

EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

The lives of believers are not characterized in terms of perfection, but rather in terms of direction. The overall direction of our lives has changed. It is now toward the Lord, whereas before conversion it was away from the Lord. When the Holy Spirit comes to live in a person, they are regenerated (given new life) and from that point on they are “a new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). The norm is that saving faith has fruit-bearing evidences in the life.

Paul in speaking to the Philippians was very confident that the Lord who had begun a good work in them would “complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). The writer of the book of Hebrews said that God disciplines ALL of His children (without exception) “that we may be partakers of His holiness” (Heb. 12:7-11).

1. AN OBVIOUS DISTINCTION:

To profess to be a Christian is to say your life has been changed. Jesus said, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.” (Mt. 12:33)

Paul said to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.” Then he gave a list of sinful practices before saying, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-11; cf. Gal. 5:19-21)

Paul explained that prior to salvation, we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” in which we “once walked according to the course of this world” (Eph. 2:1-2). Those who do not believe take pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:12). Paul says, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” (Titus 3:3) These descriptions are what we once were before our conversion.

In 1 John 3:7-10 the Apostle John says, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil...” (1 Jn. 3:7-10). In 3 John 11 he says, “He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”

Revelation 22:14-15 says, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually

immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” (Also see Ex. 20:5-6; 2 Chron. 19:2-3; Ps. 119:155; Eccl. 8:12-13; Dan. 11:32; Mal. 3:18; Mt. 13:49; Rom. 10:21; Eph. 5:5-7; Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:6-7; 1Tim. 5:6,8; Titus 1:15-16; 1Pet. 2:7; and Rev. 21:6-8).

The biblical norm is an obvious practical distinction between the lost and the saved! John says, the children of God and the children of the devil are “manifest” – meaning they are obvious in practice (1 Jn. 3:10).

2. A DEFINITE CHANGE:

John the Baptist challenged the religious leaders to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Mt. 3:8). Jesus said that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Jn. 3:3) And Paul said, “if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

In Galatians 6:15 Paul says what really counts for something is being “a new creation.” In Colossians 1:21 he says, “you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled”. We once were enemies in our mind but not anymore. This denotes a definite change. A change in nature in the heart results in a change of direction in the life.

Paul on his second missionary was able to lead a number of people in Thessalonica to faith in Christ. They were all excited about their newfound faith as they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

But as brand-new professing believers in the context of suffering (cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 3:4) Paul had concerns about their faith. FIVE times in 1 Thessalonians 3 he addresses the concern that he had regarding their “faith life” (1 Thess. 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10). For this reason he says to them, “I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.” (1 Thess. 3:5) Was it all for nothing or did they have the stuff of genuine faith that perseveres in the context of persecution? That was the question. Upon receiving follow-up word from Timothy concerning “the good news of your faith and love” Paul says we “were comforted concerning you by your faith” (1 Thess. 3:6-7).

But here is the point. It was only upon Timothy’s report that Paul could say what he said in 1 Thessalonians 1:4.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 (NKJV)

4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

How could Paul say that he KNEW they were the elect of God. Well, he could state this with confidence because of the “faith report” he had heard back from Timothy as stated in chapter three. Note that verse 4 is sandwiched in between a context that emphasizes the evidence of CHANGED LIVES.

1 Thessalonians 1:3–7 (NKJV)

3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

The “knowing” of 1 Thessalonians 1:4 cannot be divorced from the surrounding context emphasizing their changed lives. And it cannot be disassociated from Paul’s assurance of their faith as confirmed by Timothy as seen in 1 Thessalonians 3. The proof of a person’s election (humanly speaking) is seen in the fact that they “stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3:8). Truly saved people evidence a changed life, and it continues (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-2).

1 Corinthians 15:1–2 (NKJV)

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.