the airplane that got them to where they needed to go.
 - Faith got them onto the plane, but it was the plane and aerodynamics that got them home.
- In the same way, it's not the strength of your faith, but the power of the Savior you trust, that saves you from your sin.
 - And so, when you struggle with sin, when you struggle with failure.
 - It may cause you to lose your confidence.
 - You may feel that your faith will fail.
 - But when your heart condemns you, look to Jesus Christ and what he's done for you.
 - And when you look to Jesus, you'll see that his power is greater than your sin.
 - Listen to 1 John 3:19-21
 - **“By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God...”**
 - You can know that you have eternal life, by remembering the confession of your faith.

Point 2:



- Second, you can know that you have eternal life, by looking at the fruit of your new life in Christ.
 - In other words, you can grow in your assurance, as you see the Holy Spirit leading you to obey God's word.

- Listen to 1 John chapter 2, verses 3 to 4:
 - **And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:3-4**

- Or listen to 1 John chapter 2, verse 5:
 - **By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 2:5**

- We can know that we belong to Christ, by what we do.
 - Now, let me be clear.
 - These verses aren't saying that if you obey God, you'll be saved.
 - You're not saved by works.
 - Rather, they're teaching that if you belong to Christ, you'll show the evidence, that you belong to Christ.
 - **By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments**
 - Obedience to Christ is the natural fruit of your faith in Christ.

- And so, we can grow in our assurance that we belong to Christ, when we look to the fruit of obedience.

- Now, you might be thinking:



- “Well, Pastor Tom, I see what John is saying, but I’ve failed so many times.”
- “I’ve obeyed as much as I can, but I’ve also failed to completely obey.”
- “There’s a lot, I’m still working on.”
- “Does that mean I’m not a Christian believer?”

- If you haven’t been able to keep God’s commandments, remember the Bible doesn’t expect you to live a perfect life.
 - John isn’t speaking about perfection.
 - That’s why he says in chapter 1 verse 8:
 - **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and this word is not in us.”** 1 John 1:8
 - The Bible is clear, if you say you live a perfect life, you’re deceiving yourself, and the truth isn’t in you.
 - No one can live a perfect life.
 - Everyone sins.

- Then what does John mean when he says, that we can know we belong to Christ, if we obey his commandments?
 - It means, that we begin to obey God’s commandments.
 - It doesn’t mean we’re perfect, but that we start to obey.
 - Listen to Mark chapter 4 verse 20.
 - **“But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”**
 - Notice that Jesus speaks about different amounts of fruit.
 - There’s thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.
 - There are varying degrees of fruitfulness among true believers.
 - Some grow faster.
 - Some grow slower.



- Some will bear more visible fruit than others.
 - But here's the point, they all bear fruit.
 - When you begin to believe in God, you won't be perfect, you'll never be perfect on earth, but you'll begin to bear fruit in your life.
 - And you'll be able to grow in assurance as you see God working in you, to obey his word.
- If you find yourself doubting your salvation, instead of focusing on your flaws, take a moment to think about the good fruit in your life.
 - Do you hate sin more than you used to?
 - Do you feel conviction when you disobey?
 - Do you desire holiness?
 - Do you want to please God?
 - Do you see even small growth in humility, patience, love?
- Even though it may look small, look at how God has been working in your life, and you can grow in assurance.
- A few years ago, we planted a cherry tree in our backyard.
 - And during the first couple of years, we didn't see any cherries.
 - And I asked my wife, "Are you sure that's a cherry tree?"
 - She assured me it was.
 - Finally, after a while, we saw like two, maybe three cherries.
 - And I finally saw, it really was a cherry tree.
 - Even if there was only one little cherry, you would see that it's a cherry tree.
 - In the same way, let's remember that it's not the quantity of the fruit, but the reality of the fruit that gives us assurance.



- In the Christian life, there will be moments when you're running fast.
 - It may be a season when you're defeating sin, and your ministry is bearing fruit, and your relationships are strong, and there's passion in your heart.
 - There will be other times, when you're walking, and life is steady.
 - There will be other times, when you feel like you're crawling and barely making it.
 - There will even be times, when you feel stuck, and you're not moving at all, and all you can do is look to Jesus.
 - But remember that your looking is the fruit of of faith.
 - When you refuse to walk away.
 - When you continue to look to Christ, that's still fruit.
 - It may not be a flourishing orchard, but small little cherry.
 - But it's still fruit.
 - And so, keep looking to him.
 - And in due season, you will bear much fruit.
 - **“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit...”** John 15:6
 - Keep looking to Christ.
 - Remain in him, and in due time, you'll bear more fruit.

- You can know that you have eternal life, by looking at the fruit of your new life in Christ.

Point 3:

- Third, you can know that you belong Christ, by looking at how God is growing your love.



- Take a look at 1 John 3:14:
 - **We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14**

- 1 John 4:7-8
 - **Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8**

- Both these verses show, that those who belong to Christ will grow in their love for God, and grow in their love for others.
 - It's not only by looking at the fruit of obedience, but also by looking at our fruit of love, that we can grow in assurance.
 - **Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.**

- Now, my hope is that all of us might have greater assurance in our faith.
 - But John also gives us a warning in this letter as well.
 - He writes in chapter 2 verse 9:
 - **“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.”**
 - John is saying that the person who hates his brother, that is, other Christian believers, or other people in their family, is walking in darkness.

- And notice how this person is someone who says they walk in the light.



- That is, if you say you're a Christian, and you hate others, that means you're still walking in darkness.
- Later on in chapter 3, John mentioned the story of Cain and Abel.
- Cain was someone who claimed to worship God.
- But he hated his brother.
- And it became clear that he was a child of the devil, and not a child of God.

- Isn't this so relevant for our world today, filled with so much hate.
 - There are even those who say they walk in the light, they claim to worship God, but their heart is filled with anger and hate.
 - But Bible says, if you hate others, you're walking in darkness, and not in the light.
 - In fact, if you continue in hate, it may mean, you don't know the love of Christ.
 - This doesn't mean Christians can't struggle with anger.
 - But persistent hatred, isn't consistent with the Christian faith.
 - John writes:
 - **“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”**
 - **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.”**

- One time when a certain village didn't repent.
 - In Luke 9, John and James asked Jesus, if they could ask God to send judgement and fire to consume this village.
 - And Jesus had to rebuke them.
 - John was called a son of thunder for his fiery personality.
 - But this son of thunder, became the disciple of love.



- The grace of God changed his heart.
- Jerome the historian tells us that when the aged apostle John, became so weak that he could no longer preach, he used to be carried into the congregation at Ephesus and be content with a word of exhortation.
 - “Little children,” he would always say, “love one another.”
 - And when his hearers grew tired of this message and asked him why he kept repeating this message, he would respond:
 - “Because it is the Lord’s command, and if this is all you do, it is enough.” (BST)
 - Hate is evidence of darkness and death, and so Christian brother and sister, run away from hate.
 - Guard your heart against hate.
- And instead, let’s strive to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, to love our family members, to love our neighbors.
 - **Let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.**
- I know that some people are hard to love.
 - To love the person who is always criticizing us.
 - To love the person who needs extra care and attention.
 - To love the person who’s hurt our heart.
 - To love our enemy.
- But the reason we can grow in love, and love others, is because God is love.
 - Love comes from God, and we can know we belong to God, because we love as God loved us.



- Whoever loves has been born of God.
- And let's remember that Jesus was surrounded by people who were hard to love.
 - The crowds followed him, and then abandoned him.
 - Many disciples followed him, and then left him.
 - Peter denied him.
 - Judas betrayed him.
 - At one point, Jesus' own family, his brothers and sisters said to him, "You're out of your mind."
 - Have you ever had a family member, tell you that you're out of your mind.
 - "Are you crazy?"
 - And eventually the people crucified him.
 - But he was able to love the people.
 - He laid down his life.
- And we can learn to love others, and forgive others, because God is love, and love comes from God.
 - That means, when you believe in Jesus Christ, the love of Christ lives in you.
 - And in Christ, you have the power and strength to love, as Christ loves you.
- And as you see God growing your love, you'll also grow in assurance, that you belong to Christ.
- How can we grow in assurance?
 - How can we enjoy peace and joy and security, knowing that we're saved?



- Remember the confession of your faith, and you can grow in assurance.
- Look at the fruit of your new life in Christ, and you can grow in assurance.
- Look at how God is growing your love, and you can know that you belong to Christ.