

Last week we looked at the issue of church membership. The biblical evidence for being committed to a local church at the membership level.

Tonight, we are going to talk about a *related* area, and also another area of confusion, and that is various issues related to baptism.

Our outline for this evening is pretty simple: We're going to define what baptism is, then we'll talk about the mode for baptism, and then who qualifies for baptism?

So what is baptism? Well, along with the Lord's Supper, baptism is one of the 2 ordinances that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His church to practice.

And the first thing we can say about baptism is that it's a *symbolic* rite [[formal or ceremonial act]] NOT a *salvific* rite!

In other words, baptism *symbolizes* the reality of salvation, it is not an act that saves anyone.

As Charles Spurgeon has well said "If you go in the water a dry devil you simply come out a wet devil!" Water baptism has no mystical or magical powers to save anyone or to cleanse anyone from sin.

Rather, it is a physical symbol, a physical illustration of a spiritual reality.

What is that reality? It is a picture of our dying with Christ to sin & our old life being buried with Christ, which is what our submersion under the water depicts.

And then our rising with Christ to walk in newness of life, which is what our emergence out of the water depicts.

We can see this very clearly from Romans 6:3-4 where the apostle Paul writes about the spiritual reality that baptism depicts.

When you see the word "baptism" here it is not talking about the act of water baptism. It is using the same language however, the language of baptism, to talk about the spiritual reality behind it.

"3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized [or immersed] into Christ Jesus have been baptized [or immersed] into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

It is a symbolic act where we identify ourselves with Christ in His death, burial & resurrection (dying with Him to sin & our old life & rising with Him to walk in newness of life)

Baptism is also demonstrating one's commitment to follow Christ and be a disciple of Christ.

In the Great Commission for example. Take a look at Matthew 28:19, Jesus said **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**

And how are we to make disciples? Well, He gives 2 instrumental participles explaining how. **(first) baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, (secondly) teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.”**

And so, according to Jesus an essential part of making disciples and thereby fulfilling the great commission is baptizing new converts in the name of the triune God.

So baptism is a way of publicly confessing Christ as Savior and Lord, and publicly identifying with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection.

So that’s a very brief snapshot on what baptism is. We’ll spend the least amount of time on that one because it is the next two issues where the majority of the confusion typically occurs.

First, how is one to be baptized? In other words, what is the mode of baptism?

Well, it is clear biblically that it is by immersion in water. And I’ll just give the main reasons for that:

First, the lexical meaning of the word “baptize.” In the NT there are 2 verbs describing this reality of baptism: *bapto* & *baptizo*.

-*Bapto* occurs only 4 times (Lk. 16:24; Jn. 13:26 (2x); Rev. 19:13). It always means to dip, as in dipping a piece of cloth into dye.

-*Baptizo* is an intensive form of *bapto*. It is used many times in the NT & always means “to dip completely” or “to immerse” or even “to drown.”

Noticeably absent in the use of these words is any reference whatsoever to sprinkling with water.

The second reason why baptism is by immersion is because of the fact that water is never said to be baptized *on* someone.

As in sprinkled or dabbed onto someone's head. But always someone is baptized into water.

Look at Matthew 3:4, **“Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; ⁶and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.”**

Notice they were going out to John who was around the Jordan River, and they were going *into* the Jordan River.

If sprinkling was acceptable, none of that would be necessary. You wouldn't need to find a body of water nor would you need to go into the body of water.

Skip ahead to verse 13, **“Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he *permitted Him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water;**

You only come up out of water because you've gone down into the water.

Let's look at one more: Acts 8, Philip preached Christ & the Ethiopian eunuch believed.

As a result of his faith he said in v. 36, **“Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”**

Verse 38, **“And he ordered the ^lchariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.**

Again, they wouldn't have had to go down into the water if he only needed to be sprinkled. So again we see baptism by immersion.

And then finally a third reason why baptism by immersion is because only immersion can accurately portray the *reality* that baptism is meant to picture.

As we read in Romans 6 earlier, at the moment of conversion the believer is united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

And so, going down into the water symbolizes death & burial (the believer being symbolically co-crucified with Christ & His old sinful life being buried with Christ);

While coming out of the water symbolizes new life (the believer rising symbolically with Christ by the power of the Spirit to walk in newness of life) (Rom. 6:1-4).

That symbol can only be accurately portrayed by immersion.

So we have seen what baptism is, we've seen the mode of baptism.

But this then brings us to the crucial question of who qualifies for baptism? Who should be baptized?

Let me give you the answer in a simple and concise way, and then we will spend some time defending and developing the answer:

Who should be baptized, who qualifies? Believers.

And that answer automatically raises the issue of young children, particularly infants. So, we have to first spend some time talking about that issue.

As most of you are probably aware the Roman Catholic Church says that infants should be “baptized” by sprinkling water on them. This is known as the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration*.

Whereby in that act of sprinkling the infant is regenerated & saved & cleansed from original sin.

Now, we’re not really going to spend any time on this one because that is obviously a massive misunderstanding about baptism and a denial of the gospel. That is false teaching.

But there is another view which also holds to the practice of baptizing infants, and that is pedobaptism. Most often seen in Presbyterian denominations.

This is a view which says that we should baptize the infants of believing parents into the New Covenant whereby they are adopted by God.

However, unlike the Roman Catholic view, this is not a *gospel-denying doctrine* and there are many genuine Christians and respected Christian teachers who hold to this view.

Nonetheless, we do not believe this is a view can be defended biblically. I think it is a view that is far more influenced by tradition and church history than the Scriptures.

So I want to take a few minutes pointing out the inconsistencies with this view.

And just a disclaimer. A lot of what we’re going to cover on this issue comes from a resource I was greatly helped by. Matt Waymeyer wrote a fairly short book entitled “A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism.”

To my knowledge it is the best resource on dealing with this issue biblically. So I commend this to you if you are desiring to study the issue further.

According to pedobaptists, the baptism of an infant of believing parents guarantees that the child will be forgiven & justified but only *if & when* that child meets the conditions of the covenant.

What are the conditions are the new covenant? Repentance from sin & faith in Christ.

And upon hearing that you’re probably already identifying a problem with it. The problem is that child born into a *pagan* home has exactly the same conditional promise extended to him—if he repents & believes, he too will be forgiven & justified.

Therefore, the same promise applies to every child born, regardless of whether they have believing parents or were baptized as an infant.

And so this begs the question: What exactly does infant baptism really accomplish for a child?

That is the first problem with this view. There's really no significance to the baptism of the infant.

Now, pedobaptists typically say that baptism is the sign of the New Covenant which now replaces circumcision, which was the sign of the Old Covenant.

But there are several problems with this as well: The first problem is that baptism is never said to be the sign of the New Covenant.

In fact, if anything the sign of the New Covenant would be the Lord's Supper, not baptism.

After all, Jesus said in Lk. 22:20 this cup is the New Covenant in my blood; meaning it's a sign & a symbol of the new covenant purchased by my blood.

A second problem with saying that baptizing infants places them into the New Covenant is that it intentionally includes unregenerate & unbelieving people in a covenant which only has believers in it.

When you look at the passages that detail the New Covenant, unlike the Old Covenant, which had believers *and* unbelievers in it, the New Covenant consists only of believers.

We don't have time to look at these passages tonight, but Jer. 31:31-34, and Ezekiel 36:26-27, both highlight the features of the new covenant.

And it is clear that the members of the new covenant all know the Lord, they all have new hearts, they all have the Spirit of God, they all have forgiveness.

So you cannot baptize unbelieving infants into the new covenant. You would have to leave room in your theology for infants to repent and believe the gospel.

A third problem with the pedobaptist view, specifically that baptism is the New Covenant counterpart to circumcision in the Old Covenant is that circumcision was obviously limited to males only.

A surgery performed on males as a fitting symbol of the Abrahamic promises which were passed on from generation to generation by physical birth & natural descent.

In contrast, the physical act of water baptism is for both males *and females*.

So, let alone there not being a single NT passage that teaches a connection between circumcision and baptism, there is a massive discontinuity when you consider that both males and females are baptized.

Now, laying aside every argument we've considered so far, here is probably the most important argument against it:

There is not a single *command*, nor a single *example* in the Scriptures of an infant being baptized. It's not *mandated* nor *modeled* anywhere in Scripture.

This raises the question: "What about all of the household baptisms recorded for us in the book of Acts. Surely infants were included in those."

Well, if they were, there's no way we could know. Because a careful study of each instance suggests no such evidence.

Let's take a few and go to just a few of the main passages that are used in defense of infant baptism and demonstrate why they come up short in defending that doctrine.

One of the main passages used to support this is Acts 2:37-39 we read **"37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

And now verse 39 is particularly the verse used to support infant baptism: **"For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."**

First, let's consider what is the promise here? Obviously not baptism but rather the reception of the Holy Spirit at salvation. He just said that at the end of verse 38.

And here in verse 39, Peter identifies 3 groups of individuals who are the recipients of this promise:

It is for "you," "your children," and "all who are far off." But Peter doesn't stop there. Instead, *he qualifies all 3 groups with the clause, "as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself"*

As many as the Lord effectually calls to Himself through the gospel message.

In other words, to how many of *your children* has God promised the Holy Spirit? As many as the Lord shall call to Himself. To how many of *those who are far off* has God promised the Holy Spirit? As many as the Lord shall call to Himself.

And this promise is extended to all three groups of people upon personal repentance. As Peter said in verse 38.

So the children or descendants of those listening to Peter were welcome to participate in the same blessing as their parents, if they too repented.

This verse says nothing about infant baptism. Instead, it was Peter's assurance that the Holy Spirit was available to all who repent.

And the clincher comes next, as the text continues, Peter exhorts the people of Israel to repent and be saved (v. 40), and notice verse 41 indicates who was baptized: **“those who had received his word were baptized.”**

Not “those who had received his word *and their children*”—just “those who had received his word.”

And so, rather than supporting infant baptism, Acts 2:38-39 is consistent with believer’s baptism.

Let’s look at a couple more, both from Acts 16. The first one is the household of Lydia in Acts 16:15, **“And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”**

Now while v. 15 indicates that both Lydia & her household were baptized, it doesn’t say anything regarding the age of her household and even whether that meant her own children.

Sometimes households in the ancient context contained servants or extended family. Was she married, did she even have children? We simply don’t have the details.

And so, again at best, this is an argument from silence that infants were included in this baptism.

Let’s look at one more, the household of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31. While imprisoned in Philippi, Paul & Silas preached the gospel to the jailer who guarded them.

Notice verse 31, **“They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of [n]the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.**

Now notice this in verse 34, **“And he brought them into his house and set [o]food before them, and rejoiced [p]greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.”**

So it is true the Philippian jailer’s entire household was baptized after he believed in Christ, but the very same passage indicates that his whole household believed as well.

And just like all of the other passages, it says nothing about children, or even if he was married, or what his household looked like.

So again, this account not only doesn’t support infant baptism, it supports believer’s baptism. Only those who believed were baptized.

So all that to say, we simply don’t see any support in the NT for the practice of pedobaptism. Baptizing infants.

What is clear is that the consistent pattern throughout the NT is that only those who professed faith in Christ, only those who first heard and received the message, were baptized.

We just read several examples of that. Let's look at a few more:

Acts 2:40, **“And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**

Belief preceded baptism.

Acts 8:12 says **“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God & the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”**

Belief preceded baptism.

So, baptism is clearly for those who have believed. **Before we go on to talk a little more about what it means to believe, let's discuss a few practical implications.**

These are some common questions that get raised in the membership and baptism discussion.

First question: If I was “baptized” as an infant should I be re-baptized now that I have come to faith in Christ as an adult?

I would say no. You don't need to be rebaptized because you were never baptized in the first place.

Here's why that is true: First, you were sprinkled not immersed. So the mode was not consistent with what the Scriptures teach.

But that is not the main concern. The main concern would be your spiritual condition.

You didn't qualify for baptism because you weren't a believer. It was an empty religious ceremony with no significance.

So, I wouldn't think of it as being rebaptized as much as you need to obey the Lord and be baptized as one who now trusts in Christ.

Another question that typically gets raised: I was baptized as an adult but I was not a believer.

Looking back on that time I can definitely say I did not know the Lord and I was just going through the religious ceremony because church leaders encouraged me to do it, or family or friends encouraged me to do it.

Or I thought I was doing something to atone for my sin or earn my salvation in some way. But looking back I was still lost at that point.

In that case, the mode may have been correct, but you still did not qualify because you weren't in Christ. Should you be rebaptized?

Yes, because baptism is an act of obedience for believers.

A third question: I was baptized as an adult but I don't know if I was a believer at that time. Should I be baptized again?

This one gets a little more difficult to be definitive on. I would say, you're certainly not dishonoring the Lord in any way by choosing to be baptized again because you're just uncertain of your spiritual state the first time.

I also don't think that your assurance at that time determines whether you need to be baptized again.

So this is typically a scenario that doesn't necessarily have a right or wrong answer.

And therefore, I typically counsel people to obey their conscience. If you're not sure, and you're going to have lingering doubts about this for the rest of your Christian life, maybe you should pursue baptism now.

But we, as a church, can't tell you for sure either way. We cannot speak definitively as to your spiritual condition at that time, so that is a decision that you personally have to make before the Lord and in your own conscience.

Now, we've talked about who qualifies for baptism, and that is believers only. But we haven't talked about what it means to believe.

This is another area of significant confusion in the church today.

And it really shouldn't be that confusing because the Scriptures go to great length to teach us about the danger of false faith.

The Bible is abundantly clear that many people in the church, who profess Christ, are deceived and in danger of waiting to find out until it's too late.

We could say it this way. There are many in the church who are *almost* Christians. There are many who love the privileges of the gospel - heaven, friendships, fellowship, a sense of purpose, clean conscience, a moral life.

There are many who appreciate those things, the privileges of the gospel, but so few who also accept the *duties* of the gospel.

There are many who have rock solid confidence and expectation that they will be with Jesus forever in heaven, only to find out on the last day that they were deceived.

How do we know that is the case? Jesus Himself said so in Matthew 7:21-23, **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many ²³ miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’**

Notice first that these people professed an attachment to Christ. “Lord, Lord.”

They did religious activity and service in His name. You can see that phrase over and over and over. In your name, in your name, in your name.

These are not atheists, Muslims, Buddhists, agnostics, pagans, these are *professing Christians*.

And so here they are on the last day, they have a flurry of religious Christian activity and religious service. And they are defending themselves here on the Day of Judgment as those who should be granted acceptance.

And this is not just a few isolated cases here and there. Notice the beginning of verse 22 again: *Many* will say to me on that day.

A multitude of people will enter that day with bold confidence that they were a Christian only to find out they were self-deceived.

Many who spend their lives attending church, serving in the church, will come before Him on judgment day with a confident but empty expectation.

And Christ will say, “Depart from me you who practice lawlessness.” You who lived as though I never gave you commands to obey.”

You who lived in self-willed independence. You who ignored my Word. You who treated my instruction as irrelevant or optional.

By the way, you can test yourself right just by looking at that verse and seeing how these deceived people argued:

In verse 22, they are making their case why they merit heaven. Why they should be included.

And they appeal to their religious works. And you can already know you are in a dangerous position spiritually if you would answer Christ in a similar way:

Why should you enter the kingdom of heaven? A self-deceived person will promote their works.

A genuinely saved person would respond this way: I need no other argument, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.”

A genuinely saved person would respond: my only hope is Christ.

Now, on top of the general threat of self-deception that the Scriptures testify to, many today are even more vulnerable because of shallow teaching and shallow ministries in evangelicalism.

I’m sure you don’t need to be convinced of this, but we’ll just state it: At large the church today is plagued with weak pulpits and pragmatic ministry models, which has resulted in filling up the church with a multitude of unbelievers who have just enough religion to make them feel good and salve their conscience, but no real love for Christ and separation from the world.

A.W. Tozer [[American pastor 20th century]] wrote: Christianity has been watered down until the solution is so weak that if it were poison it would not hurt anyone, and if it were medicine it would not cure anyone.”

And we live in that very evangelical climate, therefore making us vulnerable to deception.

We can confuse our *appreciation* of righteousness and our church attendance and service and our Christian heritage, we can confuse or equate those things with genuine faith.

We have been taught to externally rearrange our lives according to the Bible while our heart is far from God. We have been taught to give ourselves a Christianized external makeover without ever being born again.

Now, maybe you’re thinking: is this really as complicated and difficult as you’re making it sound?

I thought we believe. And if we believe we are Christians. Absolutely that’s true.

But we’re not discussing how do you *become* a Christian? We’re asking, How do you *know* you’re a Christian.

How do you *know* you believe? And an insufficient answer is this: Because I agree with the facts about the Bible and Jesus.

Why is that insufficient? Because Satan and the demons also agree with those facts. In fact, they have better theology than any of us.

James 2:19, “**You believe that ¹⁹God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**”

Furthermore, Judas agreed with facts. As we will see, Judas preached the truth. There’s no indication that his error was one of false theology. He would have affirmed good theology.

How do you know your belief, isn't just a mental awareness and affirmation of facts?

Because we are not saved by our affirmation of orthodoxy. You are saved by trusting in the person and work of Christ alone.

We're going to take some time and look at passages that are going to help us discern if we are thinking through our own personal salvation according to the Scriptures, or according to evangelicalism today.

Let's first examine what the Bible teaches that the natural man, an unbeliever can do without the Spirit of God.

In other words, what are the religious Christian activities we might be tempted to place our confidence in with regard to assurance, when in fact, it doesn't require genuine faith, genuine conversion to do them?

And a clarification is in order. The things we're about to cover are good things. Things that Christians do, and should do, are even commanded to do.

While at the same time, they can be manufactured by unbelievers, they can be counterfeited fairly easily, at least in appearance, and therefore should not serve as significant factors in our assurance.

We'll go through these very quickly:

1) Consistent Scripture intake. Can an unbeliever do that? James 1:22-25, ²² **But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** ²³ **For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his ^[x]natural face in a mirror;** ²⁴ **for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, ^[y]he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."**

The word for "delude" means deceive. They make a massive miscalculation about their spiritual condition.

And the basis for this spiritual miscalculation? I read or listen to the Bible on a consistent basis. I have constant exposure to Scripture.

We should also note that the Pharisees knew more Scripture than anyone, they read more Scripture than anyone, and yet as they interacted with Christ it became clear they were not genuine believers. [[see Paul in Philippians 3:5]]

This leads us to the next one.

2. Being in a position of spiritual influence. Discipling, teaching others. Again, something we should do as Christians, but in and of itself doesn't indicate spiritual life.

Matthew 23:1-3, **“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”**

And He goes on to condemn them for their hypocrisy and informs them that when they make a convert they make him twice as much a son of hell as they are. Matthew 23:15.

Furthermore, think of all the passages about false teachers in the NT. False teachers know their bibles. False teachers can be very compelling teachers.

So teaching or having spiritual influence over others can't be something that necessarily indicates that we have believed.

Whether it is teaching the truth, defending the truth, debating the truth, we have to recognize that merely having an appreciation and verbal loyalty is not necessarily evidence of conversion.

3. Prayer. Does the fact that I pray on a regular basis necessarily mean I'm a believer? Maybe, maybe not.

Look at another example of a Pharisees in Luke 18:9-14, **“9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’**

Notice in his prayer: Gratitude to God, credit to God for the evidences of grace and obedience in his life. God I thank you I do these things. You have given me the grace to be different than the pagans.

And yet as the rest of the story makes clear, this is an unbeliever praying, he was lost because he was trusting in himself.

4. Serving in the Church. Does all of my activity and service in the church automatically mean I'm a believer?

We already read Matthew 7:21-23 where you have lost people standing in front of Jesus on the day of judgment saying, “look at all of these things we did in your name.” In the name of Christian service.

And yet Jesus says “depart from me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity.”

Serving can be done in your own strength and for your own glory, not in faith.

This would include missions work and evangelizing. Again, things that are noble and things Christians should do, but don't necessarily prove one is genuine.

Again, I present to you Judas.

For this one look over at Luke 9:1, **“And He called the twelve together, (Judas is included in the twelve here) and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. ² And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing**

Skip down to verse 6, **“Departing, they *began going* ^lthroughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.”**

Judas preached the gospel, Judas was given power to heal, along with the rest of the disciples.

We need to remember that Judas looked like the real thing, he didn't stand out as fake, even among his closest ministry companions.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus said that one of the disciples would betray him?

In John 13:21ff, they all looked around at one another and had no idea who he was speaking about.

So, being used by God as an instrument in preaching or healing, or casting out demons, or other religious activity, *even if it's supernatural*, even if it's *miraculous*, can be done by an unbeliever.

5. **Trying to be a “good person.”** Or we could call it, visible morality. Trying to keep the commandments of God, even having a good track record of doing so.

Look at Matthew 19:16-22, **“¹⁶ And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”**

Here's a guy concerned with morality, concerned with living a good, clean life.

¹⁷ And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only One* who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ Then he *said to Him*, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; ¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” ²⁰ The young man *said to Him*, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”

This man was committed to a moral life, committed to being a good person.

Verse 21, **“Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be ^lcomplete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” ²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.”**

He would live morally, but he wouldn't stop worshipping things other than Christ. He wanted benefits of the gospel, without the cost of giving up all that he loved more than Christ.

We could also note Matthew 23:27, where Jesus pronounces woes on the Pharisees, who outwardly appeared righteous.

So merely conforming your life to righteous standards is not necessarily evidence of genuine conversion.

6. Making a decision for Christ.

This may involve having an emotional experience where you "felt" the presence of God come into your life.

This may be walking down an aisle to accept Christ at an altar call at a church service or camp or something like that.

This may mean that you prayed the sinner's prayer and asked Jesus to come into your heart.

This may mean that some spiritual leader or parent or friend asked you at one point if you wanted to become a Christian and you said yes.

The problem with placing too much stock in these things is that they don't necessarily mean anything.

Maybe that historical event in your life is indeed when you were transformed and given new life in Christ, but at the same time, we have to recognize that unbelievers can make decisions for Christ.

For this let's turn to Matthew 13:18-23, "18 **"Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the ^lword of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;**

Hears the gospel, understands it, finds it appealing, makes a decision, and is really really happy about it.

Verse 21, **"yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the ^lword, immediately he ^kfalls away.**

There was no substance, it was a shallow and superficial association with the truth. And proved so when it came time for that faith to be tested.

Verse 22, **“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the ^{III}world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**

So this one as well started off on a positive note but then over time his love for security and the world caused the Word to be unfruitful. It didn't produce anything of eternal value.

Verse 23, **“And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”**

There's the genuine believer. This is where we get the principle: Time and truth go hand in hand. Give it enough time and the true condition about one's spiritual condition will be made evident.

So, based on this passage, we certainly would not want to place any stock in some historical decision we made to follow Christ.

7. Professing faith in Christ. Does not our profession of faith count for something?

Well, we could go to a lot of places for this one, we already saw it in Matthew 7:21, but let's just note a few verses from the book of 1 John.

1 John 1:6, “6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;”

1 John 2:4, “4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

2:9, “9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

4:20, “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

You can't miss the theme. A profession of faith, a profession of love or commitment to God in and of itself means absolutely nothing.

Again, to clarify, if we are believers, we should be professing Christ, but we shouldn't equate that with genuine faith.

8. Wanting to escape God's judgment. Is that a sign of genuine faith?

Well, fleeing from the wrath to come is actually a motive to come to Christ.

In fact what does the word “saved” mean? It means one has been delivered from the power and penalty of sin.

If Christ can't deliver you from the coming judgment, Paul says we are of all people most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:19.

God calls us to repent because judgment is coming. Acts 17:30

But at the same time, a Christian is not simply someone who chooses the best decision out of two alternatives. Heaven with Christ or hell. I'll take Christ.

The problem is, Jesus is not merely hell insurance. Accepting Jesus as your hell insurance does not mean that you love Him and Worship Him the way you are called to.

Let me show you one example of an unconverted man wanting to escape God's punishment in Scripture.

Look at Acts 8:9, "Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰ and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. ¹² But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed."

Let me throw in a bonus category here: baptism. Does the fact that you were baptized give you assurance?

Not necessarily because here is a man who was baptized, Simon, who as we will go on to read was not a genuine believer.

Notice verse 14, "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized ^{le}in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon wanted a new practice, a new fascinating thing he could do to amaze people and get them to continue to worship him, as he was used to.

And Peter knew this: verse 20, **"But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or portion in this ^{le}matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be**

forgiven you. ²³ **For I see that you are in the gall (the spirit) of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.** ²⁴ **But Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”**

He doesn't want to face any judgment. His main concern is to not face the consequences of his sin. And he's clearly not a genuine believer in this passage.

Practically here's why this particular principle is important. If your testimony sounds like this: I became a Christian when I heard about hell and I realized I didn't want to go there.

And that's really the depth of your understanding of salvation and the Christian life. I heard about this place called hell, and then I was told I don't have to go there if I believe in Jesus. So I did.

And it's never become anything more than that to you. Christ is to be worshipped, He is to be loved. He is not merely a ticket out of judgment. [[1 Cor. 16:22, Matthew 22:37, Philippians 3:8]]

Think about Matthew 10:37, **“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his [ad]life will lose it, and he who has lost his [ae]life for My sake will find it.**

9) **Conviction of Sin.** Feeling guilty about sin. Is that evidence of genuine conversion or is that something unbelievers can experience?

Well, first of all we should note that everyone has conscience. And some unbelievers sear their conscience but others might generally respond to it.

Unbelievers can certainly feel guilty when do something wrong. The first time I lied in my life, it was long before I was a Christian, yet I felt miserable.

So, the mere presence of a guilty feeling that can't evidence of conversion.

For the biblical example, again we return to Judas. Judas was obviously a wolf in sheep's clothing. He was not a believer. He is referred to as the Son of destruction, John 17:12.

Furthermore, Satan entered him, which is impossible for any genuine believer. And thirdly his life ended in unrepentant sin, a significantly selfish expression of sin, suicide.

There is no doubt of Judas' spiritual condition, but let's look at Matthew 27 and see what happened with Judas.

Matthew 27:3, **“Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse...**

That word for “remorse” is the idea of changing his mind. He regretted it. He wishes he wouldn’t have done it.

Verse 3 continues, **“and returned the thirty ^{la}pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,**

Takes the dirty money and returns it. Recognizes it was wrong.

⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

He confesses his sin. He agrees with God’s testimony about his actions. He calls them sin, he even gets specific, I betrayed innocent blood.

He’s even right in how he articulates the righteousness of Jesus. He was innocent. Good theology.

And you say, “well how do you know he wasn’t a genuine believer and this is his conversion?”

Keep reading in verse 4, **“But they said, “What is that to us? See *to that yourself!*” ⁵ And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.”**

His own self-atonement project didn’t work. He would not deal with his guilt, he just wanted to cover it up, and he didn’t want to deal with the consequences of his sin.

And that’s always a sign of false repentance. I sin, I was foolish, but now I’m going to manipulate people and circumstances in such a way that I don’t have to deal with the fall out.

That’s Judas and that’s an unconverted man.

Judas is the epitome of the almost Christian. Judas is the illustration of how close someone can get to Christ but still be lost.

Now, why do I spend time going over this in a membership class?

Because it is not uncommon for someone to come to the church, want to join the church, and yet it becomes apparent that they don’t know Christ.

And you say, why would they want to join the church?

Maybe they like the conservative climate of the church.

Maybe they like the music

Maybe they appreciate fellowship and friendships

Maybe they want their kids to have a healthy place to go and be instructed

Maybe they appreciate righteousness and a ministry that holds the line of righteousness

Maybe it’s the closest church to their house

Maybe they think by join a church they get closer to God.

There could be a whole host of reasons why a self-deceived person would join the church.

But there's no clear evidence that God has caused them to be born again and no clear understanding of the gospel.

So, what should you see in your life to give you confidence that you are not a victim of gospel of deception?

First, ask yourself, "What am I trusting in for my salvation?" What is my righteousness before God?

On what grounds can God forgive me and count me righteous in His sight?

If you are genuinely saved, your answer will be nothing other than the person and work of Christ Jesus, faith alone in Christ alone.

Can you answer this question? What is the gospel? Can you define it?

Here's how Paul defines it in 1 Corinthians 15:1, "**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast ^{1a}the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**

What's the gospel, what's the message Paul? ³ **For I delivered to you ^{1b}as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

The gospel is the message of salvation. It is the good news that God saves sinners through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

How can you know you truly believe? You not only have clarity about what the gospel is, you have an abiding conviction in the gospel.

Back up to verse 2, "by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."

There is an abiding clarity and confidence in this message.

I have a pastor friend of mine who wrote out 5 evidences of genuine faith that only the Spirit can produce, thus giving us full assurance of faith. The absence of these should cause careful examination.

1. a life of honesty – voluntary truth telling in areas where there was once concealing and covering
2. true repentance. A deliberate turning from sin in the most costly areas you once protected

3. self-abandoning faith. total entrustment to God where there was once elements of self-trust.
4. power over sin. Victory and power where there was once failure and apathy
5. genuine humility. Manifestations of humility where there was once ruling pride.
6. an insatiable appetite for God's Word. Where indifference, tolerance, apathy has turned to hunger, consumption, and application.

Now, the purpose of this is not to scare anyone out of the process of joining the church. It is rather to ensure that we are thinking carefully and critically about these things.

And if you have any questions about these things, that's what our elder interviews are for.

We want to hear how the Lord saved you, we want to hear your understanding of the gospel.

And we want to try to bring clarity to any questions you might have about these things.

So, next week are those interviews. Some of you will be meeting at 6:45, others will be meeting at 7:30.

You will be contacted this week via email before next Wednesday with your time and the elder who will be meeting with you.