

Never Back Slide Again

If your Christian walk has been a series of one backsliding incident after another, I have some scary news for you. You probably aren't a Christian. Let's settle the issue once and for all, are you saved or aren't you? Naturally, the Bible can help.

I John 5: 13 says, "I write these things that you might know you are saved." What things? In the five previous chapters, John gives ten markers to help you know if you are truly saved or not. Would you like to take the test? Would you like to know if you are saved? Here we go.

1. I John 1:7 says, "If we are living in the light of God's presence (i.e., if we are saved), then we have fellowship with one another."

Friend, if you are saved, you like to fellowship with other believers. You like hanging out with them. I don't mean that you exclusively spend time with Christians, but you prefer it and you enjoy it.

2. I John 1:8 say, "If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Do you think you are a pretty good person, I mean, compared to some people? If you do not recognize how utterly sinful you are, John says that you are only fooling yourself and the truth is not in you.

3. I John 2:3-4 say, "How can we be sure that we belong to Him, by obeying His commandments. If someone says, 'I belong to God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and doesn't have the truth."

Pretty straight forward stuff, do you strive to keep his commandments?

4. I John 2:15 reads, "Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you."

Do you love the world? Do you spend all your time, energy and talents pursuing worldly things? Uh oh

5. I John 2:23 say, "Anyone who denies the Son doesn't have the Father either."

When was the last time you shared your faith? Do you fail to open your mouth because you are ashamed? Do you whisper in public when you say the name of Jesus? Jesus has something really terrifying to tell you, "Whoever is ashamed of me before man, I will be ashamed of before my Father in heaven." (Matt.10:32) Gulp.

6. I John 3:2 "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what it will be like when Christ returns."

Can you wait to see Jesus face to face? Do you long for His return? Do you anxiously look forward to the day you get to be with Him in heaven? Not because you are weary and just want to clock out of this old house, but because you adore Him? Then you are God's child.

7. I John 3:7-8 have these scary words for you, "When people do what is right, it is because they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. But when people keep on sinning, it shows they belong to the devil."

Well, do you willfully continue to sin? Do you plot and plan your sins and carry them out with no fear. Except the fear of being caught, are you living a lifestyle that is marked by un-godliness? Then you are indeed un-godly.

8. I John 3:14 "If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life."

If you are saved, you not only like to hang with other Christians, you LOVE them. And it shows.

9. I John 4:6 "We belong to God: that is why those who know God listen to us."

Those who belong to God listen to their teacher. They like to learn about God. They read their Bibles. They love doctrine. Do you?

10. I John 5:1 "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God."

Is Jesus your king? Does He rule your life? Is He the center of your attention? He is if you believe that Jesus is the Christ.

Perhaps you are panicking right now. "I don't even come close to scoring a ten." Then please read these words carefully. You will never be a ten while you are living on this planet. Nobody human will ever be a ten. This test is about DIRECTION and not PERFECTION. You will never be perfect, but you definitely should be moving in that direction.

Every year you walk with Jesus, you should be able to look back and say, "I am doing better than last year. I sin less, I love Christians more and I hate sin a lot." If you are moving in that direction, you are saved. If you are not (and only you and God know. Don't fool yourself), then you are simply not saved.

If you are not moving in the right direction, would you like to be changed? Would you like to be saved and know for sure you are going to spend eternity with Him? Then read on.

I want to tell you about three men who were changed forever. These three guys were NOT moving in the right direction. They were not

believers, until something incredible happened to them. Let me introduce you to James, Jude and Joseph of Aramathea.

James and Jude were Jesus half brothers and the Bible tells us they were not believers. Imagine that, two guys who lived with Jesus didn't believe in Him. In a way, it is easy to understand. Have you ever pondered what it would have been like to be the brother of the Son of God? I can imagine at times it was a challenge.

Do you have a brother or sister who is a standout at something and you fail by comparison? It is a drag to be compared to a superstar sibling. Imagine what it was like for Jesus' little brothers.

"Hey Mom, I got a B+ at Temple today."

"That's nice, dear. Jesus fed 5000 people today."

Aargh, you can imagine how James and Jude felt and we can understand why they did not believe their brother was Messiah. But then something happened. One event changed all that. The Bible tells us that James and Jude were not believers until the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. After Easter, James and Jude became sold-out Christians.

Once James and Jude became believers, they each wrote a book in the New Testament and each book begins the same way, "James, a BONDSERVANT of Jesus Christ." "Jude, a BONDSERVANT of Jesus Christ."

Wow. They went from bitter brothers to bondservants because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Why?

Before we answer that, let's take a look at another fellow who changed. Joseph of Aramathea was a "secret follower" of Jesus. He was a man of honor and he sat on the religious council and the Bible tells us he followed Jesus in private. You can't really blame the guy, if he would publicly confess his faith in Jesus; he could potentially lose a lot. He could lose his reputation, his place of honor at with the religious council and the community. He might lose perks, bennies and maybe income.

But something changed him. The Bible says that Joseph sat on the council that witnessed the trial of Jesus. He saw Jesus stand before his accusers and He didn't utter a word. Joseph saw Jesus beaten, flogged and crucified, and that changed him. When Jesus died, Joseph went to Pilate and asked if he could have Jesus body for burial. The crucifixion forced Joseph out of the closet and he was willing to risk it all by publicly proclaiming, "I want to bury Jesus."

It was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that moved them from unbelief to rock solid faith. The crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord pushed them from skeptics to servants. The questions are, "Why?"

You see, James, Jude and Joseph were good Jewish men. They knew their Bible and they knew how God felt about sin. When they saw Jesus crucified and rise from the dead, a light bulb went on and it changed them.

Perhaps you have heard you are a sinner and Jesus died for your sins. Most of us have. The problem is that most of us have not heard why. Why did Jesus die for our sins? The answer is critical to having a saving faith.

God hates sin. I mean, He really hates sin. Do you have any idea how much God hates sin? Specifically, do you realize how much God hates your sin? Let me help you get a sense of appreciation for God's revulsion toward sin.

Hosea 13 says this to the children of Israel. "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. You have no God but me, for there is no other savior. I took care of you in the wilderness in that dry and thirsty land. But when you had eaten and were satisfied, then you became proud and forgot me. So now I will attack you like a lion, or like a leopard that lurks along the road. I will rip you to pieces like a bear whose cubs have been taken away. I will tear you apart and devour you like a hungry lion. O death, bring forth your terrors. O grave bring forth your plagues, for I will not relent."

Gulp. God hates sin.

In the Old Testament, the high priest annually entered the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people. The Holy of Holies was the place where God dwelt on that day and the high priest would purify himself before entering into God's presence. If the high priest did not cleanse himself completely, God killed him. God didn't just let him die, God killed him. God cannot have anything sinful in his presence.

Do you see how this applies to you and your eternity? Because you are a sinner, you cannot be in God's presence and you cannot be with Him in heaven. If you are thinking that maybe you are not such bad people. At least compared to some people, Romans 7:7 says that you will know the exceeding sinfulness of your sin if you know the law. The law is the Ten Commandments. Let's see how you are doing. Let's see just how good you are.

Have you always honored God above all things? Have you ever used His name as a curse word? Have you always kept Sunday a holy day? Have you ever disobeyed your parents? Have you ever thought a hateful thought about someone? Have you ever lusted after anyone? Have you ever stolen anything? Even a postage stamp, have you ever told a lie? Have you ever desired anything that belonged to your neighbor?

If you are honest, by your own admission, you have failed God's test for holiness. That is why the Bible says that all of us fall short of His glorious standard. Here is the rub. Some day, you must stand before

God and give an account of every word, thought and action of your life. Because you are sinful and God can't stand to be in the presence of sin, he cannot have you in His presence and you are going to spend eternity in a place called hell.

Jesus Himself describes hell as a horrible place filled with suffering. It is a place filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Thirst is unbearable. It is a lake of sulfur and you are going to have a lake-side cabin.

That is your destiny because you are guilty of breaking God's holy Law.

How much does God hate your sin? Picture Jesus on the cross, He had been beaten with a stick and with fists. He was so disfigured from the beating He received; the Bible says he didn't even look like a man. He had been flogged with a whip that had lead balls on the end and nails and pottery woven in its strands. His back and legs were shredded. They looked like hamburger.

7 inch nails were pounded through His wrists and through His Achilles to hold Him on a gnarly piece of wood. To catch His breath, He slid His chewed back up and down the scratchy wood. He suffocated to death.

In the midst of that, the Bible says something so awesome to ponder, "It pleased God to bruise His only Son." (Is. 53:10)

Do you understand that? In the midst of that brutal scene, the Bible says that God was pleased with what He saw. How can that be? Why would God be happy that His beloved Son endured hell on earth? God hates sin.

God hates sin so much; He was pleased that Jesus was the ultimate sacrificial lamb for the sin of the entire world. He was the sacrificial lamb for you. "He was handed over to die because of our sins and He was raised from the dead to make us right with God." (Romans 4:25)

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one dies likely to die for a good person, though some might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Jesus, He will certainly save us from God's judgment. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of His son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by His life. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us." Romans 5:6-11

That is the truth that will save you. That is the truth that changed James, Jude and Joseph. They were good Jews who knew that God hated sin. They knew that Jesus was sinless. They understood that He died so they did not have to go to hell. Instead, because of Jesus

suffering, death and resurrection, they get to be with God in Heaven because Jesus wiped their sins away.

A lie has been sold by modern day evangelism. It is the lie that says, "God has a wonderful plan for your life. If you just believe in Him, your marriage will be better and your life will be happier."

That is wrong. God does not promise that. God never says that your life will magically get better if you simply believe in Him. The only thing that changes when you repent and follow Jesus is that you will be able to deal with the ickiness of life because you know you are going to Heaven. "Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have troubles or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us." (Rom. 8:35-37)

Please follow this analogy that my friend Ray Comfort uses to illustrate the lie that many people have bought that causes them to continually backslide.

A man boards an airplane. The flight attendant hands him a parachute and says, "Put this on, it will make your flight better."

The man gets to his seat, looks around, and notices a few people are wearing a parachute. He decides to give it a go in hopes that the parachute will make his flight better. Why not? What does he have to lose? After all, that flight attendant seemed sincere enough.

About an hour into the flight, the man's back starts to hurt from the weight of the parachute. The weight forces him to lean forward causing the seatbelt to cut into his middle. Worse than that, other passengers are starting to point and laugh at him. The man takes off the parachute in disgust and stuffs it under his seat, promising never to trust anyone who tells him that lie again.

That is the lie that modern day evangelism has propagated. They promise that if you put Jesus on, your flight will be better. The problem is, when the inevitable hard times of life hit, we take off Jesus because the flight is not better.

Contrast this to the man who boarded an airplane and the flight attendant said "Put this parachute on because at 30,000 feet, this plane is going down and this will save you from going down with it."

The man doesn't even wait to get to his seat before he straps that parachute on. Despite the fact that the parachute hurts his back, the seat belt cuts his middle and passengers are pointing and laughing, he refuses to take off the parachute. Why should he? He didn't put the parachute on to make His life better, he put the parachute on because it is going to save him from the wrath that is to come.

If you have put on Jesus because you were promised that He is going to make your flight better, I am sorry. You have been told a lie. Because of that you have probably struggled with your faith and your relationship with God. You don't want to read your Bible, praying to Him is hard and you aren't growing in holiness. If that is you, you are not saved.

Jesus did not die to make your life better. He died to save you from the wrath that is to come.

Do it now. Put on Jesus because He is the Savior of your soul. If you repent and confess and acknowledge and ask Him to be the Lord of your life, you will backslide no more. You won't be able to because the Holy Spirit will dwell in you and He will make you holier. He will increase your desire to read your Bible and pray.

Make Jesus the Savior of your soul. Repent. Apologize for your exceeding sinfulness. Ask God to forgive you. Promise to make Him the Lord of your life.

He will forgive you. He will save you. He will give you the strength to endure hardships. He will give you an eternal perspective. He will keep you from backsliding.

Don't be a fool. Do it now.