



Almost a Christian-Part 3

Examining the Difference that Really Matters

Pastor Mike Fabarez

So how do you choose a good watermelon? It's a bit of an art form, isn't it—picking out the right watermelon. In our house, it involves a lot of thumping and tapping, listening for the right noise to answer back in the watermelon. Then there's the weight test. Pick it up. Got to see if it's heavy for its size. That's a good little trick—see if it's going to be a good watermelon or not.

How about a cantaloupe? Picking a good cantaloupe. It's a little different. At least for us, there's no thumping or tapping involved, but there's a lot of poking and prodding going on with the cantaloupe choice—poking in the right spots on the cantaloupe. You know, kind of a science to that.

Or how about a peach? One of those peaches that when you open it just falls off the pit, you know? Juicy, good-tasting peach. Well, that enlists your nose, I think, as a good way to choose that. You got to pick that up, smell it, see if it's got that peachy smell to it or not. A lot of handling going on with that too. But you don't just walk in and look at them and pick one.

As a matter of fact, if you go to the grocery store, the produce department, you'll find people doing lots of strange things to pick their fruit. I mean, they have all kinds of methods. And the reason they do all that, of course, is they have to assess what's going on beneath the surface. Their goal is to go through all these crazy diagnostics so that they can figure out whether or not what's inside is worth buying.

You see where this illustration is headed, right? There is a clear calling in our lives to inspect some fruit—to be vigilant about inspecting fruit, first and foremost, in our own lives. And let's say that right up front for those of you that are excited about inspecting other people's fruit. The pattern of Scripture is—and we've already quoted this passage twice now—2 Corinthians chapter 13, that's the third time, verse 5, says, summon yourself, test yourself to see whether you're of the faith.

Or as Psalm 139 says, in a moment of vulnerability before God in verses 23 and 24, the psalmist says, "Search me, O God, try my heart, test me, see if there's any wicked way in me." It's important for us to do that because the consequences of what happens when we find out whether this is good fruit or bad fruit—it has eternal consequences. It has lasting ramifications.

So doing this is important. And it's important that we spend enough time and effort looking and evaluating the product of our own lives. I mean, if we're going to go to the effort to pick out \$10 worth of fruit, we'd certainly—it would behoove us, and God would certainly encourage us—to do some inspection inside. And that's what Hebrews chapter 6—I mean, you'd have to agree—has prompted us to do: to take a good internal look at where we're at with God.

Because it started in verses 4 and 5 with some real stark realizations, and that is that you can have lots of good things going on in your life and not be saved. That you can have a lot of benefits and a lot of enrichment going on, and people can look at you and go, "Look at him—churchgoer, gives in the offering, you know, volunteers for service projects," but in reality, there is a sense in which you can't tell just by looking at it. You've got to get beneath the surface. There has to be some evaluation that's honest, transparent, authentic, that says to God like the psalmist, "Search me, God. I need some help. Help me evaluate what's going on inside of me."



So if you have your Bibles, let's continue in this quest to figure out what's going on. And today, much like week number one, there is provided for us a wonderful matrix that will help us recognize the difference that matters.

Because if it's not going to church or giving money or serving, then what is it? Well, it's not that simple. Just like a good, you know, external avocado, you know, it's not enough. I've got to know what's happening inside. And so it is with our lives.

We've looked at verses 4 and 5 and been astonished by that—that you can go through all of that and have all that good stuff, and yet in verse 6, fall away from this community of the redeemed and from Christianity altogether. And if you have that serious encounter with the truth and then you seriously turn your back on it, we said there are serious consequences. And we looked at those last week.

But then he gives this illustration. Look at it in verse number 7. He now analogizes the congregation that he's writing to, and he says, really, there's two kinds of people here—two kinds of church-going people. There's the land, verse number 7, that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, and it produces a crop that's useful to those for whom it is farmed, and it receives the blessing of God.

But land, verse 8, that produces thorns and thistles, it's worthless and it's in danger of being cursed, and in the end it will be burned.

Then he says, I know this has been heavy and this has been serious—even though we speak like this, verse number 9, dear friends, we're confident of better things in your case, things that accompany salvation. He's just come off the negative analogy of a land that's not producing fruit—good fruit at least. It's producing stuff, but it's not good stuff. And he says, we don't expect that from you. We expect that key phrase, bottom of verse 9: things that accompany salvation. And that's been a key for us understanding this whole text.

Let's take this first analogy in verse number 7, and hopefully you found your worksheet today, and let's just take the parts apart of the first soil, the first land, if you will. I called it land number one.

There are three elements to this in land number one. There's the description that the land is drinking in the rain. Then it produces a crop—a useful crop, I might add. And then it receives the blessing. So it's a very simple analogy. It's an illustration, a parable, if you will, that the preacher here is giving to his congregation in the first century. And that is, some of you are like this. You're like that land that's drinking in all that rain, and then you produce a crop, and then you receive the blessing.

Let's just try and understand this if we can.

The rain—what are we talking about? Well, we just looked at verses 4 and 5 and saw all these wonderful benefits, all these wonderful things that can happen to you in church. When you get around God's Word, the teaching of God's Word, God's people—they're blessings. And we talked about common grace on steroids two weeks ago where you get a lot of good things that God will do in your life just by associating with the right people. And so there are all these benefits. There's the teaching of God's Word. There's the conviction of sin. There's the steering of your life through all the challenges because you've got the right instructions. Yeah, that's great. You're soaking in the benefits of God, the grace of God.



Producing a crop—what are we talking about here? We’ve talked about, in chapters 4 and 5 in particular, the fact that God expects us to hear his voice, not harden our hearts, and do what he says—to obey him, to be involved in doing something—to use the word in verse number 7, something that’s useful—to be serving God, to be loving God, to be obeying God.

Receives the blessing—now, again, you could step back and say the blessing of God, that sounds pretty generic. But what’s the whole focus in this text? If you compare it to verse number 8, and the analogy on the other side of this matrix is burned, we’re not talking about just your general blessings and goosebumps that we’ve already examined in verses 4 and 5. We’re talking about salvation here. We’re talking about your residence at the end of life. We’re talking about where you end up.

And the analogy here is: you drink in all this good benefit from God, you obey God and serve God, and in the end, you’re saved.

Now, we’ve tried to make sure that we don’t misunderstand that it’s not the service and obedience that brings us salvation, but the analogy is that’s what it looks like. I today should, as I receive the benefits of God, do what God says, and in the end, I’m in heaven. You’ve got to get the equation right, but that’s the picture of land number one.

The focus on this text, it needs to be clear, and some of us miss it because it’s not specifically spelled out, but it should, in this parable, become clear as we analyze it.

Number one, where does that rain come from? Where does this blessing come from? Well, we saw it up in verse number 4. It’s the kind of giving and generosity that comes from the triune God. It comes from following the template of Christ. It comes from the conviction of the Spirit. It comes from God. God is the one giving these blessings. And then, of course, in the bottom of the verse, verse number 7, it’s clearly stated. The blessing is the blessing of God.

So we’ve got the investment of God. We’ve got the blessing of God.

What we may miss, particularly in a 21st century church, is this middle thing here—the crop.

Now look back at your text in verse number 7. The crop is described as useful to those for whom it is farmed. Now again, we’re so man-centered in our thinking today that we can look at that and think, well, who’s it farmed for? Well, I guess us. We’re the beneficiaries.

No, it’s not us. God is seeing himself as the one producing all of these good investments in the soil, and he expects a return from that. He expects that there will be a useful crop—for who? For the one who farmed it. Who farmed it? God did. Who brought all the rain? Who cultivated it? God did.

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, it’s not the people serving you that you are in turn to serve. It’s ultimately that they’re just gardeners that are helping you serve God.

So let’s just make that clear here. Not only does the investment come from God and the benefit come from God, the crop is to be produced for God. It’s useful to who? To God. See, that’s the point. And let’s hone in on that because that’s really what this is about.



If we're going to distinguish verses 7 and 8, one of the first things that we notice is that the crop that is produced is useful to the ones for whom it is farmed. It is useful to God, and that's so important for us to recognize.

As a matter of fact, let's put it down this way, number one on your outline if you're taking notes: it's a Godward focus. It is a lifestyle where the fruit that is born is born because my orientation, my focus, my direction in life is now Godward.

That's different.

If we really get into chapter 6 of Hebrews, we find out that it's going to be hard to distinguish fruit because they're going to be sitting there looking the same. But the thumping test, the tapping test, the smelling test, whatever—if we can analyze what's going on underneath—we can find out that some of this fruit is selfish and some of this fruit is God-centered. It's Godward.

Let me just prove this to you if I can by going back. Let's go back to verses 4 and 5. You don't need to write in this down because you already wrote it down if you were here two weeks ago. We took the five lists—the five items on the list rather—in verses 4 and 5, and we just gave them, you know, contemporary titles. And what are we talking? We summarized them, and then compared them to what they ought to be—that there's a way to engage in this and it's partial and it's not complete.

And really what you'll find if you compare these—it was a big verses if you remember. There was a line and it was this versus that, and this versus that. You remember that? That worksheet? Okay, let's just go through it real quick.

We said number one: I have some new insights. Don't need to write this down because you got it. Have some new insights, right? Been enlightened by the Spirit. We said versus what? Versus I am a new person. It's more than enlightenment. It's a transformation of who I am.

Now look at the difference here. Who's the focus on the insights? Well, I am. I got new stuff up here. I understand things better. I understand life better, okay? Versus I'm a new person. Why does God make us a new person? The Bible says because the old person's displeasing to him. The old person, the heart of stone, he can't fellowship with. He can't have any benefit or glory from that. So he makes us new so we bring glory to him. The focus goes from me to him.

Look at the next one: I have some new blessings—the generosity of God, the gift of God. He's giving me stuff. And isn't it great? I've got some new blessings in my life. I connect with the church. I go. I'm involved. What do you get? Blessings in my life.

Versus what we said: being captivated by God's grace. And we compared that. We said, well look at the difference here. This is a different focus. What does this do here? I say, isn't it great? Look at the advantages and the commodity of church. It's great.

Here we're saying I'm captivated by God's grace. What does that do? That leads me to worship him, to praise him. Do you remember what we looked at then when we studied this in Ephesians 1? This will be the theme through eternity—that if I understand God's grace, I will be praising him from this point on. Well, the focus here is clearly, clearly God.



How about the third one? The third one was: I have some new convictions. Spirit's doing some work in my life. And as we looked at the sequential order of the work of the Spirit, that initially he comes to convict us of sin, and then righteousness and judgment, the concept is, yeah, it's going to help my life. I'll have, as we talked about, my conscience now on steroids. There'll be a sense of heightened awareness of what's right and wrong, and that's helpful for my life. New convictions.

And we said, but versus what? It's not the external work of the Spirit. It's this residency of the Spirit in my life. It's now a different relationship with the Spirit. And again, why does the Spirit invade my life? The Bible says—and we looked at Ezekiel, remember that, 34—it's to prompt me to obey him. It's to lead me and direct me to please him, to move us, the Scripture said, to follow his decrees. The focus here is on God. The new Spirit in my life is there to prompt me to live for him.

What was the next one? Number, what was it, four? I benefited from the Bible—tasted the good Word of God. What's the point? I can sit in church, get the benefits of Bible teaching, and put some things to work in my life, in my marriage, in my parenting, and you know what? You'll be better for it. We said that's different than the resolve of the Christian, the real converted heart, who says, I will obey God's Word. And we looked at Psalm 119. You remember that?

Well, look at the difference. I've benefited from the Bible versus a resolve to obey God's Word. Why? Because I'm going to be obedient to him. I'm going to obey him. I'm going to serve him. I'm going to do what he wants.

Lastly, we said we've seen God do big things—tasted the power of the coming age. We've watched God do these big things. We've cheered him on. Look at the great things God has done versus being the target of that power. I have been transformed by his power. And again, the theme is the same. Why is this? To bring glory to God. I'm different now because I am someone who's no longer alienated from God. I am now able to bring glory to God. Before, my righteous deeds as filthy rags, but now my righteous deeds bring glory to God.

Do you see the focus? It shifts from I'm in this and it looks good to other people and I'm a good ethical churchgoer, but really it's not about God. It's about me, versus the truly converted heart. It's a Godward orientation.

And here's the thing. You'll never know the difference by looking at the exterior. You'll see someone serving in church, praying in prayer meetings, studying the Bible in Bible studies, but this is the thump test, and you got to start with your own heart. Say, why am I doing this? What's the motive here? Look for the Godward focus.

Turn with me real quickly if you would to Genesis chapter 3. I want to just remind you—and I know this is basic stuff—but maybe you've never made this connection the way we're making it now, and that is that Genesis chapter 3, when we're introduced to sin for the first time in the Bible, it is presented to us as a decision that Eve was making—and Adam ultimately was making too—to shift the focus, to move the center and the concern and the orientation from God to themselves.

Take a look at it. Verse number 1 describes the crafty serpent, and he says to the woman at the bottom of verse 1, "Hey, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? Did he tell you that?"



And the woman—look at the innocence in verse 2—“Yeah, we can eat from the fruit of the tree in the garden, but there is one tree that God said,” verse 3, “that we’re not supposed to eat from—that one in the middle there.” Look at the innocence there. “Yeah, God said it. I’m going to do it. That’s right. But, you know, our pantry’s full. The cupboards are full. The table’s full. We got all kinds of stuff. God’s given us so much. Yeah, so what? He said don’t do that. If that’s what he wants, that’s what we’re going to do.”

And then Satan creeps this temptation in. Verse 4: “He’s lying to you. You’re surely not going to die,” serpent says to the woman. “For God knows this, that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened.” Now, doesn’t that sound good, Eve? Don’t you want your eyes opened? “You’ll be like God.” Wouldn’t you like to be more like God? God’s holding back on you. “You’ll know good and evil,” which there was some truth to that, but little did Eve know she didn’t want that.

Verse 6. When the woman—now notice this, this is a key sentence—when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, for who? For herself. And pleasing to the eye—to whom did it please? Whose eyes did it please? Hers. And desirable for gaining wisdom—for whose benefit? Her own. She took some and ate it. And as I’ve often said, she gave some to her stupid husband. And he ate it too.

Do you see what just happened there? Satan tempted them to disobey God. Disobedience is defined in the archetypal sin of the Bible here as someone shifting their focus from, yeah, God said it, I’ll do it, God’s in charge, it’s his garden, he’s good to us, to a, “Wait a minute, what about me? I’m not getting what I deserve. God’s keeping something from me. I see it, I like it. I like what it’s going to do for me. I want it.” And all of a sudden now sin had entered the world. Why? Because we had shifted from a God-centered focus to a me-centered focus.

So if we’re going to say Godward, let’s just compare it this way in the little box next to it versus what? Versus meward. This is not really a word, but I made it up, but you get the point. Comparison.

Now ask the question: can I go to church with a Godward focus? Absolutely. Can I go to church with a meward focus? Yeah, I can do that. Can I pray a prayer with a Godward focus? Yeah, I can do that. Could I pray a prayer with a—yeah, you can do that too. Bible study, Partners program, giving money in the offering—all of that. You can do it all with a meward focus.

If you don’t believe it, ask a group of people in the first century called the Pharisees. They were great at it. They did all the right things. They didn’t have the right heart. They were focused on themselves.

Please recognize this: that the Christian life is not about doing these good things. That’s the external shell and it looks good. It’s about making sure that the motive underneath it all is Godward, God-centered, God-focused. And that’s a radical shift because people can go to church all the time with the wrong motive.

Think about it. Think about our appeal in the average gospel presentation. The appeal in the average gospel presentation is: God will benefit you. Won’t that be great? And in reality, here’s what the Christian life is all about—2 Corinthians 5:15. Oh, I quote this all the time. It’s the most underquoted passage in all the Scripture. That’s why I’m going to make you turn to it.



Please, 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Take a look at this text. 2 Corinthians 5:15. You don't see it on Dayspring cards. It's not framed in the Christian bookstore. And yet it ought to be because it's one short, terse verse that helps us understand in short phrases what the Christian life is all about. And yet, we don't hear much about it.

But look at how clear and crystalline this is. This is so concentrated. This is it. This is what the Christian life is all about.

2 Corinthians 5:15, look at it: "And he who died for all"—he died for all—"that those who live for him should no longer live for"—what's the word? "Themselves." But, you know who you're supposed to live for? For him. "Who died for them and was raised again."

Think about that. That is the Christian life. He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and rose again.

I'm supposed to live for Christ now. Here's the problem. It is so easy to say Christ is the center of my life when in reality he's nothing more than your favorite pill, right? I mean, it's like people say, I'm into this for all the me reasons, and I'm so thrilled with what Christ is doing for me that I've taken him out of the medicine cabinet and I put him on the mantle of the fireplace. "Look, we're into Jesus." Why? "Because he's so wonderful for us. He's changed our lives." See?

When in reality, the Christian life is summed up this way: he died for us so that we wouldn't live for ourselves anymore. He died for us so we'd live for him. That's the Godward focus.

And you can look at the shell of your life and you can say, I'm doing this, this, this, this, and this. And you can say, that's what Christians do. And in reality, yeah, that is what Christians do, but maybe they do it with a different motive. And it's so important that we check our motives. A converted life, a new heart, is going to be a heart that says, I'm here to serve God. And that's a different orientation than I would say most of the modern church touting Christ on their banners. He's their favorite placebo, because in reality, it doesn't have the power to save when you are utilizing Christ as a self-help program.

One more passage. I wasn't going to turn you there, but I need to. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. The point of Christianity is that God is the center. He's the hub. We're a spoke. We are not taking Christ and God as a nice help, self-help program for us to enhance our lives. The point is he's God, and he needs to be God in our lives and in our family and in our relationships and in our work. He's in charge. He's the center.

Take a look at 1 Thessalonians 1. Drop down to verse number 7. He said, you became—this is Paul talking to the Thessalonian church—a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Now, whatever he's going to say, we're going to say, this is good. This is the right Christian life right here. Well, what kind of template were they?

Verse 8: the Lord's message, it rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we don't need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you—now note this, underline it—turned to God from what? Idols.



What's an idol? Anything else that's the hub of my life except for God. That's an idol. Whatever the center of your life is, if it's not the triune God, that's idolatry.

But you've turned from your idols, and they were various and sundry, and now you've turned to God. And if you don't think that's clear enough, look at the next phrase: to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Our Christian life, our orientation now, is to the horizon of the coming Son, like sitting on a dock, waiting for the ship, saying that's what my life is all about—the coming Son. He's my redeemer and he's coming to save us. And my focus is to serve God. That's what the Christian life is—a model for the Christian life.

Instead today, our testimonials with our favorite story of a converted Christian is often the, you know, look at the great things God did for me, and I used to be here, and now I'm here, and isn't it great? You need to try Jesus, too. Try Jesus. Like he's some new, you know, fruit drink or something. "Try Jesus." What are you talking about? Jesus is the king of the universe, and everyone will bow naked before him one day. Try him? I don't get it. We're not supposed to try him. We're supposed to serve him. He's the king.

He died for us so that we wouldn't live for ourselves anymore, but we live for him who died and rose again.

Look for Godward focus, which means you got to get below the surface of the good deed and you got to look at the motive.

There's another soil—land, if you will—that's what he calls it in verse number 8. Land number two, I'll call it.

Now look at the elements here. There are three elements here, but one that's assumed. And if it's not in there, it doesn't make any sense. The comparison and the contrast between verse 7 and 8 is between two lands who we can safely assume—which is the point of verses 4 through 10—drinks in the rain just like the other land.

Now he didn't repeat that. He says in verse 7, the land drinks in rain often falling on it and produces a crop. Verse 8 he says, "But land that produces thorns and thistles"—what's the assumption here that people in the pews in the first century listening to this sermon say? "Yeah, they're sitting right next to me and receiving all the same benefits of church that I am." They're drinking in the rain as well.

Then it says three more things. What do they produce? Well, they produce thorns and thistles, it says. So they're not producing a crop. They're producing something—like the richest, most vibrant things in my garden—they're called weeds, right? They're robust. Look at that. Say, "When did you plant that, honey?" "Well, I didn't," right? It's not—it's a weed. They're producing something. It's just not real fruit, see?

Then two things. What's the response? You're in danger of being cursed. That's what the next phrase says. That land is in danger of being cursed, and in the end is burned.



Hmm. What's that all about?

Let's try and piece this one together. Land that drinks in the rain—we've already covered that. That's the benefits of verses 4 and 5. And the point is everybody here in this composite group in the first century, you got people that are bearing fruit and people that aren't, but they're all sitting there receiving the same benefits—certainly on a different level with a different orientation, but they got the same benefits.

Produces thorns—what's that? Well, in comparison to what we've just seen, and what we see in the normal usage of the concept and analogy of fruit in Scripture, thorns must be disobedience. If fruit and crops is an obedience and a Godward focus, this must be a selfish focus. This must be sin—classic sin. Genesis 3, I'm in it for me. That rhymes.

In danger of being cursed—here's where commentators struggle a little bit. What are we talking about? In danger of being cursed, and then it gets burned? Are these the same thing? Let me say they're not the same thing. Now, I know this is a parable right here. We're doing the best to understand these components.

But in danger of being cursed—and I don't want to read too much into that word—but the curse of the Scripture is given for us in Genesis 3, right? We call that the curse. And what was the essence of that? "In the day you eat of the fruit, you will surely die."

Now, there were two kinds of death that the Scripture makes very clear. As a matter of fact, the book of Revelation says you're all going to go through the first one—death. That's called biological death. The second one is the one you don't want. The second death—that's literally what it's called in the book of Revelation—that's a place of outer darkness. He calls it the lake of fire. It's a place where you get retribution for your sin.

Well, the danger of being cursed—ultimately you could say, well, there's two components to that. And I think they're both listed here. This is the analogy usually in Scripture about the final one. This one, clearly the first one, because they're in danger of it. Common grace is life.

Here are these people that are, if you look at verse 6 again, they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. And in doing that, see, with your sin, here's the thing: you're in danger of being cursed. What are we talking about? Let me propose this: we're talking about death—physical death. You're in danger of getting annihilated. You're in danger of, as the Scripture says later, insulting the Spirit of grace, and God might just take you out. You're in danger of that.

Now, common grace prevails for most people, but you're in danger of that. You better watch out, man. Producing thorns and God's giving you all this good stuff—it's like the farmer is ready to curse the ground, or Jesus cursing the fig tree. It should be producing fruit, but it's not. Look at the advantages of this, and you're not producing fruit. You're in danger of being cursed. You're in danger of death.

In the end, it'll be burned. Does that seem obvious? That's an obvious analogy. We're talking about no salvation. H-E, double toothpicks, right? We're talking about bad place. Retribution. Hell. In the end it'll be burned.



Now, I'm going to learn from this. I'm going to make sure, hey, I don't want to fall into any of this. I don't want to be this. I want to live in verse 9—better things concerning me, things that accompany salvation.

So what's the focus here? Well, this would certainly be my focus. I want to make sure that my life doesn't produce thorns, right? I don't want to produce thorns. I don't want the reality of my life to receive all this blessing and not produce good works, good deeds, service to God, Godward orientation.

Let's put it this way. Number two: we've got to look for more victory over sin. And I put it this way because the thorns is a pattern and production of someone's life, which is a process, obviously.

The Christian life is defined in Scripture as a kind of progression from salvation, which we call justification—made right before God—and then we begin a process of what we compare it to, sanctification. I am now growing up in my faith. And as I grow up in my faith, I should be changing.

I've quoted this many times, but at least jot it down: 2 Corinthians 3, verse 17 and 18. 2 Corinthians 3:17 and 18. You can remember this text. It's the text that says that because of God's Spirit in our lives, we are being—here's how it's put—transformed into his likeness, Christ's likeness, with an ever-increasing glory. The point is, God's work in us is moving us from, yeah, he kind of looks like Christ, and yeah, he looks more like Christ, to yeah, he looks even more like Christ.

Or to put it in the words of 1 John—this one, let's turn to this one—1 John chapter 2.

1 John is a fascinating epistle. It is so short, and it's like John takes all this theology from the gospel of John and puts it into this little five-chapter book. And in chapter 1, he's setting us up. He's talking about the fact that we are not without sin, that even Christians, we are punctuated by sin. But if we confess our sins, faithful and just forgive us, cleanse us from all, our relationship with God can be patched. But don't claim you're without sin. Whoever claims you're without sin is lying.

Chapter 3 says what? If your life is characterized by continual sin, then you're not saved. Okay?

What stands between chapter 1 and chapter 3? Chapter 2. What is chapter 2 talking about? Look at this great discussion of the progression and growth Christian life. We call it sanctification.

Drop down to verse 12, 1 John 2:12. Now, you've got to sort this out. He doesn't put it in a linear fashion for us, but he starts with children. "I write to you, dear children," you see it, "because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name." Hey, isn't that great? Your sins are forgiven. Good little pat on the head. Good, kids.

Then he says to the other end of the spectrum, "I write to you fathers, because you've known him who is from the beginning," which is how he started his gospel, John 1:1, remember? The complexities of this deep God and, man, you know him. Oh, you got your sins forgiven. You know him.



What's in between? "I write to you, young men," bottom of verse 13, "because you've overcome the evil one." You see what's between having my sins forgiven and deeply, intimately knowing God? I'm overcoming Satan in my life.

"I write to you, dear children"—he repeats this now—"because you've known the Father." Your sins are forgiven. You know the Father. Isn't it great? You've been introduced to God.

Verse 14: "I write to you, fathers, because you've known him who is from the beginning." He repeats that phrase. You've got this profound intimacy with God.

Now, verse 14—look at this—here's the focus: "I write to you, young men," which is where the audience of 1 John was. They needed to be strong. And that's what it says. "You are strong and the word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one." See that?

What stands between spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity? God's Word is abiding in you even more deeply. You're overcoming sin and temptation in your life. You're growing.

You will see if you are sanctified and being sanctified—more and more overcoming of sin, thorns and thistles, disobedience. Because the moment I'm justified, I'm not instantly and completely sanctified. God has a process for me to start on.

Look for more victory over sin. And that's what we should see.

Which, by the way, let me say this. If real fruit in my life is a continual progress of being more and more like Christ and overcoming more and more sin, doesn't it necessitate that I'm aware of sin in my life? I've got to be aware of it. Now, here's the thing. I've known people that go to church and do all the right things. They're in church. They sing the songs. They know the Bible verses. But when you ask them—if you get to know them and you're under the surface and you try to find out—tell me about the sins you struggle with, "I don't know." You can quickly discover some of these people have no consciousness of sin at all.

And if you're growing to know the one who was from the beginning, guess what you're aware of increasingly in your life? Sin.

You want an example of that? Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah 6—here's the prophet. Remember the story? He's now shown a vision of God Almighty on the throne, exalted, train filling the temple. And the first thing Isaiah says is what? "Woe to me. I am ruined. I'm a man of unclean lips. And I live among a people of unclean lips." What does he instantly see? His own sin and the sin of his people.

You cannot come to know increasingly this great God with increasing knowledge and intimacy if you don't have an increasing awareness of sin. As you do, God will show you more and more victory over that sin.

And it's a process, because once you get those things taken care of, God shows you more, and you're cleaning up more and more, and God is helping through his Spirit—your spirit—together God is working to overcome sin in your life. But you've got to be aware of it. That's a good thing.

You want to look at the fruit in your life, ask yourself, how conscious of sin am I in my daily life? Do I see it? Do I feel it? Does it grieve me the way it grieves the Spirit? If the Spirit's not in your



life, you won't have that grieving. You're left to your conscience. The Spirit dwells in you—you've got increasing conviction of sin. And if God is in you, there's an increasing process of sanctification. More victory over sin.

Now, the real thing about this text is not just the thorns. It's that the thorns are being produced when you're watering it all the time, right? My garden—it's not much of a garden, my weed palace—is watered every morning. And I don't know why. I should turn it off. But I'm investing water in July on the flower bed and it's producing weeds. It's not all that way. Mostly in the backyard.

The problem and the tension is the fact of the combination of these two things. I want to see less thorns in my life and thistles.

But the real travesty of all of this is that he is talking to people that go to church every Sunday. The juxtaposition of the benefits versus the product is what is concerning in this text. And if you look at people sitting in the pew getting the blessing of God every week and still producing sin, I'm thinking to myself, what kind of sin can they be producing? It can't be flagrant or they'd be shown the door. It can't be out there and obvious or these people wouldn't sit comfortably in worship.

What is this sin? It's got to be a kind of sin that Jesus talked about all the time. It's called hypocrisy. It's called the kind of sin which looks okay on the outside but underneath it's not good at all.

Think about that. Jesus told how many stories about people that struggled with this problem? He said, you Pharisees are like whitewashed tombs. Now think about that. We put a dead body in here. We embalmed it the best we could, and there it is, and I'm sure inside it's a mess, but you know what? It's whitewashed. We sure put a nice glossy paint coat on it last week. See the tomb? Looks pretty, doesn't it? Don't open it. See? That's hypocrisy.

As a matter of fact, I've given you this before, but hypocrisy is a transliteration of the Greek word. It's a compound word. *Hupo* is the prefix. *Hupo* is the preposition "under." And the second half comes from the word *krino*, the verb which in Greek means to judge or assess the truth. *Hupo*, *krino*. *Hupo* means you've got to get under something to get to the truth. You've got to get under some kind of veneer, some kind of facade, some kind of external to see the real deal—to judge accurately what it is. It is the outside of the coffin and the inside, which is, Jesus—but it's full of dead man's bones. That is hypocrisy. It looks good on the outside, but it's not real good on the inside.

Classic hypocrisy is what he's addressing in this text because there they sit every Sunday drinking in the rain and all the benefits of church, but there's sin in their life.

What kind of sin could that be? Flagrant? Probably not flagrant. It's probably the kind that's secret. It's the kind that people can't see. It's the kinds of things that are going on inside that cannot be seen by the person sitting next to you, but you know they're happening. That's what we're talking about here. It's called hypocrisy.

Matter of fact, let me show you an extreme example in 2 Peter 2. 2 Peter 2. This is an extreme example because it has to do with people that were teaching in the church. If you're a flagrant, carousing sinner who's out bar hopping and womanizing, you're probably not going to get a post teaching Sunday school, right? In most churches, at least. Okay? We're going to say you're not qualified.



Whatever we're talking about in 2 Peter 2, all you got to do is look up to the top of the paragraph. This is about people teaching in the church. They have teaching posts in Sunday school. And in verse number 19, Peter pops in and makes this assessment about them.

2 Peter 2, verse 19: they promise them freedom. They're promising other people freedom—the people that they teach—while they themselves are slaves to depravity. They're stumbling, they're falling, they're in sin, they're entrapped in it, but they're up there talking about, hey, you guys can be freed from sin. That's hypocrisy, obviously, right?

Then he goes on: for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. And there are a lot of church goers that put on the right facade and even do the right things and even, according to this passage, can be teaching Sunday school in church, but underneath, if you could really see what's going on, they're slaves to sin. God is not breaking those chains in their lives.

And then tell me if this isn't the message of Hebrews 6. Look at verse 20: if they've escaped the corruption in the world by quote-unquote knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—now get that. That's classic Hebrews 6:4 and 5. Their life is benefited. They're in church. They're protected in the cocoon of church. They're getting the benefits of church. They've escaped the corruption in the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and again are entangled in it, which is where that enslavement leads, back to that, and overcome by it, then they're worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

Picture that. It's exactly what chapter 6, verse 6 of Hebrews says. It's worse for them. The consequences are huge. You had all of this advantage, all this rain poured on you, and still you're enslaved to sin? Hmm. That's not good.

For it would have better of them not known the way of righteousness than to have known it and—here's our phrase again—turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the Proverbs are true: a dog returns to its vomit, and a sow that is washed goes back to wallowing in the mud.

That's the sad picture. And it's a picture that Hebrews chapter 6 is trying to warn us of and encourage us to avoid. Make sure that your fruit is of a different kind—a fruit that under the surface is continuing to master sin in your life.

Oh, I don't have time for this. But that's never stopped me before, right? Jude—can we turn there real quick? If you think Sunday school teacher hypocrisy is bad, how about pastoral hypocrisy? Look at this. Jude verse 12.

These are now called in Scripture shepherds. I don't know if they're on the payroll, I don't know what, but these guys are leaders—big time leaders in the church. And in verse number 12, Jude warns them that they're blemishes at your love feast. Now the love feast was their first century word for their communion service. They're having their potluck and their KFC and they're having communion. And he says, these men are blemishes.

Now I know you don't know that because these people are leaders. They're shepherds in their church. "These men are blemishes at your love feast, eating with you without the slightest



qualm”—no conviction of the Spirit in their life. I mean, ultimately, they’re doing what they want to do.

As a matter of fact, look at this phrase: shepherds who only feed themselves. Look at that. You talk about motive. You can even be a pastor in a church and your motive’s all about you. It’s about you. It’s for me. It’s about my benefit here. They are shepherds who only feed themselves.

They’re clouds without rain. They’re blown along by the wind. That means they look like they might give us something, but really, there’s no substance here. They’re blown along by the wind. They’re autumn trees without fruit, uprooted, twice dead. They’re wild waves of the sea foaming up their shame, wandering stars for whom the blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Does that send a chill down your spine? We’re talking about pastors in Bible teaching churches. That’s what we’re talking about. And the Bible says, watch out for hypocrisy, because here’s the thing: it could be a kind of hypocrisy that’s not easy for your congregation to see.

Man, be careful. Look for more victory over sin—a kind of victory over sin that really only you would know about, a kind of victory over sin that’s taken place behind the facade in front of your Christian activities and deeds and words and songs.

That was heavy. Let’s move on to verse 9, Hebrews chapter 6. “Even though we speak like this”—and that’s, I’m big, you just hit me on it with a sledgehammer on the head. Thanks, writer of Hebrews—he says, “Dear friends, we’re confident of better things in your case. We don’t think this is true of you. We hope it’s not true of you. We expect better things concerning you in your case—things,” he says, “that accompany salvation.” And that is the key phrase.

We are expecting and confident of better things concerning you—things that accompany salvation.

Now look carefully in verse number 9. Here’s the phrase that’s so important. Question: things—is that defined in this verse? No. “Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we’re confident of better things in your case. Things that accompany salvation.” You got to go back up to verse 7 to find the things.

What things accompany salvation? The good crop. The good fruit. That’s what accompanies salvation.

As a matter of fact, this is an interesting phrase, and it’s very interesting in Greek, and in English, it’s translated a variety of ways. It’s this phrase—I’m sorry, what are the things? Let’s just put it this way: the crop is a Godward life, victory over sin. But look at this phrase right here: that accompanies salvation.

Various translations translate this various ways. It’s really the Greek verb “to have.” This thing has that thing, and they’re connected. As a matter of fact, I looked up several translations, and sometimes it’s translated that way—things connected to salvation. Sometimes it’s translated things that go with salvation. Or, inversely, things that come with salvation. Or things that belong to salvation. Or as the NIV puts it, things that accompany salvation.

These two things go together. What are we talking about? We’re talking about the things of the good crop—the Godward life and the victory over sin, the increasing victory over sin.



Which basically leads us to this conclusion: salvation—this work of God—if God works salvation for you, you’re genuinely converted. Here’s the thing: then God works these changes in you. Why? Because they’re connected to each other.

God does not do this work for you and put your name in the Lamb’s book of life without putting his Spirit in you and changing who you are. He does not give you a place in the kingdom of heaven and then not get to work at making sure your thorns and thistles are less and your good fruit and good crop is more.

They go together. They are connected. They are the things that accompany salvation. You can’t have one without the other. God is going to get to work on you the minute you are justified. He starts the sanctification process. Why? That’s so clear.

These are the things that the writer of Hebrews says we expect these of you. We’re confident that better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.

Let’s put it down this way: this is a God-induced change. Change—a God-induced change.

Because here’s my fear: preach a message like this and people say, “God, I gotta work harder than at producing better fruit.” Yeah, you do. Philippians 2 says that: work out your salvation with fear and trembling. But the next verse—do you know that in Philippians 2? “For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

There is this synergy that we feel and sense. Ultimately, God says it’s a monergism—it’s not a synergism. There’s a new word for you: a monergism. It’s God working it in you and God guaranteeing it. But it feels a lot like a synergy. It certainly doesn’t feel like a solo act, because I have to recognize that when God is at work in producing a crop in my life, sometimes I feel like I’m along for the ride. Oh, it’s a lot of work, but I realize I’m compelled to bear fruit because God is in me, and that’s different. And that feels different.

Therefore, I’m not saying just come on and muscle up to the table and produce better fruit, man. I’m saying this: if God has done this work for you and in reality you are saved from the coming wrath, then he’s going to work these things in you—guaranteed. That’s the way the Scripture puts it. They go part and parcel, hand in hand, with one another. They’re both a work of God.

Let me show it to you in Hebrews chapter 13. I just want to stay in Hebrews here to have you look at two verses real quick—both of them make this very clear. The first one, based on the covenant—the covenant promise of God. And again, the covenant that’s been on display in the book of Hebrews is the new covenant.

And the new covenant, as spelled out in the book of Isaiah—or I’m sorry, Ezekiel and Jeremiah—but Ezekiel 26 we looked at, is when God replaces your stony heart, puts a heart of flesh in you, and moves you to follow his decrees. Okay, that’s the great new covenant and the practical implications of the new covenant.

Look at verse 20. He’s wrapping up the book. I mean, he says a few personal things in verses 22 and following, but this is the end of the book of Hebrews, verse 20. Hebrews 13:20.



May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal—here's the key word—covenant, promise, he brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. May he what? Verse 21: equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him.

Is that clear? Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Right on. Amen.

What's he want to do? May he, verse 21, based on the covenant—that's his promise. And if he promised it, he's going to do it. Equip you with everything good for doing his will. Who does the equipping? Do you muscle it up? No—God does it. And “may he work in us what is pleasing to him.” Is it always easy to do the right thing as a Christian? No. But he's in us working to do that thing.

May he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Back three chapters real quick—chapter 10. I want to put this down as an exclamation point on this truth, which is not even needed if you were here Thursday, but a lot of you weren't here Thursday. Thursday in the book of Romans we were teaching on Romans, and I was teaching that great section in chapter 3, and we looked at this passage because it was so germane to our topic.

We need to be perfect if we're ever going to have fellowship with God. How does he do it? It's called justification. He makes us right in the file cabinets of heaven. But then there's this other side.

Look at the neat connection between these two in this text. Just for context sake, let's start in verse 11, Hebrews 10:11.

Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties. This is the human priests. Again, and this was in the Old Testament system. This was prior to the destruction of the temple. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. They're just symbolic.

But when this priest—talking about Christ now—had offered for all time one sacrifice for sin, that's his own body, he sat down at the right hand of God. That's how the book of Hebrews started. He'd finished his work.

Verse 13: since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, including death, 1 Corinthians 15 says.

Because by one sacrifice—now here's our key verse. Underscore this—he has made perfect forever. Does that sound like a done and completed deal? That's my salvation. He's made perfect forever. My file is clean now. He's worked salvation for me. He has made perfect forever those—now this is interesting—who are being made holy.

What are you talking about? If I'm perfect, why do I need to be made holy? Because we're talking about justification on the one hand and sanctification on the other. He has made me perfect, and he is working in me to be a more holy person.

Look for a God-induced change.



Look for a God-induced change. Versus what? Well, ask Judas. Judas wasn't new in his heart. Judas wasn't a participant of Jeremiah 31 and the promise of the new covenant. What are we talking about? Well, I imagine in Judas' case, it was a lot of external pressure. I imagine for a lot of churchgoers in the first century, it was the external pressures. I imagine for us in the 21st century, it's sometimes the external pressures and not a redeemed heart.

Example: why haven't you divorced your spouse? Why haven't you laid into your coworkers with a string of profanity? Why haven't you, you know, you name it, indulged in that secret sin that no one would find out about it? Why haven't you done that?

Well, you got two answers. Either God's Spirit is in me, driving me away from that, or, man, I'm looking around going, well, I don't want to get caught. I don't want what it'll do to my testimony or my life. It's external pressure.

Think about it. Why didn't Judas tell everybody when they sat around talking about being generous and giving to people and being generous and traveling across—why didn't he say, "No, I don't want to do that because I'm in it for myself"? He would never say that, but he was. I mean, he proved it by his life, selling Christ out for 40 pieces of silver.

Now, Peter's sitting there in the prayer meeting with Christ, talking about traveling long distance to serve people. And what's Peter's heart doing? Oh, I'm sure that his flesh was fighting some of this, but his heart was new. And when Christ sat around and said, "Let's travel all these miles and serve these people," Peter's heart, who used to, as he was fishing on the Sea of Galilee, think of no one but himself, was now thinking about other people. And God was inducing some real change in his life.

Judas, on the other hand, he wasn't going to stand up and oppose Christ's plan to minister to people in the Decapolis or to travel down to Jerusalem again. Why? He had the pressures of the external conformity and the expectation. He wasn't going to do it. He was going to stick with the thing and work the plan because of the pressure of expectation.

And church will do that to you.

As opposed to Peter, who I'm sure wanted to please Christ. He didn't want to be a nonconformist either, but something was going on in his heart. Why? Because God had made him a new person.

Do you see the difference there? You and I are faced with temptations every day. The question is, is this a God-induced decision, in that God is pulling and tugging and changing my life? Or is this just a decision about what if I get caught? What will it do to me? And we're constantly weighing up the ramifications of what if I go down that path. Is it external pressure? Is it internal? God-induced change.

It says we're confident of better things in your case—things that go with, accompany, are connected to salvation—and that's a changed life that God is involved in.

Next time you're in the produce department of your grocery store and you're watching people thump on things and you're seeing them with all their diagnostic tests trying to pick out the best piece of fruit because they don't want to waste their money on picking bad fruit, make sure you remember this sermon and say to yourself, God, if it's important for a bag of fruit, it's important for



me to look at my life and every now and then thump on the fruit and say, is this really what it looks like? What are my motives here? Is this a Godward thing or a meward thing? Is this increasing victory over sin or just more hypocrisy? Is it a God-induced change or is it just external pressure?

And as we decide those things, as God gives us the grace to see the distinction to fix it—I mean, it's profoundly difficult but it's profoundly simple—is to get back to where we've been. And we've said this every week at the close of every message in this series. It's about repenting of our sins with a genuine broken heart. It's about putting our faith completely and solely in Christ to save us.

And God says, man, if you cry out to me, I'm gonna save you. I'm gonna change you. And if I work this salvation for you, I'm gonna work that one for you too. The power of God to save us from the penalty of sin will be evident as he begins to save us from the pattern of sin. And God says, I wanna do that for you. I'm willing to do it.

You just gotta make him your king. You gotta put him in the center and you gotta say, this is what it's about. It's about you, God.

I hope that if there's doubt or equivocation—and I know next week's sermon is specifically designed to deal with that in verses 10 and following—but man, let's clear it up today. Don't get on the freeway until we settle this matter. Am I genuinely and authentically connected to Christ?

Let's pray.

God, as the great Old Testament songwriter put it, we want you to help us in this quest, and we want to say to you—and our heart wants to cry to you, it needs to—search me, oh God, try me. Examine my heart. See if there's anything in us that is contrary to what our profession is and what our commitment is. Are we genuine people here?

God, I know that real Christianity—and I trust we all know this here—it's certainly not a life of perfection, but it's a life of growing sanctification. And God, if we find out that under the facade of the good-looking works and deeds and songs, there's a selfish heart, I pray, God, that today we might recognize and be willing to say that this is not authentic and to trade it in for the real thing.

And we can do that right now, God. We can reach out to you and say, God, we don't want a self-serving, self-tailored Christianity. We've got to have the only real one that there is—crying out to you with a real brokenness and helplessness and saying, God, you're our king, you're our God. Apply to us the benefit of Christ as we seek to make you God in our lives, in our world, in our homes, in our workplace.

God, we repent of our sin. We trust you, not ourselves, to fix the problem that we have and ultimately to reconnect us with our maker so that we can be the kinds of people that you created us to be—people that bring glory to you. Help us in this, God, and may it be clear this week for those that are genuinely saved here today, may there just be clear that there is genuine good fruit being produced, and that that is being produced, as Jesus and others said in Scripture, in increasing measure.

Make that a reality for us, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.