

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Walk of the True Christian, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Code: 49-24

We come now to the time in the Word of God, and I'm calling your attention to the book of Ephesians. I suppose if you were a part of a church, and you had gone to that church and attended that church, but maybe you never had committed your life to Christ; you now found yourself with that church, not yet a real believer, but a part of the church, and you found yourself under a concrete multi-level parking garage, sleeping on a cot while bombs were falling all over you—you might want to do a heart examination. To live in the starkness of the imminence of death changes everything, and I'm certain that there are people who in that situation have turned to the Lord; we're just grateful to have heard of some even this morning.

It would not be a time when you would want to not be sure where you were headed. And after death are only two possibilities—heaven and hell—and you will live in one of those forever. So this is a time when it's understandable that people in the face of imminent death would want to come to the gospel and embrace that which will deliver them from condemnation, judgment, and hell, and bring them into the glories of heaven. And we also understand that this would be a time when believers would want to be certain that their salvation was the real thing.

Now we know that the church is made up of true believers and false wheat and tares; we know that because Jesus said that. And our Lord also said that in the day of judgment, "Many will say to Me . . . 'Lord, Lord'"—confessing Him, and He will say, "Depart from Me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity." And that is to say that there are people who will end up in the judgment moment believing they're headed for heaven, only to find out they are not; they're headed to hell. Any kind of dire circumstance, any kind of life-threatening setting would make a person who professed to be a Christian want to examine his or her heart to be certain, and I'm sure that's happening because I know it just happens in general.

I suppose if there's a common question that I'm asked, both personally and by mail, and on Grace to You radio, it comes up all the time, it is this question: How can I be sure I'm really a Christian? How can I be sure I'm really saved? Anybody who's a believer has faced the reality of a doubt here or there, wondering whether my salvation is real; but any kind of dire circumstance, or even the reality of you're getting older, or maybe you're unwell, or perhaps fearful of something that may overtake your life before you are sure you're a Christian. I understand that, because you want to know for sure. That's what I think the focus of our message to you this morning is, and it's really just a brief one: How do I know I'm really saved?

Now there are two things you have to consider. One is security, and the other is assurance. When I talk about security I'm saying, Is salvation forever? That is, If I have the real thing, is it eternal? Well, that's easy to answer: It's called eternal life. What else would eternal life be but eternal? Yes, if you are truly saved, you have received eternal life. Nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ; you are headed for heaven.

Salvation is forever. You don't get it, and lose it, and hopefully get it back; it is forever. And I want to show you that, 1 Peter chapter 1—before we get to Ephesians, 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 3. And Peter is writing to some believers who are scattered, being persecuted. It's a hard time, and I'm sure they wanted to know the reality of their salvation. So Peter writes to them about the security of their salvation.

Listen to what he says in verse 3 of 1 Peter 1: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." God, in His mercy, "His great mercy . . . caused us to be born again." You don't see any role that we played there. God in His great mercy regenerated us to a living hope that is attached to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So Christ arose; He lives. We rose in Him; we live as He lives. So Peter is talking about the eternality of salvation, because our salvation is in Christ. And Christ lives forever; we live forever. So we have a living hope, meaning a hope of eternally living.

And Peter expands on that in the next verse, verse 4, there is prepared for us "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Again, Peter is saying, based upon the regenerating work of God, out of His great mercy, we have been given a hope that lives because Christ lives. And when that hope is realized, we will receive an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, unfading, reserved in heaven for you. It's reserved in heaven for you and for no one else. That is the security of our salvation.

Further, he says in verse 5, that we "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The full revelation of our final salvation and the receiving of that glorious heavenly inheritance is for us and no one else, and we are protected by the power of God for that final revelation. So Peter is literally affirming the security of salvation, the security of salvation. You will one day be in glory, as it says at the end of verse 8, and "greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory," because you will obtain "as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." This is security. Security is objective; it is based on the divine revelation: Scripture. Scripture says salvation is forever. If you have it, it is forever.

But there's another word that is important, and that is the word *assurance*. Security is an objective reality; assurance is a subjective reality. In security, you know salvation is forever; in assurance, you know you possess that salvation. That is critically important, so important that Paul says, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith," so that you don't wind up having believed in vain, or for nothing.

What about assurance? Where do we go for that? Where do we go for the subjective? Where do we go for the confidence that our salvation is the real thing? Well, let's look at 2 Peter chapter 1, 2 Peter chapter 1, and we'll look at verse 4. "By His own glory and excellence"—as it ends in verse 3—"by these [things, the glory and excellence of God] He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises." Again, all that awaits us in eternal glory is promised to us in the gospel. "He . . . granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." This is talking about, again, the nature of our salvation. We have become partakers of the divine nature. In other words, we possess the life of God. We have escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. We have been given promises that God will fulfill.

Now we come to verse 5: “Now for this very reason, 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.” He’s saying you are secure by the promises of God. You are secure by the power of God. You are already a partaker of the divine nature, you possess eternal life now. You have escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust. But you must add to that reality these qualities: moral excellence—which is a word for virtue—knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

Why? Verse 8: “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.” If these things are characteristic of your life and they are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What it’s to say is this: If these things are characteristic of your life, you possess the true knowledge of Christ; your salvation is the real thing.

On the other hand, verse 9, “He who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.” Do you understand? You can be a real believer and forget that you really are a true believer. You can lose your assurance.

So in verse 10 he says, “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling”—that you are truly called to salvation—“certain about His . . . choosing”—that you genuinely were elect—“for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.” Practice what things? That list: moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love.

Where you have virtue in your life, you have assurance. You understand? That’s what he’s saying. If those qualities are not obvious in your life, you have lost touch, then, with your salvation. If you want to make your calling sure and your choosing, your election, sure, be diligent to make sure these things are characteristics of your life.

So how do you know you’re saved? Not by a past event, not remembering a date, not remembering a prayer, but looking at your life and seeing the kinds of virtues, patterns of righteousness, godliness, that testify to a transformation.

Assurance can be hard; it can be. We can be insecure. We can lose our assurance. Assurance is hard to experience, and it’s hard to hold on to. Even though you know salvation is forever, there are times when you can really struggle to believe that you’re actually a possessor of the true salvation.

Why? Why is it hard to have assurance? Why do I struggle with my assurance? I’ll give you some reasons.

Number one: convicting preaching. You come and you sit under the Word of God. And the Word of God is powerful, “sharper than any two-edged sword,” Hebrews 4, and it goes into you, and it cuts you, and it dissects you, and it takes you apart, and it reveals your heart. And honestly, you probably wouldn’t have that experience of wondering about your salvation if you were sitting in a place where the Word of God was dealt with superficially. But when you expose yourself to convicting preaching from the Word of God, you can struggle with your assurance because you are being convicted by the

Word of God. And the standard is so high, which leads to a second reason people are insecure or lack assurance. It is this: guilt, guilt.

I talked to a man on the phone this week. Graduated from a Christian college many, many, many years ago, half a century ago. And he said, "I was not a believer. I came out of that school, I lived thirty years as a homosexual"—the worst, dissolute, unimaginable kind of life. He said, "I came to Christ," and he said, "Now I spend four or five hours a day in the Word of God because I need that exposure to cleanse the garbage of thirty years." When you have vivid realities of your sinfulness, and the standard of holiness is high, you can very definitely struggle with assurance.

There's a third reason people struggle with assurance, and it is that they misunderstand the gospel. They think that the gospel is God's plan to save you, and then you keep yourself saved; so that they would say, "Yes, you're saved by grace, but you're kept by works." And if you're trying to keep yourself saved by your works, you will never have any assurance.

Then along that same line, there's a fourth reason why people struggle with assurance, and it is because they have wrong ideas about forgiveness. I was reading this week about one viewpoint that said, "When you're saved, God forgives all the sins of your past"—that's true—"but not the present and the future. You have to work out righteousness in the future. You have to name your sins and seek forgiveness. There's no lifelong, blanket forgiveness; forgiveness is only partial." If you believe that, of course you wouldn't have assurance, because you know you can't keep yourself righteous.

There's another reason why people struggle with assurance, and it's because they can't remember the time of their salvation. By the way, that's true for most people; I can't remember. Oh, if you're like me or many Christians, you probably grew up in a church, you prayed to be saved a thousand times or a hundred times, and you were always trying to reach back and find out which of those was the real deal. And you never will know; even when you think was the moment of your salvation may not have been—maybe a moment you prayed a prayer. But the divine miracle of regeneration is God's work, on His schedule, not ours.

So convicting preaching, guilt over sin, understanding a high standard of holiness, misunderstanding the gospel, not accepting full and complete forgiveness, no memory of the time of your true salvation—those things can tamper with your assurance.

There's another one: strong impulses of the flesh. You keep going back to the same sins. Have you noticed? You don't all of a sudden come up with a brand new sin. People say to me, "Why do I do the same sins?" And the answer is because they're ingrained in you. That's the character—or the lack of character, but that's the nature of your sinful flesh. You have sins that you prefer; and so, of course, you go back to those sins. You go back to them also because you have passed carnal fulfillment in those sins. And when you think about the strong impulses of your flesh that seem to be making you recycle those same old sins, you might say to yourself, "Maybe I'm not really saved."

Another element in life that will tamper with your assurance is a failure to see God's goodness in your trials. What do I mean by that? Well, you find out you have cancer, you find out you have to have heart surgery, and you say, "Why is God doing this to me?" Or one of your children denies the faith. Or you thought you had a girl that you wanted to marry, and she shunned you. Or you had a career in mind, and a goal in mind, or an objective; it could be a whole lot of things. Life is full of

disappointment, and you can get on sort of the pity side of all of that and say, “If God’s supposed to be my Father and bless me with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to me?”

It’s a failure to see God’s good hand in the trial. It’s a failure to go below the trial to the providence that’s unfolding. You have to understand that life is full of those things. But Romans 8:28, right? That’s why that verse is so popular. God orders all things so that they work out—for what?—for good to those who are the called.

So all of those things can trouble you with regard to assurance. But there’s one other thing that is the dominant reality, and it’s just simply this: sin and disobedience. If there is in your life the appearance of sin and disobedience on a regular basis, you will forfeit your assurance, for the reason—some of the reasons we just mentioned: guilt and familiarity with those sins. But also I have to tell you this: If you’re walking in disobedience, the Holy Spirit will withdraw that assurance. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,” right? So if you’re not walking in the Spirit, you’re not going to experience love, joy, and peace.

We want assurance, and it’s for those reasons. Let me just kind of lay it out simply: We want assurance because with assurance comes peace, joy, praise, love, gratitude, strength, patience, purity, hope. With assurance comes love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control—all the fruit of the Spirit. We want that. We want assurance because we want those wonderful spiritual blessings.

But you’re not going to have them if you’re sinning and disobedient. If that’s going on in your life in some kind of routine way, even though the dominant tyranny of sin has been broken because you have been made a servant of righteousness, if you see continual pattern of sin for a season or a time, that’s going to take away your assurance; and honestly, it should. The only accurate evidence that you’re a true believer is righteousness and godliness of life—not as a perfection, but as a dominant direction. Let me show you this.

Now we’ll come to Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2. I want to go back to this, and we’ll make a few comments. Verse 4, we remember this: “God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us”—again, everything is divinely designed, planned, initiated, and achieved—“even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

This is a description of our salvation and its security. Look at it: God, out of His mercy, out of His love, made us alive with Christ by grace. We have been raised up with Christ; we are seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ, which means we have a place in heaven. That’s what Peter meant when he said we have an inheritance waiting there. That’s all said and done. And in the ages to come, the Lord will pour out surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ. So that’s the reality of our eternal salvation.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; not of yourselves, it’s a gift of God; not as a result of work, so that no one may boast.” But then this: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” As surely as He predetermined your justification, He predetermined your sanctification. God prepared beforehand your good works, that you would walk in them. Justification and sanctification come together. We are spiritually transformed; our lives are dramatically changed. It’s not just that God declares us righteous by covering us with the righteousness of Christ; He transforms us. That’s what verse 10 of chapter 2 is saying.

Now I want you to go over to chapter 4, which is where we have been for the last few times in Ephesians. And I draw you to verse 17: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord”—Paul and the Lord agree—“that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind”—you don’t walk that way anymore.

How do they walk, and how did you walk before your conversion? Verse 18, “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” OK, that’s a description of unconverted people. They walk like pagans, because they are. They’re futile in their mind, empty, darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, and given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

You look at the world around you, the unrestrained world in which we live now, and you wonder, How can people be so dissolute, so reprobate, live at such an aggressive level of going from one transgression to another as fast as they can possibly go? It’s because that’s who they really are.

And the last word in verse 19 is very important. Unconverted people pursue sensuality and impurity “with greediness”—they never have enough. They’re greedy, they never have enough.

You and I, as believers, may sin, but we’re not greedy to sin. We’re not longing to sin, lusting to sin. We don’t have this dominating greediness to go to the next sin and the next sin and the next sin and the next sin. How do I know that? Because verse 20 says this: “You did not learn Christ in [that] way.” You don’t live like that; you don’t think like that; you don’t function like that. Yes, you can fall into sin and disobedience, and you will forfeit your assurance; but if you’re a true believer, those are the exceptions to your righteousness. And you don’t pursue sensuality and every wicked thing with intense greed. You didn’t learn Christ in that way.

Verse 21, “If indeed you have heard Him, have been taught in Him, just as the truth is in Jesus”—and here’s what you learned: “in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self” when you come to Christ. That old self “is being corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit.” But you have laid aside the old self, and you have become “renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” That’s exactly what 2:10 says. God has ordained that we walk in good works. Here, God has created us in righteousness and holiness of the truth. We are dramatically different.

When Paul wrote Ephesians, he also at the same time wrote Colossians. Turn over to Colossians chapter 3, just a few more thoughts. Chapter 3, verse 1, “If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.” This is exactly what Peter says. Add to your

faith moral excellence, which is virtue and all those other things that we read. “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” You’re a completely new creature. And “when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” That’s security. When Christ comes in glory, you’ll be there. Because you were raised with Christ, because you were seated at the right hand of God with Christ, you’ll be there when He comes to reign.

“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come on the sons of disobedience; in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.” You once walked that way, “but now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” I mean, the language here is so rich. You have been transformed, totally transformed, and you see the reality of that in your righteousness, in your godliness, and in your virtue, even though it falls short.

Now back to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Walk worthy of this calling. This is a calling of—salvation call. Walk worthy with this calling, consistent with its godly and righteous nature.

Verse 17, again, “Walk no longer as the Gentiles walk”—not like you used to; don’t go that way. Chapter 5, verse 2, “Walk in love, just as Christ . . . loved you.” Verse 8, “Walk as children of Light.” Verse 15, walk wisely. In other words, this is a call for obedience. This is the definition of the Christian life: It’s a walk; it’s a step at a time, one step at a time, *peripatein*, from which we get the English word *peripatetic*, which means to walk around. We live the Christian life one step at a time, one day at a time, one moment at a time.

Romans 8, Galatians 5, says we walk in the Spirit. Second Corinthians 5 says, “We walk by faith.” Second John—3 John says we walk in truth. First John 2 says we walk as Christ walks. This is the evidence of true salvation; this is the evidence.

And that is what Paul says. Go back to chapter 4 of Ephesians. Since you have laid aside the old self, verse 22; since you are being “renewed in the spirit of your mind,” verse 23; since you have “put on the new self” that had already “been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” and bears “the likeness of God,” verse 25—“therefore,” this is how you live, this is how you live. You “[lay] aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” You’re angry, but you don’t sin; “don’t let the sun go down on your anger.” You “don’t give the devil an opportunity.” Verse 28, you don’t steal anymore, you share. Verse 29, your speech is not filthy, it’s edifying. Verse 30, you “don’t grieve the Holy Spirit,” who is grieved by unrighteousness.

Yes, you were sealed for the day of redemption; that’s your security. But if you want to enjoy assurance, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other”—and this is the key. It doesn’t say, “If you do this, God in Christ will forgive you”; it says you do this because “God in Christ”—what?—“*has forgiven* you.” You don’t earn your salvation, but this is how it is manifest.

So that's the character of this section of Ephesians that we barely touched; in fact, that was one page in my notes. But the message is simple and profoundly important: The Lord wants you to enjoy your salvation, not just in heaven but now. He wants you to have peace and joy and hope and assurance, even though you're under the powerful preaching of the Word of God, even though you understand the high standard of holiness, even though you feel strong impulses of the flesh, even though you battle with sin. This is the Christian life. We are new creatures. We struggle to live fully as new creatures because our bodies are not yet redeemed. But you need to understand—your salvation is secure, and you can enjoy the assurance that comes with true obedience.

Father, we thank You for Your wonderful Word. Everything is laid out so specifically. We don't define our salvation by some mystical, esoteric feeling. The confidence and assurance that we are saved comes to us by how we walk one step at a time, as we walk in the Spirit, walk in the truth, walk in love, walk in light, walk in wisdom, walk worthy—one step at a time. And as we do that, blessed Holy Spirit, You assure our hearts; the Spirit of God shows us we belong to You, O God. The Spirit shows us. He gives us internal comfort—not just the external comfort of Scripture truth, but the internal comfort comes to an obedient Christian directly from the Holy Spirit, who declares to us that we are the children of God. And it's in that fullness of joy that we can and should live.

And we pray, Lord, for everyone here who doesn't know the Savior, that they would come to Him. Grant them life, Lord, for Your own glory. May Your people always be adding to their faith the kinds of things that bring assurance, and with it, all the joys of heaven on earth. For Your glory we ask all these things, and seek Your strength. Amen.

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