

Title: Aiming for Assurance – Part 5

Text: Various

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Last support for assurance, God has laid out for us in God's word and that is the obedience of the faith. And it's been very encouraging for me, and I hope it has for you to go through this study together as a faith family because let's be honest, we all struggle at times with assurance because we all struggle at times with doubt. And this is not a strange thing to struggle with as people of God.

Sarah, if you remember Abraham's wife, was a woman of great faith commended in the New Testament and yet even she doubted in the face of God's sure promise of a coming child.

"After I am worn out and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

Elijah was a, he was a prophet of great faith. He called down fire from heaven and caused a great drought to come upon the people of Israel and the nation of Israel for generation and yet even he doubted in the face of God's sure promise of a remnant that would exist.

"I even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away."

John the Baptist who is a man of great faith but even he doubted in the face of God's sure testimony that came out of heaven itself over Jesus. He still doubted, "are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?" By Jesus' own confession in Matthew 11:11, John the Baptist was the greatest among all those born of women and yet even he struggled at times without. How heartening is that? That God is not only surprised by our doubts or our struggles, in fact, he understands us. He knows our frame that we are but dust, that we are saints that are still being transformed out of sinners and that we are believers still being loosed from the shackles of unbelief that once dominated us. God knows that at times all of us will struggle with doubts and so he has given us His truth so that we might know it and be set free by it. As Jesus said in John 8:32 that you would know the truth and that the truth would set you free and that's exactly where we should go when we are struggling with spiritual assurance. We should go straight to the word of God to hear what he has to say about it so that we might have greater assurance in our lives.

As 1 John 5:13 states and I reminded you of this every time we've gone to this topic, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you might know that you have eternal life." God has given us truth so that you and I can have assurance of salvation right now, not after we die but right now. We can know that we have eternal life based upon the promises of God and the person of Christ. God has laid out in his word four ways or means by which we can aim for greater assurance in our lives. He's given us two sources of assurance and he's also given us two supports of assurance as well. First, he's given us two sources of assurance that we ought to live in all of the time. Those two sources of assurance are the performance of Christ and the promises of God. First, the performance of Christ is to be a continual source of assurance for those of us who follow after Christ. Hebrews 10:19-23 tells us plainly that we can have confidence then through the holy places. We can draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith and we can hold fast to the confession of hope

without wavering. We can have assurance how versus 19-20 tells us by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he has opened up for us in the curtain that is through his flesh.

Listen, assurance of salvation is found not by looking to ourselves. And that was reminded of this past week. Contrary to what Kansas City chiefs kicker Harrison Butker stated in an otherwise absolutely commendable speech this past week, salvation and its assurance is not found by receiving the sacraments or by entering into marriage or by becoming a member of a church or by constantly striving for greater virtue. No, assurance of salvation is not found by looking to ourselves. It is found by looking at Christ. He is the assurance of our salvation. His finished work, not our own. He lived the perfect life that you and I have never lived. He who died the perfect death that you and I could never die and he won the perfect victory that you and I could never win. And because of that sinners like you and I can now receive through faith in his perfect and finished work on our behalf, we can now receive the free gift of righteousness, forgiveness and eternal life. That is good news. We can have assurance because our standing before God is grounded in the performance of Christ, not our own.

So, the first source of assurance that you and I should continually live in is the performance of Christ. Let the one who boasts, boasts in who? The Lord. The second source of assurance that we ought to continually live in is the promises of God. Hebrews 6:18 says "by two unchangeable things that is God's word and God's character, we who have fled to him for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope that is set before us." God's unfailing commitments and his underlying character are to be the continual source of assurance for us as believers. God has promised that everyone is accepted, and no one is abandoned who truly trusts in and relies on Jesus Christ and what he has done for their salvation. Those promises include you. And so, we should cast ourselves upon the whoever and everyone promises of God's word knowing that he who made them is both faithful, able, and desirous to fulfillment. So that's the second source of assurance that you and I should continually live in, the promises of God. Every word of God proves true, we're told in the Psalmist. Right, He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so, these are the two sources of assurance that you and I should continually turn to when we're aiming for greater assurance in our lives. The performance of Christ, the promises of God, that's where we ought to live, day in and day out continually.

But God has also given us two supports for assurance that you and I can look at occasionally, if you remember like a bathroom scale, to catch the overall trajectory of our lives. And those supports are the affirmation of the spirit and the obedience of the faith. They're not sources of assurance, but they're supports. First God has given us the affirmation of the spirit. We're told in Romans 8:16 that the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. How, and we've looked at this at great length, by cultivating within us his spiritual transforming fruit, the very virtues of Christ. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, right?

When we see these supernatural virtues beginning to blossom within us, it should serve as a support for our assurance that Christ indeed is living in us, and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit has been given to us. So that's the first source or support of assurance that we ought to look to occasionally and that is the affirmation of the spirit.

Second, God has given us, and here we finally caught up, God has given us the obedience of the faith, which I introduced last time. Scripture makes it clear that we by the grace of God, when we by the grace of God trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation, we enter into a new relationship with God that is marked by obedience. There is an obedience that belongs to the faith, a natural outworking that always accompanies saving faith. Jesus put it this way in Matthew chapter seven, you shall surely know them by their fruits. So, what are some of those fruits and what are some of those evidences that accompany saving faith? What is the outworking of saving faith look like that can occasionally encourage and support our assurance of salvation?

Well, last time I set you up brilliantly and didn't deliver because I talked about all the ways that do not support saving faith, right? The empty evidences that do not point to saving faith or the presence of salvation one way or the other. Just to remind you, those empty evidences were having a form of public morality, a mental knowledge of scripture and involvement in ministry, a conviction of sin and a moment of decision. Those are empty evidences that have nothing to do with the true nature of saving faith. They are empty evidences that we shouldn't even occasionally look to as supports for assurance.

In fact, as I reminded us all last time we were in this study, they actually, these five things actually bear all the markings of a superficial man made for a pharisaical religion that's motivated by nothing but self-righteousness and pride. Think about it, the self, the false assurance of public morality says, I must be saved because I'm more moral than you. The false assurance of mental knowledge says, I must be saved because I know more about the Bible than you. The false assurance of involvement in ministry says, well, I must be saved because I'm more involved or dedicated than you. The false assurance of conviction of sin says, well, I must be saved because I'm grieved more than you. And the false assurance of a moment of decision says, I must be saved because I've had an experience unlike you. None of these things have anything to do with the obedience of the faith. As I said last time, Jesus never promised to fill you with a reputation, to fill you with intellect, to fill you with a resume, to fill you with a feeling or to fill you with an experience. What did he promise to fill us with? He promised to fill us with himself, namely he promised to fill us with the true evidences of saving faith. The true evidences that do sometimes point to the genuineness of someone's faith. The true evidences that we can look at occasionally, like a bathroom scale to track the overall trajectory of our lives and see if we're moving in a healthy direction. Though more could be given, for the sake of our time, we're just going to look at nine true evidences that often point to the genuineness of someone's saving faith.

And those are a love for God, a reliance on Christ, an affection for believers, and aversion to spiritual darkness, a rejection of sin, a desire for God's glory, a spirit of prayer, a grasp of scripture, and an increase in obedience. These are nine true evidences that can point to the genuineness of someone's faith, and that can occasionally be used as a support to us as believers as we aim for greater assurance in our own spiritual lives. Nine, nine true evidences. You're already knowing it's time to buckle up. Let's go, let's pray and ask the Lord to help us understand His word this morning.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word. And we thank you, Father, that these things have been written to us who have believed in the name of your Son Jesus Christ so that we would know that we have eternal life. Father, we know that your word often cuts, and so Father, I pray that as your spirit is present among us this morning. Father, I pray that it would convict those that need to be convicted, and I pray that it would encourage those who need to be encouraged, and I pray that at the end of the day, what would result is that we as a body would be more greatly assured of the work that you have done in our lives as we have come to understand and rely on Christ's perfect person in work, and you're sure and steadfast promises to sinners like us. Father, I pray that we would understand your word so that we can go forth into this world with confidence, telling the world around us, we know there is someone who justifies the ungodly because he has justified us. Give us the assurance that comes through knowing these things, Father, we pray, and help us to understand the obedience of the faith biblically so that it might be an encouragement to us when and where needed. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right, so after carefully highlighting last time some empty evidences that don't point to the genuineness of someone's faith, empty evidences that should never be used, as supports for assurance, we must now consider what are some of those true evidences that do sometimes point to the genuineness of someone's faith, that we can look at occasionally, like a bathroom scale, to track the overall spiritual trajectory of our lives. Again, not perfectly but characteristically and increasingly.

Well, the first true evidence of saving faith is a love for God, a love for God. An unbeliever, though they might say that they love God, inwardly resent and rebel against him. As Romans 8:7 says, "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." Now, I understand that many unbelievers would protest this point that I'm making. They would say that they're not hostile, nor opposed to the idea of God. In fact, many of them would say that they're quite open to him, in fact. However, if you were to push the point, what you'd find out is that what they're open to is merely a God of their own imaginations, of their own conceptions, and of their own desires. If you were to begin to describe to them, God, as he describes himself to be in his word, transcendent, independent, sovereign, creator, holy, just, jealous, wrathful, merciful, forgiving, and so much more, let me assure you, you would swiftly meet protests and expose a deep-seated hostility that they have towards God, even among the most polite members of our society. Though they might even be able to come to church and sing out, Lord, Lord, and profess to love God, inwardly they resent and rebel against the one true and living God who's revealed himself in scripture. However, a believer has experienced a complete transformation of their affections away from that former hostility. Rather than hate God, they are now, those as Romans 8:28 states, "who love God", who as Ephesians 6:24 confesses, "who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible".

A true evidence of saving faith is sincere, heart-felt, deep-rooted love for God as he is seen in his word. God as he truly is. And so sometimes it is helpful to ask yourself in aiming for greater assurance, do you find your heart drawn in affection towards God and towards the things of God? Is your heart often lifted up in expectation and desire to worship him and to know more about him? Does your heart resonate with the psalmist's adoration as a deer pants for streams of living water? So, my soul longs for you, oh God, for the living God, for whom of I in heaven but you. And there is nothing on earth that I desire that compares with you. See the Lord, to see him, to know him, to worship him, he occupies increasingly the position of

being the greatest delight of your heart. Do you love God? That's the first question you should ask yourself. Not perfectly, but characteristically and increasingly, do you love God? This is one of the true evidences of genuine saving faith.

Second, a reliance on Christ. We're told in 1 John 2:3, "by this we know that we have come to know him". In other words, here is an indicator of saving faith, the support for assurance. What is it? How can we know that we have come to know him? If we keep his commandments, the apostle John says. So, what are his commandments? Well, you could go through the entire book of 1 John, which Colby is doing, right? Or let me fast-track to 1 John 3:23, which says this, "and this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another as he has commanded us". That's it. That is the commandment that shows us that we know God. It is first and fundamentally to believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ. He who has seen me has seen the Father. It is first and fundamentally to believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ, to rely completely and singularly on him. Listen, this should be obvious. Unbelievers don't do that. Unbelievers don't do that as Romans 10:3 states. Unbelievers seek to establish a righteousness of their own. They want to stand before God on the merit of their own works and accomplishments. Again, just like Mr. Butker and so many others, they'll attempt to point to something that they've done to merit acceptance before God in heaven. They will seek to establish a righteousness before God that comes solely through their works. But a true believer will simply confess nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling. There is a reliance on Christ alone. This is at the heart of every true believer. As Romans 5:19 says, "for as by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners". So, by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. I want you to see something obvious from this verse. How many men's obedience is needed in order to be justified and declared righteous before God in heaven? Is it two men's obedience, Christ's and yours? No, it is one man's obedience, Christ's alone. Christ alone and his perfect work is the soul and solitary confidence of a believer. As Romans 4:5 states, "we believe in him who justifies the ungodly, who counts their faith in Jesus Christ's righteousness". That's why it's so beautiful, the song that exclaims these words. His robes for mine, a wonderful exchange, clothed in his sin, Christ suffered, clothed in my sin, Christ suffered, 'neath God's rage. Draped in his righteousness, I'm justified. In Christ I live, for in my place he died. Christ alone, plus nothing else. A true evidence of saving faith is an absolute reliance on Christ alone for salvation. Can you say that this morning? Does your heart resound with the Apostle Paul's own testimony that he gives in Philippians 3, where he says, "everything that I've ever done is counted as rubbish?"

Christ is the one of surpassing worth. I don't have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God that depends upon faith. Are you relying this morning on Christ alone for salvation? Or have you squeaked in some other work that you'll think will merit you acceptance before God? Do you have reliance on Christ? This is a true evidence of genuine saving faith.

Third, an affection for believers. The verse that I just read, first John 3:23, says that "this is the commandment that shows us that we know God. This is this commandment that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and then he immediately follows it up and loved one another just as he commanded us". We know from other passages that unbelievers on the whole do not love Christians and do not love the church. I mean, just think about all the things that we saw when we studied 1 Peter, the

book of 1 Peter. In their self-righteousness, unbelievers speak against Christians. They call them evildoers, they revile believers, they malign them, they slander them. Unbelievers want to avoid Christians or silence them if at all possible. They do not love believers or long to be with them. But just as Jesus taught in John 13:35, "by this all people will know that you are my disciples" if you have what? Love for one another. You all of a sudden have an affection for the things that Christ love and Christ loves his people. As first John 3:14 states, "we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death". True evidence of saving faith is an earnest affection for other believers. So again, it's helpful to occasionally ask yourself this question, do I love other believers? And do you long for their sweet counsel? Do you appreciate and desire to be stirred up into love and good works by them or do you sit there and say, I'll just have my own private religion and I want to leave the church alone. Do you have an affection for other believers? Not perfectly again, but characteristically and increasingly so. Do you have an affection for believers?

Fourth, an aversion to darkness. An aversion to spiritual darkness. See, Proverbs 2:13 tells us that unbelievers, they forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness. You sit there and say, well, why would they do that? Well, Jesus tells us in John 3:19 is because they love the darkness rather than the light. Why? Because their deeds are evil. In other words, an unbeliever doesn't hate or avoid spiritual darkness or wickedness. He walks in spiritual darkness and wickedness. He does it because he loves it. Let's make this entirely practical. An unbeliever will watch shows and movies that glorify the works and the power of Satan and they will enjoy them. They'll recommend them even. An unbeliever finds, let me put it even more general, an unbeliever finds the sins and the darkness that Jesus died to abolish entertaining to observe and even something that you ought to participate in with pride, but not so a child of God. As James 4:4 states, "do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God"? I mean, 1 Peter, or 2 Peter 2:8 tells us that even useless Lot was vexed and he felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by the lawless deeds that he saw around him occurring in Sodom and Gomorrah. And I just have to say, yet many in evangelicalism today are even more useless than useless Lot because at least Lot was tormented by what he saw. He wasn't entertained by it. And it's in this simple way that even useless Lot showed the nature of his saving faith. For every true believer will demonstrate an aversion towards spiritual darkness. It is a true evidence of saving faith. They will, as 1 John 2:15 states, "not love the world nor the things in the world, for if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him". As 1 John 5:5 states later, "those who believe in Christ overcome this world, they aren't overcome by it". And so, it's helpful to consider every once in a while, are you vexed by sin? The sins that you see in our culture around us, does immorality bother you? Are you often tormented in your soul over the things that God hates? Or do you just shape your morals and conscience to whatever your culture is saying at the moment? Not perfectly, but increasingly and characteristically, do you have an aversion towards spiritual darkness? This is a true evidence of saving faith.

Fifth, a rejection of sin, a rejection of sin. And this kind of goes with the previous one that we looked at, sin offends. It blasphemes and it curses and it seeks to harm God. Therefore, every true believer, being someone who loves God, will hate sin and seek to avoid it. Again, not perfectly, but characteristically. That is not true, ladies and gentlemen, of those who are outside of Christ. Unbelievers, as Proverbs 2:14 states, rejoice, they rejoice in doing evil and they delight in its perversity. Unbelievers like sin. Deep down, they

yearn for it. As 2 Peter 2:22 graphically puts it, "the dog returns to its own vomit. And the sow after washing herself returns to wallow in the mire". Peter's point is simple. Just like a dog, because of its nature, always returns to its vomit. And just like a pig, because of its nature, always returns to its mud. So also, an unredeemed sinner, because of his unredeemed nature, will always return to his sin. He doesn't reject it. He doesn't avoid it. He just seeks to mitigate its influences and consequences. But a believer is someone who's been totally transformed away from all of that. As Paul makes clear in Romans 7:15 & 24, when a believer sins, they hate what they've done. And they're filled with regret and sorrow over their sin, even though no one else knows about it. As, just like David says in Psalms 31:9-10, when a believer sins, they are distressed, he says. They're grieved, they're exhausted, until they finally come clean. Until finally, as Psalms 32:5 describes, "I acknowledged at last my sin before you. And I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sins". See, for a believer, they find no rest until they reject their sin and find the rest that comes from forgiveness from the Lord. A true evidence of saving faith is rejection of sin. I'm not going to ask you, as your pastor, is there a moment in your life when you repented of your sins and believed in Jesus? I, as your pastor and shepherd of your soul, I'm going to ask you this question. Are you still repenting of your sins and relying on Jesus Christ alone to save you? Because that's a true evidence of saving faith, not a moment, a transformation. True evidence of saving faith is rejection of sin. So, does that describe you? Does sin fill you with a godly grief? A grief that drives you to repentance to a rejection of that sin? For as Proverbs 24:16 states, "though the righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, he gets back up, he turns and repents". This is an evidence of saving faith. So not perfectly, but characteristically and increasingly. It's a helpful, it's helpful occasionally to ask yourself the question, do I exhibit a rejection of sin in my life?

Sixth, a desire for God's glory. A desire for God's glory. One of the things the scripture teaches us is that an unbeliever lives for his own glory and his own praise and his own recognition and reputation. As Romans 1:25 says, "they worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. But believers have been radically transformed from that way of thinking, and they become concerned with God's glory, praise, and reputation". As, 2 Corinthians 5:15 states, "and he died for all so that those who live, in other words, for those who have been made spiritually alive, they might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised". A believer is suddenly very concerned with the spirit of 1 Corinthians 10:31 about "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you're doing it all for the glory of God". Or again, Colossians 3:17, "whatever you do in word or deed, do it all for the glory of God". Or again, 1 Peter 4:11, "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, because to him belongs the glory both now and forever, amen". A true evidence of saving faith is a desire for God's glory, just like John the Baptist, that he may increase and that I may decrease. "Lord, I want you to be glorified and magnified, as seen as great through me, whatever it takes, good days and bad, just show yourself to be the God that you are". Can you say that? Does your heart resound with the prayer of the psalmist in Psalms 115:1, "not to us, oh Lord, not to us, but to your name, be the glory"? Do you have a desire for God's glory? And again, none of us are perfect in any of this, but if you've been born again, then this is one of the currents, whether fast or slow, that continually flows through your life, that continually moves you forward and continually so, increasingly so. It is a desire for God's glory.

Seventh, true evidence of saving faith is a spirit of prayer, a spirit of prayer. Psalms 14:1 reminds us that the fool says in his heart, there is no God. And we know from Romans 1 that he's lying, that he really doesn't believe that, but nevertheless, he lives like it. It's the self-deceiving mantra that he tries to tell himself every day when he wakes up, there is no God, there is no God, I don't have to live like there's a God. And because of that, an unbeliever definitely does not possess a spirit of prayer, of true communion and communication with God. Now, to be clear, he might fake it for a while and be a lot like the Pharisees during Jesus's day in Luke 18, where you're spending more time talking about yourself and worshiping yourself in your own works. In fact, sometimes people make prayer, even a work that they do, and that you're building yourself up in your own self-righteous works, rather than talking to and communion with God and praising him for all of his works. An unbeliever might fake it for a time, but eventually he'll give up on prayer because his religion is to live as if God doesn't really exist. But a believer is someone who's completely different than that. A believer is someone who by definition has faith. As Hebrews 11:6 states, "he believes that God exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him". That's evidenced by the way by Jesus' parable in Luke 18:1 and following, where he says that saving faith is evidenced by a spirit of always praying and never losing heart. A consistent fellowship with God through prayer is the atmosphere in which a true believer lives, it is the air that he breathes. He doesn't just pray occasionally when he's in public, like the Pharisees did. He prays even when no one's watching him, when he's all alone in the secret places of his heart. A believer prays. That is true evidence of saving faith. It's a spirit of prayer. Is that a characteristic of your life? Does your heart resound with the psalmist? I call to God for the Lord will save me. At morning and evening and noon, I utter my complaints and moan, and he hears my voice and redeems my soul and safety from the battles that I wage. Is that the spirit of your life? Does that describe you? Not perfectly, but again, characteristically, and increasingly so, do you possess a spirit of prayer?

Eighth, we're almost done, a grasp of scripture. A grasp of scripture. Do you learn when you read God's word personally? I said that the way I meant to say it. I'm not saying do you learn through sermons. I'm saying do you learn through your own personal reading of God's word. You see, 1 Corinthians 2:12 states that "unlike unbelievers who cannot accept the things of God, we have received the spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given to us by him". And so whereas an unbeliever will never make a true sense of this book, that it's meaning and its value and its significance, a believer, someone who's been born again, when they pick up God's word, they understand it, they love it, they're drawn to it, and they grow in their understanding of it. Just like Paul described in the 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, he says, "we know brothers loved by God that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction". Is this an open or a closed book to you? Sadly, can I say this, that many believers often miss out on this element of a support for assurance because they aren't in God's word. If they were, they would receive it with increasing power and understanding from the Holy Spirit, and their assurance would be supported as they come to love the revelation of God that he has given to them in his word. This is a true evidence of saving faith. It is a grasp of scripture. So not perfectly, but characteristically, and increasingly so. Do you possess a grasp of scripture?

And then finally, a growth in obedience. And this brings us full circle. Jesus stated in Matthew 7:21, "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven", I should really preach a sermon

on this sometime. A profession doesn't show anything, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. A transformed life is an indicator of saving faith. As Jesus said in John 15:14, "you are my friends if you do what I command you". That's a statement of fact. Those who are united to Jesus obey him because they love him. 1 John 2:3-6 puts it this way, "By this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word in him, truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same manner in which he walked". So, this is a true evidence of saving faith, a growth in obedience and knowing and doing and following God's will. So not perfectly, but characteristically and increasingly so, are you experiencing in your life a growth and obedience to God in the obedience of the faith? Because a love for God, a reliance on Christ, an affection for believers, and aversion to spiritual darkness, a rejection of sin, a desire for God's glory, a spirit of prayer, a grasp of scripture, and an increase in obedience are all biblical evidences of saving faith.

So that was really quick, I understand. What do we do with all this? It was something that needs to be given so that we would understand how to biblically look at our lives in light of scripture when it comes to assurance. But what do we do with this, in aiming for assurance? How do we rightly handle this support of assurance, the obedience of faith, because it is highly dangerous that we might handle it wrongly? So let me finish up by giving you four ways to rightly respond to what we've looked at today regarding the obedience of the faith.

First way to respond to everything that we've looked at is to examine yourself. It's to examine yourself. You would be a fool to see all of these verses in scripture and say, none of these apply to me. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "examine yourselves, test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith". The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it. Examine yourself in light of not your own self-assessment, but in light of God's word. So how about you, can you see these evidences within you? Again, not perfectly, but characteristically. As Peter says this in 2 Peter 1:8, "are these qualities yours and are they increasing"? A love for God, a reliance for Christ, an affection for believers, an aversion to darkness, a rejection of sin, a desire for God's glory, a spirit of prayer, a grasp of scripture, and an increase in obedience. So first, examine yourselves.

Second, be objective. If you sincerely want to know if the obedience of the faith can be seen in you, don't go and look in the mirror at yourself. Go to those who know you, go to your spouse, go to your kids, go to your parents, go to your church, and go and ask them. For as Ephesians 5:9 says, "the fruit of light is seen in all that is good and right and true".

So even the verse that I just quoted from 2 Corinthians 13:5, to examine yourselves was not given to individuals, it was given by Paul to a church, to either confirm or deny one's individual testimony of faith, and so if these qualities of yours are present and increasing, then they should be seen by more than just you. They should be seen by those who are around you, especially those who know you the best. So even if it might terrify you, you need to go and talk to those who are around you. So, when you're struggling

with assurance, here's the encouragement. When you're struggling with assurance, don't struggle alone. Go to your spouse, go to your friends, go talk to your pastor or your elders and ask them, examine me, test me in light of God's word. Do you see the obedience of faith in me? Do you see a love for God? Do you see a reliance on Christ? Do you see an affection for other believers? Are you seeing an aversion to spiritual darkness? A rejection of sin, a desire for God's glory? Do you see in me a spirit of prayer, a grasp of scripture, and an increase in obedience? Are these evidences, are these fruits that proceed from seed and faith, are they seen in me? This is helpful to do, again, not all the time, but like a bathroom scale, occasionally, to show whether our lives are moving in a good and a healthy and a Godward direction. They're designed to support our assurance. So, examine yourself. The second thing I would do is to be objective.

Third, is stay focused. So, what if after looking at the obedience of faith in our lives, we come away and we step off that bathroom scale with some very serious concerns? What do we do? What should we do if looking at the overall fruit of our lives, we become aware of, you could say, some bad apples on the tree? What should we do? Should we focus in on that specific area that we seem to be lacking on and work on cultivating it more? I'm going to try really, really hard on loving God more. I'm going to try really, really hard on liking other believers more. I'm going to try really, really hard on desiring God's glory more, on praying more, until I can finally get assurance from that. Is that what we should do? No. To do that would be to ignore everything that I've said for this entire topic of sermons. It would be to mistake a support for assurance as a source of assurance. If you see an area in your life that is lacking in any one of these qualities, the solution is not to stare at the fruits. It is to water the roots. It's to go back to the sources of assurance that God has given us. It's to go back to the performance of Christ and the promises of God and live in them. And how do I know this? It's because exactly what Peter said in 2 Peter 1:9, he says this, "whoever lacks these qualities", in other words, they looked at the obedience of the faith and they're like, I have some concerns. Whoever lacks these qualities, Peter says this, "is so nearsighted that he's blind, having forgotten that he was what cleansed from his former sins". See, the solution that Peter offers is to go back to the gospel and the work of Jesus Christ, to remember the performance of Jesus Christ and the promises of God on your behalf and to find your assurance in them.

As Robert Murray M'Cheyne so memorably said, for everyone, look at yourself. Take 10 looks at Christ. So, examine yourself. Be objective, stay focused. And then the final counsel I would give for the obedience of the faith is trust Christ. Trust Christ. You know, sometimes stepping onto a bathroom scale is discouraging. And sometimes taking a look at the obedience of the faith in our lives can be discouraging as well. But rather than grow discouraged, where does scripture point us? Scripture points us to lift up our eyes and to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith and to remember the performance of Christ and the promises of God that surround our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and live in that. In the face of discouragement, we should do what Martin Luther did, not always do what Martin Luther did. But in this occasion, we should do what Martin Luther did on one occasion during one of his dreams. In one of his dreams, got to love Martin Luther's dreams, Luther envisioned the devil coming to him. And the devil

started to list off all of Luther's sins, writing them down one by one. Sins of the mind, sins of the heart, sins of the body, sins that stirred up in Luther memories of shame, foolishness, heartache. It just went on and on. Until finally Luther said, are you finished? And Satan said, oh no, there are many more. To which Luther replied, then put them all down and then take your pen and write in red across the whole of them, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin. Beloved, don't grow discouraged as you aim for assurance. Remember the source of assurance and trust in the perfect Savior, Jesus Christ. Trust Christ, he lived the perfect life in your place. Why? Because he knew you couldn't live it yourself. He died the perfect death in your place. Why? Because he knew you couldn't endure it yourself. And he won the perfect victory in your place. Why? Because he knew you couldn't win that victory for yourself. He came to earth and he did his work and he saved you because he knew you needed saving and that you couldn't save yourself. And so don't grow discouraged. Trust Christ, rest in his promises of God and the promises of him who has promised that he is the one who justifies the ungodly through faith in Christ Jesus.

So, examine yourself, be objective, stay focused, but above all, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. This is how to aim for assurance in our Christian lives is by looking at the two biblical supports of assurance that God has given us occasionally and it's by living in the two biblical sources of assurance that God has given us continually. Two supports, two sources, one great salvation. Finish with a quote from a hymn that we all know and love that pertains directly to this. "How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent word. What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled. Amen. Praise God for his word, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." This is the confidence that we have in him. Let's aim for knowing and living out that assurance by God's grace for his glory this week. To that end, let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for Jesus, we thank you that he has not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and that he shed his life to be a pleasing sacrifice for us. We thank you for his perfect work on our behalf that we can now say that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We thank you for the perfect work of Jesus on our behalf and we thank you for your great and precious promises that you have given unto us so that we as we go throughout this life might have full confidence and knowledge that knowing to know that we have eternal life through faith in your Son Jesus Christ. Father, I pray that if there is some soul who this morning as we have looked at the obedience of the faith have come to realize that they are outside of Christ, that there is no evidence of spiritual life within them and all, Father, I pray that they would run to Jesus, give them the grace to see his glory and to trust in his work and to find eternal unending life and forgiveness and salvation in him and for the rest of us, Father, help us to remember where we ought to be looking and that is not to ourselves first and foremost but always and ever up to Jesus who is at your right hand as the forerunner on our behalf. And Father, we thank you that where he has gone so we too shall go because he who began a good work in us will finish it. We are sure of this. And so, Father, help us to live in light of this confidence for the glory that belongs to you, for the glory that belongs to your perfect Savior, Jesus Christ. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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