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A table of contents for the *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbtj.php

Dealing with Doubt

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All believers doubt at times. No matter how strong our faith, there are moments of distress or difficulty when doubts creep in. Many believers doubt a great deal. Society presents numerous incentives to question people and things. In this past century, the world has both suffered from and profited from cultural pressures to question all past knowledge and to reexamine scientific and moral dogmas. The current humanistic worldview does not accept certainties. Yet, in such a world, a Christian can be and should be sure of his personal stand before God.

Any believer may occasionally doubt the genuineness of his faith, the reality of God, the possibility of eternal life, even the certainty of eternal damnation. In a sense, doubt concerning these areas can be healthy, for it stimulates us to reexamine the firm foundations of our faith. Like successful victory over temptation, successfully overcoming discouraging doubts can strengthen the inner man.

In several areas of life there can be no real basis for confidence. One day you see a sign that reads, "Register and win a car." So, if you register, will you drive away with a new car? Hardly. Another sign reads, "Buy one, get one free." Can you confidently carry two to the checkout counter and pay

the price of just one? Certainly. The difference in confidence is the difference in the nature of the offer.

A recent poll indicated that 87% of Americans (almost nine out of every ten!) expect to get to heaven. Two other similar polls might prove interesting. How many people who purchase a lottery ticket expect to win big? How many who put coins into a slot machine expect to hit the jackpot? Losing at Atlantic City or Las Vegas may not be too devastating, but losing out on eternal life is totally, unendingly devastating. Whether for commercial offers or for celestial bliss following death, a reasonable person should evaluate the provision, the nature of the offer, and what happens when you buy in. Is there provision of one automobile, of thousands of jars of peanut butter? Does signing on mean a chance to be a winner or a guaranteed gift? Do you walk out with a number on a piece of paper or a sixteen ounce jar of Jif?

The possibility of getting to heaven likewise depends on the validity of the provision, the kind of offer, and the walkaway result. Inner assurance concerning spiritual realms cannot be gained by evaluating religious activity that we think might please God. Self-examination or introspection is often the recommended path of psychology or of worldly wisdom. This will not suffice for a Christian. For spiritual truths, the soul reflecting on itself will produce only despair and discouragement. True joy and confidence can come only from consideration of the revealed truths in the Bible. *"These things write we unto you that your joy may be full"* (1 John 1:4). The mirror of the Word of God can show us aspects that need correction; it can also clarify the reality of our relation to God.

Three teachings of the Bible provide a firm foundation for our faith. Our hope of heaven rests on: (1) who Jesus is, (2) what Jesus did for us, and (3) what the Holy Spirit has done in us. It is not what we have done, but what God has done that is important. How we feel has no bearing on how we stand before God. Our good religious works may engender inner pride, but cannot assure us that we are right with God.

Every portion of Scripture contributes in some way to our understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His accomplishment before the Father, and of the Comforter He promised to send. Occasional Christophanies and numerous predictions of the Old Testament thrillingly portray the person and work of the promised Messiah. The Gospel accounts of His life and death give dependable historic detail of God's supreme personal revelation (Heb 1:1-3). The book of Acts relates how early believers rejoiced following His ascension, being confident of His co-regency with the Father, and prayed unto Him (Acts 1:24).

One book of the Bible is of special significance when considering how to deal with doubt, for it was written to believers in order to give confident assurance. John, the disciple who was specially loved by Jesus, wrote in what we call his first epistle, *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"* (1 John 5:13). John was writing to believers who already had true faith in Jesus in order that they might have intellectual confidence that they already possessed eternal life, and that they might continue resting their faith in the Name (power, authority) above every name. John's message is that God has given such indisputable evidences that no believer need doubt.

In his first epistle, John cited numerous ways whereby doubts can be dispelled and replaced by confident assurance. God directed that these practical tests for dealing with doubt be inscripturated; they are in the Bible for our benefit. Among the tests of the faith listed by the Apostle John are significant assertions concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, which it is the purpose of this investigation to examine.

We Should Acknowledge Who Jesus Is

John the disciple, as a young man among the chosen Twelve, had personally known Jesus of Nazareth during His earthly ministry as well as any man knew Him. We today must depend on ancient eye-witness accounts to learn about Him; John had close, intimate, personal familiarity. The best sources we have (almost the only sources!) to learn of the life and ministry of Jesus are the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Two of the writers, Matthew and John, were of the Twelve. Mark probably obtained his information from Peter, the frequent spokesman of the Twelve. Dr. Luke faithfully interrogated many to ascertain the exactness of what he wrote (Luke 1:1-4). One new in the faith should endeavor to read these four Gospel accounts repeatedly, particularly the Gospel of John, to get factual content regarding the Savior. Every believer needs periodic refreshing concerning the glories of his Redeemer. Paul's lifetime longing was to know Him better (Phil 3:14), as ours should be.

If Jesus of Nazareth were just a man, there would be no hope of eternal life with God. All men are sinners. All sinned in Adam. No ordinary man can qualify to approach God because of the separation of sin. No man can get himself to heaven, let alone help another to be right with God. If Jesus is our hope of heaven, He must have been an unusual man. If we are to have a firm hope, it is crucial to recognize who Jesus is, that He is the eternal God who by a special, miraculous, virgin birth became a true human except for sin (similar to Adam prior to the fall). Only if we have such a sinless Savior can we have salvation.

Five teachings in the first epistle of John give a clear picture of the One who is the object of our faith. In systematic theology, these are treated with the labels eternal deity, incarnation, intercession, expiation, etc. John set forth deep theological truths in simple, clear, everyday language.

Jesus is the True, Eternal Son of God

John used the title "Son of God" twice in 1 John 5:13 and many times elsewhere in his epistle (1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 20). In the 105 verses of 1 John, there are 23 references to Jesus as Son. Jesus in His public ministry had employed the title Son of Man in order to stress His true humanity. After the resurrection, His disciples employed the title Son of God to emphasize His eternal divine existence. To a Hebrew, the label "son of" at times referred to the nature of an individual, such as sons of Belial (men characterized by wickedness, 1 Sam 2:12) or son of consolation (Barnabas, noted for his encouragement, Acts 4:36). John was thus identifying Jesus as true God, as the eternal God come among men (John 1:1, 14), the God-man. John and the other disciples concurred with Peter when he confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16).

This recognition of Jesus as the God-man is crucial to true Christianity. *"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God"* (1 John 4:15). To confess is to agree with God, to acknowledge inwardly and admit publicly. Those who are born again by personal acceptance of the Son of God genuinely know God; mere doctrinal lip agreement is not sufficient. Any who deny the eternal nature of Jesus of Nazareth have built their own religion; they have not accepted Christianity. Only those who personally, publicly profess their faith in the Son of God are right with God.

John Taught the Deity of Jesus Christ

John declared that Jesus of Nazareth was truly divine; He also clearly indicated that this One who was truly God was an eternal One. John wrote of *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled,*

of the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). For He existed already (was) prior to creation, at the beginning (see Gen 1:1; John 1:1). He who in time (5 B.C.) came in the flesh had an eternal existence. He was an eternal Son; He did not become a son. Of the godhead, He was the active Creator. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

John also spoke of the eternal preexistence of his Lord in his declarations concerning the incarnation, that is, the coming of the eternal Son into this finite world. Jesus, one of the unchanging Trinity, existed prior to the birth in Bethlehem. He was eternally the unique Son, and at the time of His miraculous birth He was sent from heaven itself. "*God sent His only begotten Son into the world*" (1 John 4:9; see Isa 9:6).

To return to the earlier analogy, someone purchased an automobile or manufactured abundant peanut butter. Jesus as the only sinless human in all history was qualified to provide the "product" of redemption, to shed His own blood for the sins of mankind. That He did so on the cross of Calvary is the basis of the good news that everyone who calls on Him for salvation will receive eternal life (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13; John 6:37). That His work on our behalf was acceptable before the eternal Throne of Justice was certified by His physical, body resurrection, His further forty day ministry, and His installation as co-regent on high (Rom 4:25; Acts 1:3, 9; Heb 1:3).

John forcefully proclaimed that Jesus came into the world for a definite purpose, with an assigned task: "*The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world*" (1 John 4:14). God had an eternal plan for our redemption, accomplished in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4). John asserted that the coming of the eternal Son was a completed fact. John had been one of hundreds who had observed the sinless life and ministry of the most remarkable person in all history. "*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are*

in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Every true believer will inwardly acknowledge and publicly assert His in-fleshment: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). Doctrinal correctness is important; personal profession is crucial. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23).

Jesus Was Historically Real

Third, John affirmed that the life and ministry of this God-man was historical reality; it was not an apparition. These were not cunningly devised fables (2 Peter 1:16). For this too John was particularly well qualified to bear personal witness. *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us). That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).*

Recipients of this epistle (ye also) have likewise experienced the spiritual fellowship which John had enjoyed in the presence of Jesus, even though they had not known Him during His earthly walk. Each generation of true believers is able to practice the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. What John declared unto the congregation to which he wrote was divinely directed to be inscripturated for the benefit of succeeding generations, including us today. Denial of the actual incarnation ministry of this Word revelation is unthinkable, and really satanic: *"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of*

God; and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:3).

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah

Fourth, John adds to our appreciation of who Jesus is by asserting that He is the long-awaited Messiah, the one promised by God through chosen prophets through many centuries. The Greek word for the Hebrew *Messiah* was *Christos*. John proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is that God-promised Christ. *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1).*

God had promised to His chosen people for centuries that a supreme prophet would be born among them, like unto Moses (Deut 18:15). God had called Abraham and formed a nation through him in preparation for the appearance of the Christ. This extensive preparation has reached its culmination. *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).*

John frequently used "Jesus Christ" in the fashion of a proper name (1 John 1:3, 7; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2, 3; 5:6, 20). The One who earlier had customarily been called Jesus of Nazareth within decades was regularly referred to as Jesus the Messiah. Another appellation, asserting deity, was also customarily included, giving the familiar title "Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus Reigns on High

Finally, John referred to the resurrection, ascension, and co-regency of Jesus in heaven as important in the delineation of the Person we confess. He rules on high already

as He awaits the greater victories ahead, and He intercedes for His own. We know that, *"if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). Our perfect Lawyer-Friend is in the very presence of God. He now reigns along with the Father and is engaged in unhindered intercession with the Father, making personal requests for our benefit. Each moment of each hour of each day, our Savior is pleading on our behalf. John declares that this One who is presently seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high is, according to God's plan, waiting until His enemies be made His footstool. In God's appointed time, He will return again. *"And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at his coming"* (1 John 2:28). John did not write "if" He might return, but "when" He will return. *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2).

Our salvation depends on who Jesus is; our assurance is firmly based on awareness of the five assertions of John concerning Him in the first epistle: He is the Son of God, He is eternal God, He walked and worked on earth to convey God's message, He was well pre-announced as the predicted Jewish Messiah, and He is alive and active at the Throne of Grace today.

We Should Rejoice Over What Jesus Did For Us

God loved and He gave; Jesus loved and He gave. His life and death were for our benefit. All that He accomplished through His life and death was done with you and me in mind. He was miraculously conceived, was born without sin, and lived a sinless life that He might be the flawless Lamb of God, shedding His blood in death to pay the sin debt of the world. He came to do the Father's will, not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). Three

assertions concerning His work on our behalf are given by John in his first epistle: that He paid our sin debt, that He delivers from sin, and that He thereby made possible newness of life.

Jesus Paid for our Sin

John wonderfully proclaims that He who had no sin, who never sinned, who did not need to die because of His own sin, willingly took the penalty of our sin. *"He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin"* (1 John 3:5). Jesus in His death was the satisfying sacrifice to appease the righteous wrath of God against our sins. God *"loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"* (1 John 4:10). He was the appointed propitiating sacrifice, fully satisfying the Creator regarding our sins. *"He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). He was sent from heaven to be the propitiating sacrifice; He lived without sin that He might be qualified as the sinless Lamb of God; He died for the sins of the world in order that whosoever believes on Him might have full forgiveness of sin.

Jesus Delivers and Cleanses

John and many others of his generation could witness, *"We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world"* (1 John 4:14). A true believer knows that there can be salvation no other way. *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Believers have been unshackled from the bonds of sin. Satan, who had the power of death, was overcome by the work of the cross. *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"* (1 John 3:8). Those who received John's epistle knew

the reality of this deliverance. *"I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one"* (1 John 2:13). *"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin"* (1 John 3:5). They knew that His death set a standard for personal commitment. *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us"* (1 John 3:16).

Jesus Gives Us a Rich Life

Believers know their sin-debt is erased; they know also that they have received a new, rich, abundant life, often called eternal life. *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"* (1 John 5:11-12). Whereas we were dead in relation to spiritual things, we now live spiritually through Him. We have life through the death of Jesus. This is a personal knowledge: *"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true"* (1 John 5:20). *"This is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life"* (1 John 2:25).

The born again believer will have an inner desire to do that which God declares to be right, and he will have a new ability to do what is right. He will love less what displeases God. He will not persistently continue to sin (1 John 3:6, 9; 5:4, 18). That is not to say that a believer does not fall into sin. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10). Yet, when we sin, *"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Our sin no longer separates us from God; Jesus died that we might personally approach God through Him in prayer. The power

of His shed blood cleanses us in the sight of God and enables cleansing here on earth as we confess our sins. He has given us the privilege and the power of an abundant life year after year.

We Should Recall What the Holy Spirit Has Done in Us

Why do many believers lack confident assurance? Do they question the person of the Savior or the validity of His sacrifice? Too often these appear as nothing more than areas of dead doctrine. Many who are yet unsaved know the teaching that Jesus is the God-man and that He died for the sins of the world. But, if they have not personally trusted in the work of Christ, they have only a wrong wish-it hope of heaven rather than a know-it confidence.

We want something worthwhile we can hold in our hand. Americans with last week's losing lottery ticket have a meaningless memento. Those with a jar of peanut butter will benefit for several weeks. Eternal life means unending blessedness. Such has been made available by the work of Jesus and offered to all who call on Him. The question is, Do I have it? Is there something more I should have or feel? Am I genuinely saved or merely self-deceived?

Jesus lived and died in the past. We today want clear evidence of God at work in our midst. We can easily doubt what took place centuries ago. We feel that we can better counteract doubt with evidences we ourselves see and hear. Jesus provided for such encouragement by sending His other Self, a Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). He is the One who is active today. As we behold His work in us and around us, we should be encouraged; our doubt should be dispelled.

The concern of most people is not so much on the historic past as on evidences in their daily lives. It is at this point that many fail to see the radical difference between works-earning endeavors and Holy Spirit changes. If a man

thinks he is good enough to get to heaven, he is not headed there. If he thinks religious endeavor will achieve entrance, he does not know the Gospel of God's grace. If anyone could get to heaven in any other way, the death of Jesus would not have been necessary (Matt 26:39, 42). The simple, clear truth: our personal confident assurance that absent from the body will mean present with the Lord is not in any way based on what we have done or might do for the Lord, but must be the result of honest evaluation of spiritual changes wrought in us by the Holy Spirit.

To use theological terms and distinctions, God has made full provision; reception is individually by faith. Sinful mankind has been reconciled unto God; each person must personally be reconciled (2 Cor 5:19-20). Objective provision by death on the cross makes salvation available for all; subjective appropriation is the reception of the salvation which Christ purchased at such great price. No one was saved at that moment in 29 A.D. when the life blood of Jesus flowed forth. Everyone remains condemned until justified. Justification and regeneration are always simultaneous. Each one who gets right with God receives a new nature, a new ability to function in the spiritual realm.

To employ again the earlier analogy, one who took advantage of the store offer walked out with a free jar of peanut butter. One who did not purchase did not receive. All who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation walk with the Lord; those who have not yet personally called are yet on the road to hell. What are the characteristics of this new walk? A spiritual life shows itself in spiritual acts. Where there is spiritual birth, spiritual growth will follow. If there are no evidences of spiritual growth, there has not been a spiritual birth. So, what ought we to look for in our spiritual self-evaluation? Seeing ourselves in the mirror of the Word of God, what ought we to consider? John advises us to acknowledge three important truths regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer: He is the effective cause of change in our lives,

He indwells us, and He carries on a work of constantly bringing about changes in our lives that He might more and more conform us unto the image of the perfect Son of God.

He Changed Us

Believers through the centuries and multitudes today have received the new birth which Jesus explained to an important Jewish scholar (John 3:1-21). In this epistle, John declares that a new spiritual nature is received by everyone who exercises saving faith. "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*" (1 John 5:1). "*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*" (1 John 5:11). This entrance into newness of life is not by means of any sacrament, by any church membership, nor by any human endeavor. John calls it a gift; it can only be received, not earned. God freely offers it to all; yet no one has it without specifically asking for it. Many who have grown up in a religious atmosphere presume and assume that they are right with God, but have never personally plead for forgiveness and new life in Christ. The reason they have no inner confident assurance is that they do not have the inner reality.

We as believers can look back to compare our former lives which were dead in trespasses and sins with our new lives in Christ Jesus. Such a change cannot be accomplished by the flesh, by the will of the flesh, or by the will of man (John 1:12-13). If we are alive in Christ, it is not by some human accomplishment, but only as God imparted a new nature to us. Making men new creatures is a special work of the Holy Spirit. Every new convert is a contemporary "miracle" of God's grace, an activity of the Holy Spirit. One life radically changed is a more important witness of the work of the Holy Spirit today than the inexplicable healing of a hundred from cancer. Our own conversion change is a witness for ourselves and for others. Every soul we see come to the Savior and begin newness of life in Him is a clear evidence of God at work

today. The power of the change is not produced by the convert but is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

His Spirit Indwells Us

Second, the promised Comforter has been given to indwell every believer. *"Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13). "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us" (1 John 3:24). "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John 5:10).*

This inner eternal Being actively teaches, leads unto truth, stimulates unto righteousness, and endeavors to warn us concerning sin. His inner communication is different from that of the conscience, but often says the same thing as the conscience. The tool of His communication is the Bible. Since He does not speak of Himself (John 16:13), any direct or audible voice a person thinks he hears must be that of a demon, not of the indwelling Spirit.

This resident Comforter dwells within each true believer and teaches believers as they abide in Him. *"The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him" (1 John 2:27). "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:20-21).* John reminds his readers that the Holy Spirit within is greater than the spirit which pervades the world. *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that*

is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). This infinite Person dwelling in this human body-temple both instructs us concerning the Word and protects us against Satan and the world. Each believer has a new spiritual life and also has as an inner resident, the eternal Holy Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom 8:9).

His Spirit Continues to Change Us

The third, probably the most important test for our personal encouragement, is the realization that the Holy Spirit who has effected radical change, from spiritual death to spiritual life, continues to change us. Assurance that we are children of God never comes from listing what we have done for God, only from realizing what He has done in and through us. We do not work to attain salvation; we show by our works that we are saved (Eph 2:4-10). As we grow in grace and knowledge, we have increased confidence and dwindling doubt. John's check list is remarkably helpful. John mentions four ways the Holy Spirit changes us. It is well for each believer to test recent changes performed by the Holy Spirit in these four areas. These are crucial to our growth and our assurance.

(1) John's first area of spiritual evaluation is that we have both a new love and an increasing love for God and the things of God. "*We love Him, because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). A lost man is at enmity with God (Rom 5:10), fearing God, hating God and the things of God. A saved man loves God and all that is God's and all who are God's. A new believer is conscious that He lives in the sight of God and desires that all that he does merits God's approval. Throughout each day he repeatedly says thanks to God for abundant blessings. The believer has a new object of love; he has also a new ability to love, made clear by the use of italics in the King James translation, "*We love because He first loved us*" (1

John 4:19). "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:5).

Weighing the reality of our love for God is something we must do for ourselves; no one else can advise us. We alone can judge whether a changed lifestyle is but self-induced reformation or the result of the divine work of the Holy Spirit. Who or what we love is evident in things we choose to do. We spend time with those we love. When we love God we converse with Him freely and frequently. We want to be in places where His name is honored, where He is worshiped.

Love is seeking the best for another. Love to God is the greatest commandment. "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:37-39). Love of God produces in us a love of others. We endeavor to do unto God and unto others that which He considers best. We aid and serve others as He expects us to as children of God.

This new love has produced some drastic changes in our everyday lives. Things we formerly hated we now love. Before we were saved, when Christians witnessed to us, we were irritated; now when we hear a personal testimony of how God has worked, our hearts are thrilled. Before, we detested requirements of the law; now we desire to do His will. These new loves are fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), not something that an unsaved man does in order to try to satisfy God.

One who loves God also hates what God hates. John uses the figure of light and darkness; the two do not mix. *"This then is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth"* (1 John 1:5-6). We walk in the light; we love Him who is pure light; we oppose Satan's realm of darkness. Whereas sin had controlled us, now we

have victory. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"* (1 John 5:3-4). Increasingly as we walk with God we manifest a greater love for God.

(2) John's second test of self-examination is recognizing that we have a new love for God's Word. The Bible made little sense to us prior to conversion; now it is a daily delight. Meditating on the Bible and being molded by it has been the strength of our new life. *"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father"* (1 John 2:24).

Like a love letter, the Bible has a personal significance for us. We are aware of God speaking to us, using His Word. A verse will encourage us. A passage will convict us of a needed change. A portion of a sermon meets the very need that troubles us. Because He continues to speak to us through His Word, we know that God loves us, that He wants to guide us in our daily walk. John as a messenger of God could write, *"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"* (1 John 4:6). We love teachers of truth and react against teachers of error.

A believer can have confidence if he endeavors to keep God's commands. *"And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments"* (1 John 2:3). *"He that saith I know Him and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked"* (1 John 2:4-6). We learn to walk as Jesus walked. *"If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him"* (1 John

2:29). Our victory follows from our new love for God. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous"* (1 John 5:3).

A lost man may determine to spend more time reading the Bible, which of course is good for Him. But a saved man inwardly wants to read more, to hear more, to meditate much on the good things God makes known. To deal with the despair of doubt, review those occasions when the Scripture was precious. Let God reassure you over and over that you are one of His precious sheep.

(3) As his third test, John explains that a child of God no longer walks in the ways of the world. *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:6-7). Our interests now are different from what they were before we were saved. We have new tastes, new satisfactions. We appreciate God's command that we *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"* (1 John 2:15-17).

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to joyous confidence in Christ is the greed and materialism of the old life still holding sway. A believer is to mortify the lusts of the flesh (Col 3:5). He is not to be conformed to the ways of the fleshly life (Rom 12:2). Some who show an interest in the things of the Lord are turned aside by the attractions of the world and the deceitfulness of riches (Matt 13:22). Some have forsaken the way of the Lord, having loved this present world (2 Tim 4:10). John says of such, *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have*

continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

Because we were given a new nature when we believed on Jesus, God says we are now sons of God. *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God [which we already, actually are]: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3:1).* Believers are in the world but have a life different from the world. Those who have not been born again do not comprehend our loyalty to our supreme King (John 3:3).

A born again believer has inner power to overcome the things of the world. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5).* Realizing that all we do is known by God and that one day we shall give account before Him, *"every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).*

(4) John's most important test of an authentic new life is that we love the brethren. *"This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:11).* God has put within us as His children a desire to do good unto all men, and particularly unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Genuine love does something for the benefit of another. *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 John 5:2).* We can *"know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14).* *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12).* Of all the various things that John lists in this epistle as personal tests for our encouragement, this one, that we love fellow believers, is mentioned more often than any other. We

are to love the congregation of believers and the congregating of saints. We are regularly to fellowship with Christians. Disruptions and church squabbles ought never to be a part of the interaction of God's people.

Love is not mere emotion; love endeavors to benefit.

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:16-17). Love is more than mere mushy emotion; it is a deep inner concern that pushes hands and feet into action.

This love of fellow believers will not be forced nor will it ever be a cause of disruption. *"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him"* (1 John 2:10). *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"* (1 John 3:18). Such love is characteristic, and it also is commanded: *"This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment"* (1 John 3:23). *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8). *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another"* (1 John 4:11). *"And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also"* (1 John 4:21). This love was so characteristic, so genuine, and so unusual in the first century that pagan Romans marveled concerning Christians, "Behold how they love one another."

Those who do not love fellow believers may not be saved. *"He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now"* (1 John 2:9). *"He that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* (1 John 2:11). *"In this the children of God are manifest and*

the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). "If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

John has been known as the Apostle of love. That is an appropriate label. In this epistle he makes clear the greatness of God's love and the effect of that love in the lives of those who accept it. The tests of true conversion are not, Do I do this? or, Do I do that? but evaluating the heart source, Why do I do what I do? John's four tests which manifest a dead heart or an enlivened heart weigh our true devotion. Do I really love God? Do I love His written message to me? Do I have a dwindling love for the temporalities of this life? Do I genuinely love others who love my God?

Conclusion

What is the right thing for a doubter to do? Realizing what God has done is effective for dispelling doubt. Recounting what we have done or mulling over how we feel can only lead to pride or despair. Instead, review who Jesus is, what Jesus did for you, and what the Holy Spirit has done in you. If you do not remember ever asking God to save you, ask now. God is not offended if we pray, "Lord, if I'm not saved, save me now." He wants all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). Jesus assured us, "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Believer, when dark clouds of despair darken your outlook, raise your eyes unto the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2), the Son of God; contemplate His love and sacrifice for you; and rejoice in recalling the many ways the Holy Spirit has already changed you from glory unto glory. Rejoice too that that process will one day be complete, when we in a glorified state will forever live fully apart from sin.