



Are You a Christian?

A message from the
**ORTHODOX
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

BY LAWRENCE R. EYRES

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Contents

Are You a Christian?	5
You Are a Sinner	11
Christ Died to Save Sinners	16
You May Become a Christian	22
How May You Be Sure You Are a Christian? . . .	27



Are You a Christian?

As you begin to read this booklet, I want you to consider the title question as being asked of you personally. I hope you will not turn aside from this question until you are able to say with warm conviction, “Yes, by God’s grace, *I am a Christian!*” And I for my part will attempt to keep this question and its answer before you, for I am persuaded that no other question can ever be as vital to you as this one: *Are you a Christian?*

The Stock Answers

No other question is so surrounded with confusion or answered so variously. Though it does not include them all, here is a list of more common answers given to this question:

(1) “I hope I’m a Christian,” says one. “I’m trying. I try to live by the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and the Sermon on the Mount. I’m doing my best. God surely can’t ask for more than one’s best!”

(2) “I should think I am,” says another. “My father and mother are very devout. I have a brother who is a minister. I was taught the articles of my religion from earliest childhood. If I’m not a Christian, who is?”

(3) “Why yes!” answers the third. “I was baptized as an infant, I have been instructed in the beliefs of my church, I took my first communion at the age of fourteen, and I’ve been a faithful church member ever since.”

(4) The next one says, “I went to the altar under the evangelist when the invitation was given. I had a real experience with the Lord at that time. I may have been a little careless since then, but it was showed me out of the Bible that when you accept Jesus as your Savior you’re saved, and you’ll never be lost again. So, you see, I *must* be a Christian.”

(5) Another says, “I don’t really know. In fact, I don’t see how anyone can really be sure in this life that he’s saved.”

(6) “Certainly I’m a Christian,” says the last one, “Aren’t we *all* children of God? God is the Father of all men, therefore all are brothers. It’s true that other religions have other names for God and heaven, but we’re all striv-

ing for the same goal, we're all going to the same place. Therefore, everyone who is sincere in his own religion is a Christian."

The Standard of Judgment

I'm sure you see by now why I said this question is surrounded by confusion. I've heard all these answers given—and sincerely, too. And yet, *they can't all be true!* Whose answer, if any, is the right answer? The simple way to settle this question is by saying, "My answer is right, and therefore all the others are wrong." But this simple solution will satisfy no one but me. In fact, behind the answer of each of our six friends is the assumption, "I'm right, and therefore you're wrong." There are as many standards of judgment as there are opinions. Each of our six friends, if confronted with this fact, would retreat to this next position and there stand his ground: "Well, everyone has a right to his own opinions." And this is the same as saying, "Truth is what you make it." Now if these six opinions are equally true, they are also equally false, since they contradict each other. But if we must leave the matter here, it must be admitted that there can be no satisfying answer to our title question. And what is more, if truth is to be determined by what people think, there is no question to be answered, since to ask a question implies that there is a standard of truth that is higher than the conflicting opinions of men.

What escape is there from this confusion? There is no escape unless we realize that there are only two possible standards of truth involved in this or any other question: *man's* standard, with all its variations, and *God's*. Now if God has not given us a clear standard of judgment, there might be some excuse for this battle of human opinions, *but if God has given to man a standard of truth, his standard renders all human opinions null and void.*

To come to the heart of the matter, God *has* done just that. He has given us his Word, and by that I simply mean the Bible. Maybe you have your doubts and are even now thinking, "He'll have to *prove* to me that the Bible is the Word of God." By way of answer, I cannot *prove* to you or anyone else that the Bible is God's inspired Word. I won't even try, and that for three reasons: (1) I cannot convince you of the divinity of Scripture if you are not open to conviction. I have tried many times and have always failed. You see, proving that the Bible is divinely inspired is a matter of changing the heart, and that is a work which God alone can do! (2) Those who find pleasure in denying the divine authority of the Bible come with their minds made up. They find many "errors" in Scripture, having already decided what constitutes an error. Before hearing the case for the Bible, they have appointed

themselves both judge and jury. Such prejudices make it impossible for them to render a fair verdict. (3) The whole subject is beyond the scope of this booklet, although I'd like to say that if you really *want* to come to a high and reverent esteem of Holy Scripture, there is evidence *in abundance* to support the historic Christian view that the Bible, in all its sixty-six books, is the very Word of God.

I have, nevertheless, three suggestions to make to you with regard to the subject of the authority of Scripture: (1) Consider that the contents of the Bible are most remarkable throughout. They set forth but one grand theme: Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, and his great salvation. (2) Consider that the Bible sets forth a view of God and the world that forms a basis for all true knowledge, whether it be science, history, philosophy, or any other branch of learning. And this is the only foundation of faith and life that stands and has stood the test of time. This view of God and the universe has been bitterly assailed by its enemies, but has never been disproved. (3) Consider what the Bible means to me. It has uncovered the sinfulness of my own heart. It has pointed me to my Savior Jesus Christ, who has taken away my sins and given me peace of conscience and full assurance of God's undying love and care of me for time and eternity. I commend this holy book to you for a lifetime of study. If your heart is open to its message, the Spirit of God himself will bring to you the needed assurance of its divine authority, even as he has done to me. And, if it is proof you want, herein is the proof of the matter.

The Stock Answers Examined in the Light of Scripture

Since the Bible, God's inspired Word, appears to be the only safe rule of life, let us examine the "stock answers" given to the question, "Are you a Christian?" in the light of this rule. Let us apply the "acid test" of Scripture to these answers.

(1) The first answer was, "I hope I'm a Christian. I'm trying. I try to live by the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. I'm doing my best." It is clear that this person is seeking God's approval on the ground of his own efforts to live up to God's standard. That is, he's trusting in *good works* to commend him to God for salvation. As important as good works are in the life of a Christian, they can never *make* him a Christian—they cannot *save*. Scripture teaches us: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The word *grace*, when used with re-

spect to salvation, always means *the undeserved favor of God to sinners*. Here salvation, or becoming a Christian, is placed squarely on the foundation of *grace*, which is the opposite of works (see Romans 11:6). Even the faith through which this salvation is claimed by the Christian is a gift of God's grace. Again we read, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20). No mere man, since the entrance of sin into the race, ever found favor with God because of his good works. It is a "doctrine of devils" that you or I, poor sinners that we are, can ever hope to find acceptance with the holy God upon the ground of good works!

(2) The second answer is from one who places confidence in the godliness of parents and family, having himself been taught the articles of his religion from childhood. In John 1:12–13 we are told that "to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." But lest false or insincere persons assume too much from these words of grace, there follows immediately: "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Considering the whole passage, we are told that those who receive Jesus as their Savior through faith have a right to the privileges and the name of the children of God. And those who have this distinction are those who have been born of God and God alone. That is, family connection, blood lineage, or any other human factor does not enter into that which actually makes one a Christian. This does not mean that Christian parents may not consider their children as belonging from infancy to Jesus. Other Scripture states that they *must* so regard their young children. But only the act of God in the new birth, which comes to expression in faith toward Christ, can make anyone a child of God. *There is no substitute for salvation by grace, not even a Christian home and family!*

(3) The third answer is from one who was baptized and in due time became a church member in full standing, being admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since the two Christian sacraments are indications of membership in the visible church, what really is being claimed as the basis for Christian hope is church membership. Now Christ Jesus established the visible church. He also instituted baptism and the Lord's Supper as being necessary for membership in the visible church. We may not belittle these Christian sacraments as many do. Nevertheless, neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper can save the soul. They are but the outward sign and seal of the saving work of God's Spirit in the soul. Man baptizes; God saves. The work of God can never be replaced by the work of man. The apostle Paul rec-

ognized this distinction when he said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). If you will bear in mind that in the Old Testament circumcision meant the same as baptism does in the New Testament, you can see what Paul meant by these words: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). The sacraments are a blessing only to those who are cleansed in heart by the Spirit of God; administered apart from this, they become a curse and not a blessing. Therefore, it is vain to rest one’s confidence in the mere fact of church membership.

(4) The next opinion lays stress on a conversion experience. Now I intend no criticism of responding to a public evangelistic appeal, nor to having an experience in connection with one’s becoming a Christian. Of course there are many forms of evangelism and many varieties of conversion experience, from the dramatic experience of one’s sensing a reprieve from the jaws of hell to that quiet peace of the soul somewhat similar to the warmth which dispels the cold. *The wrongness of this man’s confidence is in his apparent faith in an experience rather than faith in the Savior.* What is more, he said certain words about being sorry for sin and accepting Christ as Savior, and was taught to believe that just because he *said* he was sorry and *said* he trusted in Jesus, he *must* have been saved. This trust in an experience rather than in the living Savior accounts for a laxness in Christian living which indicates, if nothing more, a lack of understanding of the fact that “faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). There are thousands who live out their days not fearing death or the judgment, feeling secure in the memory of some Christian experience. This is as vain a hope as any other false hope. *Nowhere* in Scripture is salvation attributed to or grounded in an experience. The apostle Paul, whose Christian experience was of the most spectacular sort, testified, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul’s confidence and that of all the saints as well, was in a person, not an experience, and that person was Jesus Christ.

(5) The next opinion comes from one who holds that in his life there can be no certainty of salvation. Perhaps he believes that, though one may be sure for the moment, none can be sure of continuing in a state of salvation to the moment of death. Or perhaps he believes that God purposely withholds this certainty lest his children relax their vigil against the enticements of the world. Reasonable as this may sound to some, both of these views are plainly unscriptural. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say unto you, whoever hears my

word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). This new life is not only a future hope to the faithful Christian, but a *present reality*. He “has” life and “has passed from death to life.” What is more, the life Jesus gives to his own is *eternal*. All of Scripture testifies to this glorious truth. How can a salvation which I have today but may lose tomorrow be “eternal”? God is not such a Father as to hold his dearly bought children in constant fear, lest they should not be his after all!

(6) Our last answer is from one who believes that all men are children of God by natural birthright. To this person, and to all who agree with him, the real question is not, “Am I a Christian?” but “Am I a *good* Christian?” This is the teaching of much that is called Christianity today. And very many, ignorantly to be sure, take it for granted that Jesus taught that God was the spiritual Father of all men and that, therefore, all men are brothers in the family of God. Consequently, it comes as a great shock to many to hear that these doctrines have absolutely no support in Scripture, but are a distortion of the true doctrine of divine Fatherhood and Christian brotherhood. Of course, God is the Creator of all men. That the Bible does teach. It also teaches that God is the Sustainer of all life, even that of the wicked, and that he is good to the wicked—even loves them! Nevertheless, God never calls his enemies his friends, nor does he give to unbelievers the title of children or sons of God. Jesus himself was most insistent on this distinction between the children of God and the enemies of God. To the unbelieving Jews of his time our Lord said, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44). There is a great spiritual gulf between the holy God and unrepentant sinners. This gulf is so great and deep that, for those who die unrepentant, it will never be bridged throughout eternity! And that gulf is fixed not only between God and his enemies, but between the enemies of God and the children of God. (See John 3:18, 36 and Matthew 25:46.)

We must conclude that, judged by God’s standard of right and wrong, of faith and life, all these “stock answers” are both inadequate and false. Are *you* among those who give one of these answers to the question, “Are you a Christian?” If you are, you have an empty confidence. And there is a *better* answer. It is set forth in the following chapters. It is a simple answer, but it is not an *easy* one. If the Bible’s answer is to be *your* answer, you must humble yourself before God; you must accept his sentence upon you as true and just; you must adopt his remedy and cling to his Son as your only and all-sufficient hope.

You Are a Sinner

In the previous chapter, we came to the conclusion that only in the light of the Bible are we able to deal properly with the question, “Are you a Christian?” It now becomes necessary to learn what the Bible has to say as to your spiritual condition before God. I will attempt in this chapter to show you that the Bible says emphatically that *you are a sinner!* We shall make no further progress until you are able to accept this divine sentence as both true and just. Consequently, I want to deal with two aspects of our subject: *the biblical doctrine and its application to you personally.*

The Biblical Doctrine

Having once accepted the Bible as the Word of God, and therefore of absolute authority in all matters of faith and life, it is not at all difficult to show that all men, including you, are sinners. I expect in due time to do this very thing, but not until we have answered from Scripture the prior question, “*How did the human race become sinful in the first place?*”

Romans 5:12–21. “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (verse 12). If you carefully analyze this verse in the light of the verses that follow, as well as Scripture in general, the following truths become evident: (1) *Sin entered into the world through the one sin of the one man Adam.* That sin was his eating of the forbidden fruit (see verses 18a and 19a, and Genesis 3:17). (2) *Sin is the cause of death in the human race* (Romans 6:23), so that wherever you see death, it must be because of sin (see verses 13–14). (3) *Death is a universal condition among men.* (4) *And the reason that death is universal is that “all sinned.”* It is right here that we must ask the question, *In what sense have all sinned?*

To begin with, it is easy to see that all morally responsible persons have sinned. A morally responsible person is one who has reached that mental age in which he may be held accountable for his actions. It is of no concern to us just what that age is. Of these persons it may be said that they have sinned *in the flesh*. But how about those human beings who die before reaching that morally accountable age, such as infants dying at birth? Surely they have not sinned *in the flesh*, yet they died: and death comes only to those who have sinned. And the Scripture says that “death spread to all men because all

sinned"! Yet they have not all sinned in the flesh. Is there *another* way to sin? Yes, *in Adam*. Adam was created by God to be the federal representative of the whole human race. When temptation came to him from Satan, through Eve, in the garden of Eden, the fate of the race hung upon his action. Had Adam resisted the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit, his whole posterity would have benefited by the obedience of their federal representative. His obedience would have been imputed to us (that is, reckoned to our account). But since he disobeyed and sinned, the guilt of that one disobedience was imputed to all who should descend from him, to the whole human race. Therefore, *all sinned in Adam*, and therefore death has spread to all (see Romans 5:17–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22).

We have yet to explain how we came by the sinful natures we find ourselves to have. David, in his great psalm of penitence says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Now we know that David was not referring to anything shameful concerning his parents. David's was a *natural* conception and birth, protected by the sanctity of the marriage relation. But it was from a normal conception and birth, nonetheless, that he received a heart so sinful that he could commit adultery and even murder. You and I also have such a sinful nature, which is the result of a *natural birth*. We were *born sinners!* That is why Jesus was virgin born (that is, born without a human father). He who became our sinless Redeemer could not be a natural-born son of Adam.

And that is how we came to be guilty sinners: the guilt of our first father, Adam, became *our* guilt, since he acted in our behalf when he sinned in the garden. As a result of his sin, he became spiritually and morally corrupt, and this spiritual and moral corruption has been passed on from generation to generation, infecting all but the man Christ Jesus, who was not born of ordinary parenthood and generation. This explains the meaning of our Lord's words in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

Let us see if this inherent corruption is as broad as the human race and as deep as the human heart. There are three passages which are conclusive:

(1) *Genesis 6:5*. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually [or every day]." This was God's verdict on the human race just before the great flood. This was not a judgment of that generation alone, for the same truth is repeated in *Genesis 8:2* and *Psalm 14:2–3*. The "intention of the thoughts of his heart" simply refers to that which proceeds from man's truest and innermost being. As a man "thinks in his heart, so is he"

(Proverbs 23:7 NKJV). These thoughts are to the man what the water is to the fountain, or the fruit to the tree. Notice the depth of this evil: “Every intention ... is *only evil continually*!” Man in his heart of hearts is *completely* sinful, *nothing but* sinful, and sinful *all the time*! What judgment could be more devastating?

(2) *Jeremiah 17:9*. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Again, the fountainhead of all our thoughts, words, and actions is exceedingly wicked, and that wickedness intensifies itself by trying to conceal its true character from both God and men.

It is not only a wicked heart, but a *hypocritically wicked heart*! Only God can know the full depths of its depravity!

(3) *Romans 3:9–19*. This passage is too long to be quoted in full here. Get your Bible and turn to it as you read. It comes in the book of Romans, where Paul holds as proved that “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin,” and that they therefore need salvation. Verses 10 through 18 are quotations from the Old Testament which show the true character of fallen man. And the whole array of passages is summed up in the words, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” All the world stands guilty and inexcusable before our holy God.

Let us sum up the evidence thus far in these four propositions: (1) All men descending from Adam by ordinary generation are therefore guilty before God. (2) Every member of the race received by inheritance from his parents an evil nature which came originally from Adam. (3) Since all are guilty sinners by nature, all are subject to death, both physical and spiritual. This death is the “wages of sin.” (4) This sinful nature cannot but express itself in sinful thoughts, words, and actions, unless God mercifully restrains our sinful impulses, and pardons us, and renews our hearts out of his free grace.

The Meaning of the Doctrine for You

There are those who, in leading a soul to Christ, are satisfied if they can get a man or woman or child to admit that he is a sinner, and get him to say a prayer after them confessing this fact and asking Christ to enter his heart and save him. When this has been done, the convert is told that he has been “gloriously saved.” Whether or not this is true, I want to impress upon you that more than an *admission* of sin is required by God of those who would inherit eternal life. The admission may be reluctant or halfhearted. In such a case, the prayer of confession and of faith has no meaning unless it be to add to the mountain of sins already laid at the sinner’s door. You see, the fact of your own sinfulness and unworthiness must not be just an *admission*, but a

conviction! May the load of guilt grip your soul and break your heart! May you be utterly dismayed at the thought of your rebellion against God.

Ponder what Scripture teaches as to the loathsomeness of *your sin*:

(1) Consider the nature of the sin of Eve and Adam in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–6). First Satan asked Eve if God had really said, “You shall not eat of *any* tree of the garden,” as if he were miserly in his goodness! Then, when Eve began to think that there might be something to this subtle accusation against the goodness of God, came the lie, “You will not surely die.” And she *believed* it. And then she aspired to be like the most high God, “knowing good and evil.” It would be a most cowardly thing for a son so to attribute evil to his father by first doubting his love, then denying the truthfulness of his word, and finally rebelling against his authority. But to do this against *God* is a most fearful and wicked thing. That is the nature of the first sin.

(2) Consider David’s psalm of repentance, Psalm 51, in which he says, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” While David accounts for the corruption of his heart by saying he was born in sin, yet he did not blame his mother, or Adam, or God for the sinfulness of his heart; he blamed *himself*. And he came to God, not demanding restoration to his favor, as though forgiveness were due to him, but *pleading for God’s mercy*.

Another lesson can be learned from this psalm. David had wantonly committed adultery with Bathsheba and caused the death of Uriah, her husband. These particular sins were black indeed, and well he knew it, but he knew equally well that the fault lay not in his *sins* but in his *sinfulness!* His grief was less over the particular deeds than over the inborn wickedness of his heart. Now, if you will learn from this very great sinner, you must learn that sorrow for particular sins that you commit will soon pass with the vividness of your memory of them, but repentance is a deeper sorrow than that: it is sorrow for *sin-ful-ness*—that inner spring of your thoughts, words, and actions which corrupts all that goes forth from the heart. You must feel this so deeply that you will not merely cry out, “Forgive *these* sins,” but “Create in me a *clean heart*, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

(3) There is still another measure of the wickedness of your sin: it was man’s sin that nailed the Son of God to the cross. In John 3:16, Jesus said concerning his coming death upon the cross, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son . . .” The little word “so” is the measure of the greatness of God’s love for wicked sinners, and for that very reason it is also the

measure of the greatness of their sin. Consider Jesus as he prayed in anguish in Gethsemane, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus shrank from the death he had to die on the cross, the awfulness of which he alone fully knew. Yet he also prayed, “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). He knew, as he struggled there in the garden, that *there was no other way to save lost sinners than to bear the punishment of their sins upon the cross*. And this is a judgment of *your* sinfulness, In your rebellion against God, you are at one with those who drove the nails into his hands. In his pitiful cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 26:46), you can hear the awful reality of the punishment your sin deserves.

(4) Finally, consider that another measure of the wickedness of your sin is hell, or the lake of fire, or the “second death,” as it is called in Revelation 20:14–15. It is from this place of punishment that “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” (Revelation 14:11). It is of this well-deserved punishment of rebellious and unrepentant sinners that Jesus said, “Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).

Will you face it squarely—not only the fact of your total sinfulness, but the extent and vileness and wickedness of that condition? It is as true as God is true. *And do not rise in criticism of his judgments lest you find yourself accusing the altogether just and holy One, lest you be found to be fighting against God!* Bear in mind that the book in which this disclosure of your guilt and unworthiness is found is a book of *salvation*. Remember that the death of the spotless Lamb of God, which truly gauges the depths of your sin, was a death in place of sinners—for the benefit of sinners as guilty as you! And as you gaze in becoming shame upon the Christ of Calvary, may God’s Holy Spirit convince and convict you of your sinfulness, *that you may look with faith upon him and live!*

Christ Died to Save Sinners

In the last chapter, I pointed out the clear teaching of God’s Word: that you are a sinner and are under the guilt and condemnation of sin, both original and personal. You are therefore without hope unless God in heaven has mercy on your soul! But God has provided a way of escape, for Jesus Christ, his Son, is the only possible Savior of sinners such as you. I am going to present him first in his *person* and then in his *work*, that is, what he *is* and what he *did*.

What He Is

It is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith that Jesus is truly God and truly man, both divine and human—in a word, the God-man.

1. *Jesus is God.* By this I mean that he is the second of a trinity of persons in the Godhead. Scripture teaches that God is one in his divine essence. God is a spirit (John 4:24), and a spirit, unlike a body, cannot be divided into parts. It follows that the unity of the divine nature is both indivisible and indestructible. Yet the Bible teaches just as clearly that within the unity of the Godhead there are three separate and distinct persons (see Matthew 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). So then Jesus Christ, as to his divine nature, was the second person in the Godhead, distinct, as far as personality is concerned, from both the Father and the Holy Spirit, yet sharing with them the one indivisible divine nature. Therefore we can say that *Jesus is truly God*.

Even the Old Testament teaches this doctrine. Isaiah 9:6, which is a prophecy of the coming of the Christ child, says, “His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Could all this be said of a mere man? In Daniel 7:13–14, Daniel saw in his “night visions” one like the “son of man” (this was Jesus’ favorite title for himself), to whom was given “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.” Furthermore, this dominion is “an everlasting dominion,” and his kingdom “shall not be destroyed.” Could such dominion over such a kingdom belong to anyone who was less than God?

To the true deity of Christ the testimony of the New Testament is deafening. If you will turn to John 1:1–3, you will see that “the Word” was already in existence in the beginning (his eternity), that “the Word *was* God” (his

deity), and that “all things were made through him” (his work as Creator). In verse 14 of the same chapter, we read that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” By this we know beyond any doubt that “the Word” and Christ in his divine nature are one and the same. And in verse 18, Jesus is called “the only God, who is at the Father’s side.” Can language be made any more forceful?

Another passage of Scripture, equally clear and convincing, is Romans 9:5, in which the apostle Paul calls Jesus “God over all, blessed forever.” Even Jesus himself claimed equality with God by saying, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). When Jesus was on trial before Caiaphas, they accused him of making himself equal with God, and he did not deny it! (see John 19:7 and Matthew 26:63–64). Is it any wonder that the universal Christian church boldly confesses that “Jesus is God”?

2. *Jesus is truly man.* I do not mean that, besides the divine person of Jesus, there was added to that also a *human person*. Jesus was a single person, but besides having a completely divine nature, he was given in his incarnation a complete and perfect human *nature*, both body and soul. He *had* to be human as well as divine if he was to be “the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). I need not quote Scripture in support of his true humanity as it stands out everywhere in the Word, being beyond the need of proof. Notice how, in 2 John 7, that whoever denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is labeled “the deceiver and the anti-christ.”

It is important to understand that Jesus was not born of ordinary parenthood. Although the second person of the Trinity received his human nature and substance from the Virgin Mary, he had no human father, but was conceived by a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–33). (The doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ is not to be confused with the Roman Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary, which alleges that Mary also was conceived and born without sin. There is no support in Scripture for this doctrine.)

The biblical doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ is essential to the Christian faith. If he had not been born of a virgin, he could not have escaped the corruption that passes to all who are born by ordinary generation. If he had not been born without sin, how could he have saved men from their sins? No, Jesus *had* to be sinless! He was subject to the *effects* of sin in both soul and body (i.e., suffering, sorrow, weariness, and even death), yet “he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). He was “tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

3. How these two natures, the divine and the human, were joined together in a real, living union is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. It is just too deep, too wonderful, for human understanding. But of this you may be sure: Jesus was no less divine because he was human, and he was no less human because he was divine. Scripture makes it plain that we need just such a person to be our Savior. A lesser Redeemer could not have saved us from the righteous demands of God's holy law. The God-man alone can save; he is the only sufficient Savior ever to have appeared upon the stage of history. "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 21).

What He Did

I have described to you the *person* of the Savior. Now let us see what the Bible has to say about his saving *work*.

The apostle Paul quoted a "faithful saying" which was current in the early church "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Jesus himself said as much: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

But it is right here that we must beware of modern deceivers who say the same thing but mean something entirely different. These "liberal" or "modernist" teachers and preachers do not believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. They do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God in the high sense that we have seen the Bible teaches. Neither do they believe that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, virgin born. What then do these false teachers mean when they say that Christ came to save sinners? Simply this: Jesus lived among men to show us how unselfishly we ought to live, and he died to show us how much God hates sin and loves sinners. The spectacle of his living and dying, they say, should fully persuade us to forsake sin and serve God. That is their doctrine of salvation. Though an element of truth is found in their teaching, it is false at the core, for we have already seen that our sins and our sinfulness are of such a nature that we *cannot* save ourselves! If Jesus came to show us how to save ourselves, he lived and died in vain, for no man ever yet saved himself from the wrath and curse due to him for his sins. Besides this, the Bible leaves no doubt that *Jesus came to save sinners by taking their place before the law of God so that he could obey for sinners the law they were unable to obey, so that he could make atonement for the law they had broken.* This is what is meant by the "substitu-

tionary atonement” (sometimes called the “vicarious” or “satisfaction” view). And this is the scriptural view. Men may say *anything else* about the saving work of Christ, but if they fail to say *this* their teachings are but “doctrines of devils,” false and vicious all the way through!

No, God’s law makes demands upon you that not even the best Christian is in this life able to fulfill, much less he who is outside of Christ. God’s law says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Without this perfect holiness, “no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Jesus, though he was divine, came to earth in perfect subjection to his Father’s will (John 5:30; 6:38). He was obedient in all things, “to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Why is there this stress upon obedience? “For as by the one man’s [Adam’s] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s [Christ’s] obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). In part, the atoning work of Christ consists in fulfilling the exacting requirements of the law, which first Adam and then we, his descendants, failed to obey.

But there is not only unfulfilled law, there is also *broken* law. We have sinned, and those of us whose trust is in the Savior can say, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). That is to say that, since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), Jesus died to pay the debt of sin. “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5–6). Plainly put, when Jesus hung upon the cross, he, the sinless one, became identified with his people, their sins were imputed to him (i.e., reckoned to his account), and his perfect righteousness became, by imputation, the true possession of all who believe on his name (see 2 Corinthians 5:19–21).

I would like to make an imaginary portrayal of this great redemptive transaction: God’s elect people stand before the holy law of God in his presence. The law says, “These all have fallen short of your glory, O Holy One, and have become transgressors of your law; and according to your eternal justice I demand that *they must die*.” But at that moment another person—one with nail-scarred hands—steps boldly forth and places himself between the accusing law and the condemned sinners. Then he speaks: “It is true, O accusing law, these have fallen under your just penalty, for they have sinned, yet *they must not die!* For them I bore the cruel cross; for their transgressions were my hands and my feet pierced with nails; for them my sinless soul was made an offering for sin! In your sight, O my Father, I paid the utmost

price. You know well that the demands of your law have been fully met, for it pleased you that I should hang upon the cross and, while bruised and bleeding, suffer within my soul stroke after stroke of your avenging rod till your anger against these was fully spent. Then I died. Because I did what you sent me to do, because of the great love we have for these, your children, *I demand that they shall not die, but live!*" The law thereupon is silent and content, for it has received its ransom price; all its claims are perfectly met (Galatians 3:13). The Father smiles tenderly upon his elect children, for he "has blessed us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Reconciliation has been fully accomplished (2 Corinthians 5:18). Nevermore will God look with anger on those whom he has redeemed (Romans 8:1).

That is exactly what Jesus did for me, a sinner. Nothing less could have met my desperate need:

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

It is this great work of atonement that the triune God accomplished out of his amazing love for a world of sinful men (John 3:16). Yes, the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ was a sacrifice of *infinite value*. It was so, not only because he alone was without sin among the sons of men, but also because he was more than man: *he was the holy Son of God*. It was God himself in the person of his Son who wrought this great salvation for sinners such as you and I are!

I cannot close this chapter yet. It is not enough to say that Christ died to save sinners. It must also be understood that he died to save *particular* sinners. With humble assurance, I can say that Christ died for *this* sinner. "This Shepherd so kind had *me* in his mind, when he laid down his life for his sheep." The salvation of particular sinners is implied in our Lord's parable of the lost sheep. When the shepherd finds the sheep that has gone astray, he does not say, "Come, my little lamb, and I will show you the way back to the fold." Rather, "he lays it [the lost sheep] on his shoulders" and carries it back to the fold (Luke 15:5–6). Just so, God the Holy Spirit, using the gospel message, secretly and powerfully draws unto himself those specific objects of his redeeming love. This is called "effectual calling." It is a doctrine of Scripture (John 6:44; Romans 8:29–30; 1:7; Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 31). Even the faith by which sinners receive Christ as their Savior is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9). Not only this, but we learn from

the Bible that God wonderfully enables those whom he particularly draws unto himself to persevere in faith and good works to the very hour of death (Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:28–30).

I hope that now you appreciate what a wonderful Savior I have. I now close with the prayer that you, having beheld your sin, may now behold your Savior. In the next chapter, I shall try to show you just how willing and ready he is to become *your* Savior.

You May Become a Christian

In the last chapter, I tried to show you from the Scriptures themselves that Christ Jesus died to save sinners. I also made it clear that it was not simply to make it *possible* that sinners be saved, but *to accomplish the full salvation of those he came to save!* Those whom Jesus saves, he saves “to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25; see also John 6:37–44; Romans 8:29–30). Are you one of those whom Christ came to save so completely?

There is a right and a wrong way to answer this question. The *wrong* way goes like this: “You can become a Christian by confessing your sin and by believing on Christ as your Savior.” This is a wrong answer because no unsaved person *can* come to Christ of and by himself. Two passages of Scripture make this very clear: (1) In 1 Corinthians 2:14 we are told, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Now “the natural person” in this passage is the unsaved person, the unbeliever. He is *not able to understand* the things of the Spirit—the things of salvation. Therefore, *he is not able, by himself, to become a Christian!* (2) In Romans 8:7–8 we read, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” “The mind that is set on the flesh” is a way of saying the unbelieving mind or heart. How important is that little word *can!* The unsaved person cannot receive the message of salvation into his heart; the unbeliever cannot be in subjection to the law of God, so as to be pleasing to him. Why? Is it because God will not let him come to Christ? No! It is because he is *unable* either to believe on the Savior or to prepare his heart to receive Christ.

It is the same as in the physical sphere. Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, an intimate friend of Jesus, had just died (John 11). Now Jesus came to the tomb and cried out, “Lazarus, come out.” Lazarus was unable, by himself, either to hear or obey that command because he was *dead*. And if it had not been for the divine power of the Son of God, he would have remained under the power of death. In that state he could neither come out nor even *want* to come out. Nevertheless, he *did* hear and obey the voice of Jesus; he *did* come out alive, for our divine Lord freely gave him life.

It is the same with unbelieving sinners. They *cannot* come to Jesus be-

cause they are “dead in ... trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), but God sends forth his Holy Spirit and makes them alive, so that they are able to repent and believe the gospel. So you see that it is not true that you *can* become a Christian, which is to say that you of yourself have the ability to turn to Christ for salvation; you can no more change the condition of your own heart than an Ethiopian can change the color of his skin, or a leopard can change his spots (Jeremiah 13:23).

Would you, then, like to be assured that you are one of those for whom Christ died? Since we have seen what is the wrong answer to this question, let us now consider the *right* answer: “You *may* become a Christian through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus as your Savior from sin.” The whole difference lies in that little word *may*. While it is the very truth of God that, as Jesus himself said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44), it is equally the truth of God (for Jesus also said this) that “whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). Every day those once lost in sin do actually come in answer to that grand invitation, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). There are no restrictions or limitations on this invitation; it is the *gospel*, *God’s good news to you*, if you will receive it: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). It is to that end that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It all adds up to this: *God offers to you free and full salvation if you will only take him at his word!*

There is good reason for God’s willingness to save all who will come to him through Christ: (1) Jesus is *able* to save anyone and everyone. I do not mean that Jesus actually died for the express purpose of saving those who will surely be lost, but I mean that there is no sin he cannot wash away, no sinner he cannot lift out of the “miry clay” of sin, no *kind* of sinner Jesus is not abundantly able to save! He is *able* to take away your “heart of stone” and give you a “heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). (2) Another reason for God’s willingness to save all who will come to him through Christ is that he *loves all men*. This truth is taught in Matthew 5:44–45, where Jesus tells us that we ought to love our enemies and persecutors, as well as our friends, “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” The reason we ought to love our enemies is that God, our heavenly Father, loves his enemies. We see this love beautifully extended in Ezekiel 33:11, where God commands his prophet to tell rebellious Israel, “I have no plea-

sure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" It is the same divine compassion that caused our Savior to weep for the waywardness of Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" (Matthew 23:37).

It is not a cold, take-it-or-leave-it offer that God is making to you in the gospel of his Son; it is a warm, an urgent, an impassioned plea that you forsake your vain refuge of self-love, self-trust, and self-satisfaction and throw yourself upon the mercy of Christ alone, saying:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Yes, you *may* become a Christian. Still, it is right to ask, "What must I *do* to be saved?" *You must be converted.* That is, there must be a complete *turning around, an about-face*, so that your affection and hope will no longer be in yourself, or in any other person or thing, but only in the Savior. Conversion is the door by which you enter into the kingdom of God. Every door has two sides, so has conversion: they are *faith* and *repentance*. They are both necessary for salvation; no one is saved without them. The apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost, "Repent ..." (Acts 2:38). Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). On the other hand, Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). And to the Romans he wrote, "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" (Romans 10:9).

These two parts of conversion are not really separate at all, but are part of the same activity of the renewed heart, for you cannot face the north without turning your back to the south; neither can you receive by faith the crucified Savior without sincere sorrow for, and a turning from, your sin. *You may be sure that you do not truly believe unless you also repent; nor do you truly repent except that repentance drive you to faith in the Savior.*

I must speak a word as to what constitutes true faith and repentance. Repentance is heartfelt sorrow for sin. It is born of the realization that one stands justly condemned before God. The repentant heart must acknowledge God's judgment to be both true and righteous when God labels people "guilty sinners." And this is not all: with full conviction of the loathsomeness of its condition must come an abhorrence of sin and a sincere desire to turn from it. True repentance has no relation to the apathy in which the

sinner admits all that is vile about his heart and life, but is content with it nonetheless. That is why the repentant heart will turn to Christ the moment it becomes convinced that there is cleansing to be found in the Savior's blood.

Then faith follows as naturally as day follows night. Faith involves three elements, one building upon the other: (1) *Knowledge* is first. It is no faith that is not based upon knowledge. One must know that Christ came down to earth, was born of a virgin, lived a holy life, died upon a cross, and rose again the third day. (2) *Assent* is next. One must accept the whole story of Jesus and his love as *true*. But this is not all of saving faith. Thousands who do now believe that the gospel story is true will one day receive from the lips of Jesus the sad sentence, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23). (3) *Trust* is the crowning element of saving faith. Trust is simply a giving or committing of oneself to Jesus for salvation. This is well illustrated in the physical realm when a patient actually submits to the operating surgeon by receiving an anesthetic, thus literally putting his life into the doctor's hands. So also, when a sinner puts himself into the hands of the Great Physician, calling upon him to heal him of the deadly disease of sin, he *trusts* the Savior and the Savior alone for salvation. Such is the exercise of saving faith, and all degrees short of the element of trust are not *saving* faith.

We have seen what conversion is in its elements, faith and repentance; now *let us consider what actually happens when one is converted.*

He is first *justified*. To be justified means two things: (1) God has taken away the guilt of his sins and has put them to the account of Jesus. That's why Christ had to die: the guilt of his people became his (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:24). Therefore, the moment a sinner repents and believes the gospel he is forgiven *all* his sins—they all have become (by divine imputation) the sins of Jesus, who became sin for us! (2) Justification also means that Christ's righteousness is transferred (or imputed) to the believer. It is not enough that our breaking of God's law be forgiven, *but our failure to keep all the precepts of the law must also be made up*. This covers not only the period of our life as unbelievers, but also that period as believers. Not even the Christian keeps the law of God perfectly, yet God requires *perfect obedience* (Matthew 5:48), which only Christ, the perfect man, can provide. Therefore, from the moment we place our trust in Christ, God sees not our sinful imperfection but the perfect righteousness of Christ. That is the only ground of our acceptance by the holy God "in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

All this follows "repentance toward God" and "faith in our Lord Jesus

Christ” (Acts 20:21), for we are “justified by faith” (Romans 5:1). But that is not all that follows: the believer is also *adopted*. This simply means that the converted sinner actually becomes a child of God. This is taught in John 1:12: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” In Romans 8: 17, believers are, by virtue of their being children of God, “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

There is much more that I might tell you of what happens when a sinner repents and believes the gospel, but this must await the closing chapter. Now I want to bring you face-to-face with the proposition which is the title of this chapter, *You may become a Christian*. The various Scripture doctrines which I have dealt with as involved in this subject may seem difficult to understand and to relate one with another, yet the *heart* of the matter is most simple. If you do not grasp it, the reason is not that the gospel message is too hard to understand—the *hardness would not be in the doctrine, but in your heart!* Are you aware of the damning nature and extent of your sin? Have you grasped something of the sweet, rich mercy of God, who “shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)? I plead with you, as Christ pleaded and still pleads with wayward men, “Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). You sin against the unspeakable grace of God, and you sin against your own soul, when you do not receive and rest upon Jesus *now* as your Savior! “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). God has not promised you tomorrow in which to come to him; you may be certain only of today. Thousands living today will never see tomorrow in the land of the living. And most of them do not know that today is their last day of grace! There will never be for you a “more convenient time” than today. Turn now and by simple faith, born out of true repentance, receive and rest upon Christ alone for everlasting salvation. Remember, it is not I alone that offer you salvation, but God himself. And no man can safely say no to God. May the blessed Holy Spirit melt your heart, most powerfully draw you to Jesus, and make you his forever!

How May You Be Sure You Are a Christian?

In the foregoing chapter, I took you step-by-step through the whole range of subjects involved in the little question, “Are you a Christian?” To say truthfully you are a Christian, you must know yourself to be a sinner before God, lost and undone; you must realize that God has made full provision to save such sinners like you; you must acknowledge your own sinfulness, turning from it in deep repentance, and put your full trust in Christ alone as your Savior from sin and all its consequences.

But there is one thing more: having accepted and acted on the gospel truth, *how may you be assured of your salvation?* If you cannot be sure you are a Christian, your life can hardly be a happy or peaceful one. Bound up in this subject are three questions which must be answered: Does God want me to have assurance? If so, how durable is this salvation of which he wants me to be assured? Where must I look to find assurance?

1. *Does God want me to have assurance?* The Bible abounds with words of comfort for the believer, designed, it would seem, for the sole purpose of assuring his children of his love. Jesus did not hesitate to say to the woman who touched the hem of his garment, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well” (Matthew 9:22). He also said to his disciples on that fearful night when he was betrayed, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.... Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). And in Hebrews 6:18–19 we are told that “we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”

Yes, it is one of the provisions our God has made for his children that they should be confident of his love and know themselves to be his. We must not be led astray by those who teach that it is not spiritually healthy for an ordinary believer to be assured of his salvation, lest he fall into carnal indifference. The Word of God abounds in the very opposite teaching—that our loving Savior delights to assure those who trust him that they are no longer children of darkness but of the light. For “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

2. *How durable is this salvation?* To know that I am a true child of God is poor comfort if I must live all my days in the fear of falling away from Christ and returning to my former lost condition. There are hosts of sincere Christians who are needlessly burdened with this fear. There are enough burdens laid upon us by our Lord without our having to bear this wholly unnecessary weight of being afraid of becoming lost all over again! And it is small comfort to be told that I won't fall from grace as long as I am faithful to the Savior. Since I learned about my deceitful, polluted heart, I am unimpressed with the thought of my own faithfulness.

But wait! Even to raise the question of my faithfulness as the foundation of my security betrays an ignorance as to the true nature of salvation. I do not save myself, nor do I save myself with God's help; neither does God save me with my help: God, and God alone, is my Savior! The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all have a share in the work of saving me, but they share that work with none. In fact, he who thinks his continuance in the state of grace is dependent upon his own faithfulness has somehow credited himself, at least in part, with being his own savior. Still you say, "I must believe to be saved; no one can believe *for* me." That is true, but this also is true: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Please note: *you* must believe (you are saved through faith), but if and when you do, it is God who both gives you that faith and works it out in your heart. We must acknowledge this so that he might have all the glory! If it is true, then, that God does all the saving, even to the extent of giving you faith, is it imaginable that he would fail to complete the work he has begun? In writing to the Philippian Christians, the apostle Paul expressed confidence "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6).

Now hear the words of Jesus: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). Should it not be enough also to know that the new life God gives his children is called "eternal" and "everlasting"? Has anyone been heard to say of another Christian, "He has everlasting life, but I'm not sure how long it will last"? This is pure nonsense! If you have everlasting life, it will last forever! *If God has made you a new creature in Christ,*

you may be sure he will never let you fall. You may depend upon his faithfulness!

3. *Where must I look to find assurance?* There are many who outwardly profess Christ and therefore think they are saved, yet they will find themselves with those to whom Christ will say in the last day, “I never knew you.” These take their salvation for granted. Perhaps they “went forward” at an evangelistic meeting. Perhaps they were baptized or confirmed. They look upon the “experience” or the outward badge of church membership as adequate ground for calling themselves Christians. As important as public profession of faith or membership in the visible church is, these may never be trusted as the basis of your assurance of salvation. There are three grounds in Scripture upon which our assurance can rest. We need all three.

(1) *The sure promises of God.* We are told in 2 Corinthians 1:19–20, “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you ... was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” God’s promises are never yes and no, as are the promises of men, but are ever yes. When Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37), he *meant* it. Heaven and earth will one day pass away, but not so much as one of his promises will ever fail!

Many of God’s children have first seen the glimmering of assurance in this way: while they have long believed the Bible to be God’s Word and have understood what Christ has done to save them, they cannot overcome their deep sense of unworthiness to come to any assurance of salvation. They just don’t “feel saved.” Then a Christian friend, learning of their uncertainty, comes to them with his Bible open. He points out one or two simple promises, such as, “Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This friend discovers that there is a true sense of sorrow for sin and abhorrence of it; he further finds out that there is a sincere acceptance of the work of Christ upon the cross. It remains for him to point the trembling souls to the sure promise of God. And then the light dawns and peace comes. So many are waiting for a great emotional upheaval—one which seems never to come—upon which to base their confidence, whereas they should look to God’s promises. This simple act of appropriation, which we call saving faith, is often accompanied by great struggle of soul, but it just as often comes without any great struggle. Remember, it is not the experience that saves, but simple, childlike faith. Take God at his Word, lay hold of the promises, and you may know that assurance which brings peace.

(2) *The fruits of the Spirit.* There is an old saying which has come down through the Christian centuries: “Where the Spirit of God is, there is his

church.” In other words, where the Holy Spirit takes up his abode in a human heart, there you will find a true child of God. The apostle John wrote, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers” (1 John 3:14). If genuine Christian love flows from your heart, it must be that Christ, by his Spirit, lives in you. He has become “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

In Galatians 5:22–23 we find a more complete list of the fruits of the Spirit. They are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” As we rightly judge the nature of the vine by the fruit it bears, even so that heart is renewed which produces the fruit of righteousness. Still, these Christian graces are not given to be admired by us, but to *use!* It is not a cold analysis of our spiritual graces, but the using of them, by which we are led into assurance of salvation. Of the use of these spiritual gifts Peter says, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). Therefore, *perseverance in faith and good works is an outward token of saving grace.*

I must caution you not to value your own judgment of your spiritual fruitfulness, lest your heart (not yet free from the corrupting influence of sin) lead you to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Let others be beholders of your good works, so that God, who is their true source, may get all the glory.

(3) *The witness of the Holy Spirit.* In Romans 8:15–16 Paul says, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Here is the climax of our assurance: the Holy Spirit of God bears witness in our hearts that we are truly sons of God. And not only does he witness to our hearts, but he witnesses *with* that new heart he has given us. These two together bear an immediate testimony which is unshakable. It is this secret, yet powerful persuasion which enables us to say with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Timothy 1:12).

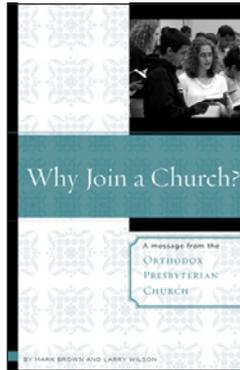
There are those who, though true children of God, do not have this assurance. Usually its lack is due to seeking assurance in what man does, rather than in what God has said and done. Often a life of carelessness for a time will rob a believer of his assurance, but he is miserable until he is restored to fellowship with God. This is the difference between the mere professing Christian and the “possessing” one: the former will fall away from his pro-

fession and remain indifferent; the latter can never long be happy without the assurance of God's love. Like the prodigal son, he will return penitent to his Father. One thing is certain, God will not withhold from his children this assurance of salvation any more than he will turn away any who seek him with all their heart.

Once this divine assurance is yours, all other blessings follow. There is peace of conscience. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). There is courage to fight the Lord's battles as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). And there is that unshakable consolation amidst the trials of life that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

And now, at the end of this booklet, I ask you again: Are you a Christian? My hope and prayer is that you will not give the evasive or false answers mentioned in the first chapter. If you do still cling to these illusions, then you have read this booklet in vain. If, on the other hand, God the Holy Spirit has brought home to you the full force of the Scriptures herein treated; if he has first shown you your sin, and then your Savior, then may you stand up before God and men and confess, "Yes, by the all-availing blood of Jesus, *I am a Christian!*"

Jesus wants his followers to be members of a local church. To learn more about this, read the 10-page booklet *Why Join a Church?*



To learn more about the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, read the 31-page booklet *Welcome to the OPC*. Learn about its history, doctrine, life, and ministries. Find sources of further information and a simple explanation of how to join an Orthodox Presbyterian church.



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