

#1 “Test Yourselves”

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In life there are all kinds of tests that we must pass. We must pass test after test to graduate from high school. Our cars must pass emission tests. We have drug tests, IQ tests, vision tests, hearing tests, allergy tests, and all kinds of tests. We are very concerned about passing these earthly tests because we know that a failure to pass them could be indicative of some serious danger and future failures. Yet we are strangely unconcerned about a future test that all mankind must pass or be sentenced to eternity in hell. There is a serious downside to failing to have our names in the Book of Life. This is one test that we absolutely must pass.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to test themselves to see if they are indeed of the faith. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, he says, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?” Did they have Christ in them, the hope of their future glory in heaven, or not (Colossians 1:27)? This is the question that they needed to answer. Implied in the notion that we should test ourselves is the fact that we can know if we indeed pass the test or not. The purpose in testing ourselves is thus to know whether or not we are saved so that, if we are not, we can do something about it before it is too late.

We should all come to a place of certainty regarding our eternity. 1 John 5:13 says, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” John’s motivation in writing the epistle of 1 John was to explain how we can know for sure if we are saved. He wanted believers to be encouraged in their hope of eternal life, and he wanted unbelievers to have the true state of their heart exposed. God’s desire is not that we wait it out and hope that we get into heaven. Knowing that we are going to be with Christ for eternity is something that we should anchor our lives upon now. If we do not know Christ, it won’t help to find that out come judgment day. We need to know now so that we can repent and receive Him into our hearts as Savior and Lord. *We must test ourselves now so that we can know now.*

John’s criteria for being sure of our salvation are as follows: 1) we keep His commandments (1 John 2:4, 29), 2) we love others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 2:9), 3) we do not love the world or the things of it (1 John 2:15), 4) we confess Jesus as Messiah and as God in the flesh (1 John 2:23-24, 4:15), 5) we are being taught by the Spirit (1 John 2:27), 6) we do not practice sin (1 John 3:9), and 7) we practice righteousness (1 John 3:9). These are very basic and black and white criteria. Either we are in Christ or not. Either we love others, or we don’t. Either we are led and taught by the Spirit, or we are not (Romans 8:14). Either we are those whose lives are characterized by sin, or we are those whose lives show patterns of righteousness. Either

we keep Christ's commandments as a general rule, or we do not. Either we are given to obedience, or we are rebels at heart. Either we love the lusts of the world, or we love Christ. Either we confess Christ as Messiah, or we deny His deity, reject His forgiveness, refuse the draw of the Holy Spirit, and do not submit to His authority. These seven criteria come as a package deal. John is cutting us to the heart to help us see whether we have a fallen heart or a heart that desires the things of God. He is trying to make the point that true saving faith has works as evidence (James 2:17). True Christians will have the fruit of good works, while those who do not truly know Christ will not have any spiritual fruit (Matthew 7:20). Rather, their lives will breed evil, destruction, sin, and hate. We must ask ourselves if we have put our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord, and we must see evidence of repentance (Luke 13:5). Repentance is a turning from something and taking a new direction. We should ask ourselves what we have repented from and what we have turned to. There should be a clear difference.

Now Christians do stumble at times (James 3:2), and some have even made shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:18-20). We may not always love, think, or act as we ought, but there should be obvious evidence that we are not as we used to be. We need to look at the big picture of our lives. Have our lives been different since we turned to Christ? What sin patterns have stopped and what righteous deeds have begun? What do we do that is clear evidence of Christ at work in and through us? Is the love of Christ characteristic of our lives? Do we rejoice when truth prevails? Is it so obvious to others that Christ is our Lord that we end up taking some flack for it? Do our works and behavior deny Christ or affirm a love and devotion to Him? Do we really care about the welfare of others above our own? Is the fruit of the Spirit evident? These are all questions that should have obvious answers.

The point is that we can and should be confident of our salvation. What we need to do is to ask the Spirit of God to testify to our spirits that we are indeed children of God. He will do this as we go through these criteria and questions humbly and honestly if we are indeed born again (Romans 8:16). If we have doubts, we should seal the deal by asking God to forgive us of our sins once and for all and to impart to us the righteousness that can be ours through Christ. Christ bore our sins and the penalty thereof. We must thus receive Him as our Savior and confess Him as our Lord (Romans 10:9-10).

The issue is the state of our hearts. Either Christ is in us, or He is not. It is possible to be sure, one way or the other. Let's test ourselves now so that we can be certain of passing Christ's test come judgment time.