

You're listening to What Does the Word Say, a series of podcasts on biblical theology produced by Grace and Glory Media, and I'm Dr. Spencer. Our usual host Mr. Roby is not with me today because we are both still obeying the stay-at-home order issued as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. And we are also still taking a break from our continuing series on systematic theology.

Last week I discussed how to think biblically. The first requirement is that you be born again because at the core of every single person's worldview you either find saving faith in the God of the Bible, or you don't. There is no third position. And this core presupposition affects how you think about everything.

But even if you have been born again, you still need to put effort into learning how to think biblically. It is all too easy to fall back on our old nature and/or to be heavily influenced in our thinking by the sea of unbiblical ideas in which we all swim on a daily basis. And so, today I want to examine how we can make our calling and election sure. And then, next time, we will look at some examples of proper biblical thinking in order to help us develop our own thinking. These examples should also provide great motivation for us because we will see the power that comes from thinking in the way God wants us to think.

So, let's begin by examining how to make our calling and election sure, which is a command, not a suggestion. We read in 2 Peter 1:10-11, "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> The Greek verb translated here as "be all the more eager" is in the imperative mood, meaning that this is a command from God, through the apostle Peter. The verb means to be zealous, earnest and diligent in pursuing something. In other words, this is important. It is not something about which we should be careless. It is, in fact, the most important thing to know about ourselves because our calling and election determine whether we are headed for eternal heaven or eternal hell.

But you may be asking yourself, "How am I supposed to make my calling and election sure? God doesn't tell us in the Bible who is and is not chosen. I can't pry into the eternal counsels of God to know whether or not I am an elect." I would answer that objection by first saying that it is true in the sense that we cannot examine God's election *directly*. We can, however, examine it *indirectly* by looking for the fruit that is guaranteed to be produced. Jesus said, in Luke 6:43-44, that "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars." His point is clear; although we can't directly examine God's election, we can examine our lives to see whether or not they display the fruit of someone who has been born again. In 2 Peter 1:10, it said "if you do

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these things you will never fall” and “these things” refers back to the qualities noted in Verses 5 through 7; namely, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. So we must look for these Christian traits increasing in our lives.

And even though being commanded to do something doesn't always imply that we can succeed – for example, think of the command to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect – nevertheless, in this context it seems quite clear that Peter fully expects that we can, in fact, make our calling and election sure. This is not an impossible task, and it is a very important one.

There are some who think it is impossible to have a genuine assurance of salvation. Certainly Arminians, Catholics and others who think that you can lose your salvation cannot be assured of their final salvation for they believe it is always possible to sin so grievously as to lose it. And while we do not agree that a true Christian can ever lose his salvation, we must admit that there is a real possibility of having a false assurance. You should not feel secure that you are saved just because you once prayed a prayer and were baptized.

Nevertheless, the biblical command stands and examining ourselves for the sake of making our calling and election sure is an important activity. There are certainly degrees of assurance, but having a solid, biblical basis for assurance that you have been saved helps a great deal in living a productive, holy Christian life that is pleasing to God.

As we have argued in previous sessions, everyone who is elect will be effectually called by God, which means that they will be regenerated, or born again, and will then repent, believe and be saved. And this salvation will be apparent if we observe the changes in their lives. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” So, let's briefly discuss how we are to examine ourselves.

We addressed this question before, in Sessions 96 and 97, where we looked at the teaching in 1<sup>st</sup> John. This letter is an excellent place to look because John tells us that he wrote it to enable his readers to test themselves. In 1 John 5:13 we read, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” We noted at that time that the Rev. P.G. Mathew summarized John's teaching in his commentary on 1 John. Mathew wrote that John provides “three biblical tests of authentic Christianity: the doctrinal test, the moral test, and the social test.”<sup>2</sup> I don't want to go back over all that we presented in those sessions, I'll let those who are interested go listen to them. But I will give a quick survey here and then move on to some other tests.

First, with regard to the doctrinal test, John mentions a number of fundamental Christian doctrines. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but certainly no one is truly born again who doesn't agree with these basic doctrines. If you are interested in the Scripture references for each of these, take a look at the transcript for this session and you will find them. John mentions the following doctrines: the eternal deity of the second person of the Trinity<sup>3</sup>, the fact that Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> P.G. Mathew, *The Normal Church Life*, OM Books, 2006, pg. 4

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:1-2

Christ is truly God<sup>4</sup>, that he is truly man<sup>5</sup>, that he is perfectly holy<sup>6</sup>, that he is the promised Messiah<sup>7</sup>, that men are all sinners<sup>8</sup>, that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins<sup>9</sup>, that he has promised eternal life to his chosen people<sup>10</sup>, that we are the children of God<sup>11</sup>, that we must love our brothers<sup>12</sup>, that his children will all be sanctified<sup>13</sup>, that we have union with Christ<sup>14</sup>, that the Holy Spirit dwells in believers<sup>15</sup>, that Jesus truly died on the cross<sup>16</sup>, and that obedience to him is necessary for a Christian<sup>17</sup>.

Second, with regard to the moral test, in 1 John 2:3 we are told, “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” This is a very bold and crystal-clear statement. John is not talking about sinless perfection here<sup>18</sup>, but he *is* saying that a Christian’s life will be characterized by obedience. If we claim to be Christians but just go on living however we please, we are liars. And in order to obey Christ, we must know what he commands. In other words, we must know his Word, the Bible. In fact, anyone who has truly been born again will have a desire to know what the Word says. It is a very sad commentary on the modern church that most professing Christians have never read the Bible all the way through even one time, let alone made a lifetime habit of truly studying the Word of God.

Third, and last, is the social test. We read in 1 John 1:7, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”. And we are told numerous times in the letter that we must love our brothers and that love must be in actions, not just words. This is not just a call to make friendly small talk after church, it is a call to serious fellowship, to be involved in each other’s lives. Praying for one another *and* helping one another in concrete ways. It includes rebuking and correcting when appropriate, as well as sharing in material possessions and using our individual gifts for the good of the body of Christ. Christians cannot live as individuals who float around as they please. They are to be part of a local church family and to be heavily invested in one another.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 John 5:20

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 1:1-2, 4:2, 9

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:5, 2:1, 29

<sup>7</sup> John 2:22, 5:1

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 1:8, 10

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 1:7, 2:2, 12, 3:16, 4:10, 14

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 2:17, 25, 5:11

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 3:1-2, 10, 5:19

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 2:9-11, 3:10-11, 14, 23, 4:7-8, 11-12, 19-21

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 3:3, 6, 9, 5:18

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 5:11

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 3:24, 4:13

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 3:16

<sup>17</sup> 1 John 2:3-6, 3:22, 24, 5:2-3

<sup>18</sup> Or it would conflict with what he says in 1 John 1:8, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

So the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> John is a great place to start in terms of making your calling and election sure. But the entire New Testament is filled with tests we can apply to ourselves. Let me just give a small sampling of the other tests. In John 15:10 we read that Jesus said, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.” This is just one of many verses in the New Testament that speak of the necessity for us to obey God. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ and he clearly tells us here that he obeyed. Now, don't misunderstand me, our obedience is never perfect in this life. In 1 John 1:8 we are told that “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” But if you have been born again, there is a desire to obey God and a sincere grief and repentance and crying out to God for forgiveness when you fail.

Just a few verses further down we read, in John 15:19, that Christ also said, “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” Friends, if you are comfortable with the ways of the world, if you feel at home here, that is a very bad sign. In Philippians 3:18-21 Paul wrote, “as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” So ask yourself, are you a citizen of earth, or are you a citizen of heaven who is just passing through this life? While praying to the Father about his followers, Jesus said, in John 17:16, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” So, friends, what occupies your thoughts and your desires the majority of the time? Are they worldly, or heavenly? Do you spend great amounts of time studying and preparing for your vacation and no time at all studying God's Word? Are you a stranger here in this life, or is this your natural home?

Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying it is wrong for you to spend some time planning a vacation, working hard at your job, or enjoying the many legitimate pleasures of this life. But how often do your thoughts turn to God? When you step outside on a beautiful spring day and see some new flowers and hear a bird singing, do you instinctively give thanks to God? When you get up in the morning, is your mind filled with all of the things you need to do that day, or do you take time to thank God for giving you another day of life and health? Do you spend time in prayer? And in studying God's Word? If your Christianity only affects your life on Sunday morning and on other rare occasions, then I must say that your Christianity is not real.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible is God's only infallible, objective revelation to us. It is our guidebook for life. If you have been born again there must be a desire to know God, and the Bible is where you turn. That is where you learn about God's purpose and plan and how you can please him. It is where you learn what he loves and what he hates. It is the way you find the narrow path that leads to eternal life. J.I. Packer in his classic book *Knowing God* wrote, “Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life

blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you.”<sup>19</sup> And we study God by prayerfully studying his Word.

Don't buy into the illogical<sup>20</sup> and unbiblical modern idea that the Bible is just a record of human interactions with God and human reflections about God. It is true that men wrote the Bible, but they were guided by God. In 2 Peter 1:21, Peter tells us, “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” So, in fact, the Holy Spirit is the primary author of the Bible. It is God's Word to us and we must believe and obey it. We covered this in detail in Sessions 34 through 38, so I won't say any more now. My point in the context of our present discussion is simply that your attitude toward the Bible is a very strong indication of whether or not your claim to be a Christian is true. It is a great way to make your calling and election sure.

There is much more that could be said about making our calling and election sure, but let me very briefly summarize what I have shared so far. First, we are commanded to do so. Second, John gives us three ways of testing ourselves; the doctrinal test, the moral test and the social test. Third, we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, and the dominant characteristic of his life was one of obedience to God. Fourth, we are not to be worldly. We live in this world, but we are not of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven and our thoughts should frequently be there. Fifth, our attitude toward the Word of God is critical. We must come to it wanting to know how God would have us live our lives. Our desire should be to please God, not to get ahead in the world.

Now, before I go on, let me be perfectly clear that none of us ever live up to the standard by which we should measure ourselves. That standard is high. But we should see in ourselves an honest striving. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul wrote, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Many of you have heard the story of John Newton. He was an English slave trader in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who had a dramatic conversion which started with a storm at sea and led to his becoming an ordained minister. He is perhaps best known for writing the hymn Amazing Grace. A story is told about him near the end of his life commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:10, which says in part, “But by the grace of God I am what I am”. He is reported to have said, “though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’”<sup>21</sup>. That is a wonderful statement, to which all true Christians

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<sup>19</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1993, pg. 19

<sup>20</sup> The idea is illogical for many reasons; e.g., the agreement between all the parts of the Bible, which would be impossible given the number of authors and separation in time if they were not guided by God, the prophecies contained in it, and so on. See Sessions 4-11 and 17-21.

<sup>21</sup> quoted from *The Christian Spectator*, 1821, Vol III, pg. 186

should be able to say “Amen”. If you have been born again, God will be working throughout your life to conform you to the image of Christ. You may fall down, sometimes terribly, but the general tenor of your life will be one of increasing holiness and hatred of your own sins.

And finally, let me close this topic of making your calling and election sure by pointing out that the current coronavirus pandemic affords an excellent opportunity to do so. How you react to a trial is a very important sign of whether or not you have been born again. If you are a true Christian you will be able to overcome the natural anxiety and fear that attends difficult circumstances and rejoice in the fact that God has saved you. You will be able to have confidence that God is sovereign and fully in control of the situation and that he is good and his purposes are good. Listen to what the apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:3-7; “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

It is my prayer that this pandemic and the economic crisis it has caused would prove your faith to be genuine and result in praise, glory and honor when Christ returns. And if, after examining yourself, you are not sure of your salvation, then cry out to God in humble repentance. Seek his mercy and study his Word, striving to do what it says. And remember that you can send your questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). And we will do our best to answer you.