

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

Identifying the Elect, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Code: 52-2

Now our time in the Word of God this morning takes us to 1 Thessalonians, this wonderful new book that we have just begun to study...1 Thessalonians. And before we are done you're going to be encouraged, you are going to be challenged, you are going to be comforted, you're going to be strengthened in the knowledge of the things which God through His Spirit revealed in this great epistle.

As we come to the first chapter, ten brief verses, we come to the subject "identifying the elect...identifying the elect." Now the question that I have posed in regard to this chapter is: How can you tell when someone is elect? How can you tell when someone is chosen by God? Or how can you tell when someone is genuinely saved? How can you tell a real Christian? What are the distinguishing marks of the true brethren, God's true children?

The Apostle Paul, I believe, let's us in on those distinguishing marks. The key verse in this chapter is verse 4. In that verse Paul says, "Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, your election..." is what the Greek says. I know, I am confident you are brethren, beloved of God, elect. He is very confident about their election, about their salvation, that they are genuine, real Christians.

Go back to verse 1 and notice again his confidence. "Paul and Silvanus, or Silas, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians...and listen to this...in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." And again he expresses that he knows this is a church in God and in Christ in living, spiritual union with God and Christ. He says to them, "Grace to you and peace," and well they were the recipients of grace and peace. And then in verse 2 he says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you making mention of you in our prayers." Prayers of thanks, by the way, in which he thanked God for all the Thessalonians because they were all in God and in Christ, they were all Christians and he knew they were brethren, beloved of God, elect.

The question is...how did he know that? How can he so confidently say "You are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, you are the recipients of grace and peace, I am thankful to God for all of you, and I know you to be the elect?" How can he be so boldly thankful to God for all of them?

Well, we're going to learn that in this chapter because throughout this chapter the Apostle Paul identifies the distinguishing marks of the elect, those who have come to faith in Christ that is real. The whole epistle, by the way, is an epistle of encouragement to some true and noble Christians

living in a wretched, immoral, wicked, pagan city. They were very young in the faith, only weeks old in Christ. They were living in an immensely hostile society, literally overpowering them. They had very limited or almost no leadership at all. You remember Paul was there only a matter of weeks and left them. And they were sort of on their own after that to fend for themselves, brand new Christians coming out of paganism in the middle of a sea of immorality, living in a city that was a trade center at the top of the Aegean Sea, filled with sailors and filled with merchants from all over the world going on the Egnatian Highway east and west and sailing the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea and so it was a very, very difficult society in which to cultivate Christianity, and yet Paul writes back and says, "I know you're genuine, I know you're brethren, I know you're beloved by God, I know you're elect, I know you're in God the Father, in Christ. I know you're recipients of grace and peace and I thank God all the time for all of you." It's a remarkable thing that God has done in that city, with very little time, very new people and almost no leadership. And yet Paul writes back this letter of commendation.

You say, "Why didn't Paul stay longer?" Remember last time, those who hated the gospel drove him out. Three Sabbaths in the synagogue, a little longer than that reaching more Gentiles and bringing them to Christ, and he was soon driven out of the city. And no doubt the people that drove him out also harassed the Christians.

So here they are, this group of brand-new baby Christians in a very difficult culture, without leadership, being harassed by people who are hostile toward what was so very new to them. Paul was concerned and so a couple of months have passed, he sends Timothy back and he sends him back with a very explicit goal of getting a report on the condition of the Thessalonian church because he fears the worst. When Timothy comes back to him, Timothy says, "I'm here to tell you the best, they're absolutely amazing, they're absolutely amazing." The whole report is good. It's all good and so Paul writes back 1 Thessalonians to a noble church, to a good church, maybe the best church in all of his ministry and he pours out his thanks to God for their true and genuine salvation.

So chapter 1 is really a sort of hymn of praise to God who has chosen, sovereignly loved and saved the people in the Thessalonian church. And now as he releases his gratitude toward God for these wonderful people, he reveals in that gratitude the marks that identify them as the elect.

Notice now in verse 3, he says, "Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father." He says I know, brethren, beloved by God, your election because I am constantly bearing in mind these three things...your work of faith, your labor of love and your steadfastness of hope. Those are the first three great realities that had convinced Paul this was truly an elect church.

Now they're not a perfect church...not perfect. That's why in chapter 3 verse 10 he says, "I want to come see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith." They weren't perfect, they were

remarkable but not perfect. But he knew they were elect.

Now note again verse 3, he says, "I am constantly bearing these things in mind in the presence of our God and Father," the end of verse 3. That is really connected to the first statement, "Constantly bearing in mind." If you take the middle out it would read like this, "Constantly bearing in mind in the presence of our God and Father." In other words, I continue to go to God as I remember your spiritual quality and I go to God in thanks. I go to God in prayerful gratitude, stimulated by the memory of your virtue. Your virtue makes me praise God. That's the idea. This was a church that literally filled his heart with thanks. And whenever he remembered it, he remembered it, as it were, in the presence of God because he had to lift up thanks for what God had done.

By the way, just to note for your review, remember that he was thankful for the work of God in Thessalonica because it was never the work of men, it was always what God had done and so God got all the credit.

Now, what did he remember? First of all, three things, let's talk about them. They mark the elect...very basic...they mark the elect. The elect are marked by a faith that works, a love that labors and a hope that endures, or perseveres. This is a very important question today because it's being debated in a lot of circles. What identifies a saved person?

Now Paul has just really made that crystal clear here in verse 3. "I know you're in God and you're in Christ, I know you're recipients of grace and peace, I can constantly thank God always for all of you, I know you are brethren, I know you are beloved of God, I know you are the elect because your faith works, your love labors and your hope perseveres." That's the essence of the first four verses. You have a faith that works.

Let's talk about that, your work of faith. A true saving faith is always revealed and manifest in how we live our lives. You cannot divorce them. You cannot say you have a faith in God but it just doesn't effect your life...like the rock singer a few years ago who said, "I've been born again, but don't think it will have any effect on my life or my act." What kind of faith is that? A true and deep and saving belief in Jesus Christ is always going to cause a change in the life. A faith that works means a faith that produces something which is representative of that faith. The elect, to put it simply, are marked by holy, righteous deeds. Their faith works. Work here, the word used, ergon refers to the deed done, to the action, to the achievement, to the function itself. And so Paul is saying, "Look, I know you're elect because your faith produces function. There are righteous deeds in your life, it is manifest."

Now no one is more clear and no one is more adamant than Paul that faith without works saves...right? Paul doesn't tolerate a works salvation. No one is stronger on the fact that it is faith alone apart from any human work that saves. Paul makes that clear again and again. For example,

in Romans 3:20, "By the works of the law no flesh will be justified." Verse 21, "Apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested." In other words, salvation is not a result of any human work. Verse 25, it says that God displayed Christ publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. In Ephesians he says, "For by grace are you saved, through faith that not of works." No place for works in the saving act.

In Romans 4:4, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who doesn't work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." In other words, if you did something to earn it, it wouldn't be grace, it wouldn't be mercy, you would have earned it. Paul says there's no place for works. Romans 5:1, "Therefore having been justified by faith..." And on and on and on he goes to make the point. And I'll say it again, no one is more clear or adamant that salvation is purely by grace through faith without works than Paul. But no one is more clear and adamant than Paul that saving faith always produces...what?...works. He makes that equally clear that where you have saving faith, it produces works. In fact, clear back in Romans chapter 2 he said, "When God judges, He will render...chapter 2 verse 6...to every man according to his deeds, to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and mortality He gives eternal life." He gives eternal life to the people who do good.

You say, "Well do they earn eternal life?" No, they verify that they are the recipients of it because their faith works. In Romans also, chapter 13 and verse 3, "Do what is good," he says, "and you will have praise from the same." The analogy of authority and that is a spiritual principle, just as God has set in the world the fact that if you do good, the authority will praise you, that is a principle that functions on the supernatural level as well. When you do good, God will honor you. The reason you're doing good is because God is at work in you through the salvation act to produce the fruit of that salvation. So the fact of good deeds in the life of a believer verify salvation.

Now James needs to come into our thought here, chapter 2. Let me just point you to verse 17. "Even so...writes James...faith if it has no works is dead, being by itself." The point there is that if faith is by itself is not a saving faith. It has to be attached to works, to product. Someone may well say, verse 18, "You have faith, I have works, show me your faith without the works and I'll show you my faith by my works." The point is this, you say to someone, "Do you have faith?"

"Oh yeah, I have faith in God, faith in Christ."

"Well show me your faith without works."

Can he? No. Can you see faith? Show me your faith without works, that's impossible. The only way to show you my faith is to show you how my faith works, how my saving faith produces a changed life. And he says, "You believe that God is one? You say your faith is the fact that you believe? Good, you do well, so do the demons." The demons believe too and they're orthodox. "You foolish

fellow, faith without works is useless, it's absolutely useless."

Verse 26 says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Now listen carefully to this, it's very basic and very important. You cannot see the new birth. You cannot see faith. You cannot feel regeneration. You cannot touch the new creation. You cannot hear God declare someone righteous. Then how can you know that someone is saved? By their...what?...by their works, the fruit of their faith.

James is saying that what distinguishes counterfeit faith from the real thing is the righteous behavior inevitably produced in those who have authentic faith. "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast." And then Paul says following that, "You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that you should walk in them," Ephesians 2:10.

Faith is by nature turned and toned toward obedience. So good works are inevitable showing the presence of salvation. Faith always manifests itself in a measure of obedience.

Now we will fail and we will fall and we will disobey, but we never cease from having the disposition to obey and manifesting some fruit of obedience. Obviously it's the Father's will in John 15 that you bear much fruit but we will all who are truly saved have some fruit...some fruit.

So we can say then that true faith is evidenced by production. It's a good word to write down. True faith is evidenced by production. The second thing that he says with regard to these marvelous Christians is that they not only have a faith that works, but follow this thought...they have a love that labors. He says, "I know and remember your labor of love."

Now we're touching some very essential things here in the essence of what it means to be a Christian. Labor, that word looks not at the deed done, not at the achievement like ergo does. It looks at the effort expended, not the end result but the effort involved. So we see then secondly that not only is a true Christian marked by what he does, but he is marked by what he is motivated to do.

You say, "Well, why is it important to make that distinction?" Because sometimes we are motivated to do things we don't do. You remember Paul in Romans 7 says, "The things I want to do I don't do, the things I don't want to do I do, O wretched man that I am..." and he got in touch with the fact that he had still unredeemed human flesh which debilitated his deepest desires.

And so, we say a true Christian will produce fruit, faith that works, but a true Christian also will produce the labor of love. In other words, there will be an effort expended born out of love for Christ and love for God. The word "labor" kopos denotes an arduous kind of labor, kind of wearying toil to the point of exhaustion, sweating it out. It doesn't look at the deed, it looks at the effort involved,

straining all of one's energies at the maximum level to achieve something and it's motivated by agape, love. Paul is referring to spiritual effort to serve the Lord because you love the Lord. And it's the kind of love, that wonderful word that we know, agapao, that level of love is the love of the will. It's the love of choice. The elect then can be known not only by the product of their life, but can be known by the tremendous effort they make because of their love for Christ. The true Christian loves the Lord and that love motivates.

In 1 Corinthians 16 there is a very clear definition given of us. "If anyone does not love the Lord...verse 22...let him be accursed." In other words, people go to hell because they don't love the Lord. People go to heaven because they do. So Christianity is a matter of loving the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul says, "The love of Christ controls us." In Galatians chapter 5 and verse 6 Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything...listen to this...but faith working through love." That pulls it all together. It is a faith that works motivated by love for Christ.

When you want to evaluate someone's claim to be a Christian, look at their life. Do you see the deeds of righteousness? Do you see the maximum toiling effort of love for Christ? Paul saw them both in the report that he got from the Thessalonians. They were straining their energy to live out their love for Christ at the maximum level. Jesus said, "If you love one another, men are going to know that you're Mine." Because the mark of a Christian is love. That's what identifies us.

In 1 John, John says, "If you don't love your brother, you may say you're a Christian but you're not." And if we are marked then by the love of our brother, certainly we must be marked by the love of our Lord. In fact, John puts it this way, we love Him because He...what?...first loved us. We are the lovers of Christ, that is who we are, that is what identifies us, that is what marks us...we love Jesus Christ. That's our character.

So we have a work of faith and an effort of love. In 2 Thessalonians there's a kind of a good verse that pulls this together a little bit as well. In verse 11 of 2 Thessalonians 1, "To this end...Paul says...we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling," and listen, here it comes, "and that God will fulfill every desire for goodness." Oh I love that phrase. Christians have a desire for goodness, that's the labor of love. "And the work of faith with power," that's the faith that works. The desire for goodness is that motivating, straining effort of love and the work of faith is that faith which produces righteous deeds.

The elect...how can you identify them? They have a faith that works, that's production. They have a love that labors, that's affection...affection, that's another good word to write down...affection. They are known by their affection for Christ. Look at the third of this little trilogy in verse 3 of 1 Thessalonians 1. Paul says your election is also known because you have a hope that perseveres...he calls it the steadfastness of hope, or the endurance of hope. It is a hope that

perseveres.

Beloved, I...I'm reviewing many things that we've gone over in detail so I'm not belaboring the point, but I want to fix in your mind how crystal-clear this is in this text and how this text ought to act like a magnet to literally collect the filings of years and years of your understanding of Scripture into an absolutely definitive context. The third thing he says that marks the elect, the true brethren beloved of God, is they have a hope that perseveres. They never lose their hope in Christ. They never bail out. They are steadfast.

What do we mean by hope? The anticipation of future glory...the anticipation of future glory. Every true believer is looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. That's what Paul says. Listen to Titus 2, "The grace of God has appeared and it brings salvation," and what does salvation do? "It instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires." Just what we've been saying. It instructs us to deny ungodliness and produce godliness. It instructs us, "To turn from worldly desires and love the things of the Lord and then to live sensibly, righteously, godly in the present age all the while looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus."

True believers have a love that labors, a faith that works and a hope that perseveres. It doesn't die, it doesn't fade, it may become blurred, it may become distant but it is real, they never lose it, they hold to it. They don't abandon it. People will say to me, "Well, So-and-so is truly a Christian even though they're presently denying Christ, even though they're presently denying His Second Coming." Not so, not so. They have a faith that works, they have a love that continues to labor even when it fails, they have a broken heart over their failure like Romans 7 and they have a hope that never ever dies. Listen to Romans 5:2, verse 1 says, "We've been justified by faith." Verse 2 says, "Through the Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand," then this, "and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Every true Christian has that hope in his heart.

You say, "Is that a human work?" No, God puts it there. In fact, are you ready for this? God puts the power to produce the work, God puts the love to labor and He puts the hope to endure. That's His work and that's evidence of true salvation. In Colossians chapter 1 verse 27 it says this, "To whom God...speaking of course of the marvelous plan that God has for all generations and all His saints...to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles...listen to this...which is Christ in you." Now that's salvation, folks. Paul is saying...Look, the mystery, the thing never seen in the past was that Christ would live in you and with Christ living in you, at the end of verse 27, you have the...what?...the hope of glory...the hope of glory that goes along with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:11, Paul says, "We have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things out to the counsel of His will to the end that we were the first to

hope in Christ, and as such should be to the praise of His glory." When you become a Christian you hope in Christ...you hope in Christ.

"Beloved, it does not yet appear what we shall be. What we know when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him like He is." Paul comes to the end of his life and he says, "Look...he says...in the future, 2 Timothy 4:8, there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but all who have loved His...what?...His appearing." You know what the crown of righteousness is? It's the crown which is eternal righteousness, it goes to every Christian because every Christian is marked as one who loves His appearing. To all who love His appearing, we're looking for Christ, we're hoping in Christ. That is a mark of a believer. And as such, we are steadfast, says Peter.

The word hupomoneme means we can remain under the pressure. We can stay under it. We can endure it. The idea is perseverance. This is what the Reformers used to call the perseverance of the saints, the true Christians will hold fast to their hope until the end. No defection, we could call it spiritual staying power. They are the overcomers...the overcomers. In 1 John, "We have overcome the world with our faith." In other words, there's nothing in the world that causes a true Christian to lose his faith. No. A true Christian doesn't lose his faith. "For whatever is born of God," 1 John 5:4, "overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Faith will always triumph because it is a hope that endures, that perseveres, that remains. It is a seed that cannot die. It is a seed that cannot be killed by trouble. You remember the seed that went into the ground in Matthew 13:20 and 21, when the heat came and the pressure and the tribulation and it died because it had no real root. That's the false believer. Makes a superficial acknowledgement of Christ. As soon as the pressure's on, they're gone. The true seed with true roots produces fruit and overcomes the pressure.

It's amazing today that we have people who are saying, "You can be saved and have a faith that doesn't work...you can be saved and have a love that doesn't labor...and you can be saved and have a hope that doesn't persevere." It's exactly what they're saying. Paul is saying the only way I know you're a Christian is by those three things. If they're not there, what reason to assume that God has changed your life? Because the faith that He gives works. The love that He gives labors. And the hope that He gives perseveres. Now if you've got some faith you generated on your own, it isn't going to work. And if you've got some love you tried to muster up on your own, it isn't going to labor. And if you've got some hope that you've designed, it isn't going to persevere. But the kind that God gives will. That's a very basic understanding of salvation. The true hope can't be killed, it overcomes everything.

Read through Revelation 2 and 3 and how many times at the end of those letters to the churches he talks about the overcomer, the overcomer, the overcomer, who is going to receive this reward and that reward and this reward and that reward. He has all these wonderful things for the overcomer. and the overcomer is the Christian, the one whose faith perseveres, the one who overcomes no matter what the world throws at him...that is he never loses his faith. First John 2:19 tells us that if someone goes out and denies the faith, they went out from us because they never were of us. The people whose faith was God-given real faith, whose love was God-given real love and whose hope was God-given real hope are going to overcome. They're going to endure. They're not going to quit. They're not going to bail out. They persevere.

Listen to Proverbs 4:18, I love this. "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day." What a statement. What a statement. What the writer of Proverbs is saying is that the path of the righteous doesn't go from light to darkness, it goes from dim light to full light. It expands. It shines brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter as the work of faith increases, as the labor of love increases, and as the hope that perseveres increases. It gets brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter until the full day.

Listen to Jeremiah and Jeremiah talks here about the New Covenant in chapter 32 of his majestic prophecy. In verse 40, listen to what he says, "In the New Covenant I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them to do them good and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me." That's part of the New Covenant. God will not turn away from you and you will not turn away from God. And He does that all. He builds that all in...a hope that perseveres. This is the true perseverance of the saints who continue from the beginning to the end because their hope is a real hope.

Listen to Matthew 24:13 the words of Jesus. "The one who endures to the end, he shall be saved." The person who is going to enter into ultimate final salvation is the one whose faith endures to the very end. That's evidence of true faith.

Listen to Acts 11:23. In Acts 11:23 it says, "The hand of the Lord is with them...verse 21...a large number who believed turned to the Lord and the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas off to Antioch, then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God...listen...he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord." What was he saying? He was saying that true believers are going to remain true to the Lord. I exhort you to be sure that your salvation is genuine. That's the mark, being true to the Lord.

In chapter 13 of Acts, verse 43, "The meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who speaking to them were encouraging them to continue in the grace of God." Again, that's the mark of true faith, be sure your faith is real, be sure your faith is real. And yet there is the necessity to be faithful, to continue, to pursue.

In Acts 14 he encourages them in verse 22 to continue in the faith. And he says it's through the many tribulations that we must enter the Kingdom of God.

So there is a side of all of this that calls for us to be responsible. We are to increase in the knowledge of God. We are to bear fruits, Paul says in Colossians 1:10. But there is also the promise that if our faith is real we will continue...we will endure...we will persevere. That is the character of saving faith. So very, very important for us to know this.

In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 3:8 we're going to look at a verse a little later in our study, Paul says, "For we live if you stand firm in the Lord." Paul says, "You want to make my day? Then prove your faith is real and when I hear you standing firm in the Lord, I really enjoy life." That's the fruit.

So, beloved, it's a simple message that Paul gives them. He says, "I know you're a truly saved church. Three things prove it to me...you have a faith that works, you have a love that labors, you have a hope that endures." Let's call that third thing continuation.

How can you tell a true Christian? Production, affection and continuation. Look for a moment at chapter 5 verse 8, "Since we are of the day...I love that, that means we're believers...since we're believers...Paul says...let's be sober, let's get our priorities right." And then he mentions three things. "Having put on," past tense already. Let's get our act together because of what's already happened. Well what's already happened? Well we already have on some armor. First we have the breastplate of faith and love, and then we have as a helmet the hope of salvation because God hasn't destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, God gave us faith and God gave us love and God gave us hope because we are not destined for wrath, but for eternal salvation. We're Christians so we have those things. That's what he's saying. "We are of the day. Let's get our priorities right." How do we know we're of the day? Because God gave us a faith that works, a love that labors and a hope that endures. And that's our armor. That's our distinguishing uniform as those not destined for wrath but destined for eternal salvation.

Do you remember this familiar verse? "And now abides faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is...what?...love." Why is that? What motivates...what motivates the faith that works? Love. What motivates the effort? Love. What motivates the looking for and hastening to the coming of Christ? We love His appearing. Love is the driving force...love for God, love for Christ. If you have those three active, spiritual realities in your life, you're elect, you're brethren, you're beloved of God, you're saved. So many people have confusion about that. People say to me, you know, they say, "Well, John, you know, you preached a strong message about, you know, being a Christian, you're taking people's assurance away, you're stealing their assurance." No I'm not, I'm trying to tell

you how you can know you're a Christian. Do you have a faith that produces righteousness? Do you have a love that works and labors to do what honors the object of your love, Jesus Christ, and are you deeply disappointed when you fail? And do you have a hope that perseveres and nothing has overcome your hope and your faith and you do believe and you continue to believe and you look for the coming of Christ? Those are the evidences of your Christianity.

I'm not trying to take away your assurance, what I'm trying to do is deal with assurance from a real foundation, not an artificial one. And no man can be assured of his salvation because of a past act. No person can be sure he's a Christian because of something that happened when he was six that his mother told him happened. Or something that happened when he was 46 because it was some kind of spiritual event. Paul says, "I know you belong to God, you are in God the Father, you are in Jesus Christ because of these three things...they're realities in your life. You produce." That's the evidence of the life of God in the soul of man.

I mean, could you imagine anyone who would say, "A person is a Christian even though they have no righteous deeds, no love for Christ, and no desire to be with Him in eternal glory?" That would simply be the evidence that there was no new creation for if God recreates me, if God makes me new, the components of that newness are a productive righteousness, a loving labor, and an enduring hope.

Now, are you ready for this? That's just the stuff in verse 3 and we haven't even considered verses 5 to 10. And from verses 5 to 10 of this one chapter I'm going to give you a handful more of the marks of the elect. And I do believe with all my heart that by the time you're finished with this little list, you're going to be fairly well able to identify yourself as a true Christian and probably many others as well. And what is going to make this particularly special for us is that in just a couple of weeks, on Sunday night, we'll begin our study of 2 Peter and the first chapter of 2 Peter is about the same subject, how to know you're really a Christian. So with a heavy dose in the morning and a heavy dose at night, we've got to be able to answer some of the critics who are saying we don't know much about the assurance of salvation. By the time we're done, we're going to know what the Bible has to say about it. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You this morning that You have met us, You have blessed us in the music and the prayer, You have encouraged us in the Word, You've instructed us. Thank You that You have cleansed us in the time of confession, that You've given us the privilege of giving, the privilege of praise. Now, Lord, You've brought us to the moment when we have to look at our own hearts and consider where we stand with You. The effect of this message should be to make us look at our hearts. Do I have a love that motivates the deeds of righteousness effected by the Spirit of God in me? Do I have a love that fills my heart with an enduring persevering hope that nothing can overcome? If I do, then I belong to You. If there's question, Lord, may it be resolved right now. If there's anyone in this worship center this morning who is struggling with whether they are really a Christian, may they bring that struggle to the throne of grace and may they ask for that true salvation

which comes as a free gift to every asking heart. May we, the rest, Lord, who are truly yours confess that we fall short of being all that we would want to be, that our faith that works is hindered by the flesh, even our laboring love and our enduring hope is hindered by the flesh. But, Lord, you know our hearts and like Peter we can say, "You know, Lord, you know we love You. You know we want to work for You. You know we want to see You face to face." Father, do Your blessed and gracious work in every heart, in Jesus name. Amen.

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