

“The Sign of Signs”
(John 14:21)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Works are the best evidence of a sincere love to God:
 - a. God gives grace that we might be zealous for good works (Eph. 2:10).
 - b. When we see these works, these good fruits, then we may know that we are a good tree or true believers (Matt. 7:16-20; 1 John 2:3-6).
 - c. Our works, the things we do, show what we really are (Prov. 4:23).
 - d. When we see them in our lives and know that they come from our hearts, not just because we want to keep up appearances, then we can know we have grace, because that grace has reached its goal (James 2:22).
2. When you add to this the fact that our works will be the very thing, the only thing, the Lord will examine in our lives on the Day of Judgment, we have an irrefutable argument that our works are the best evidence of our conversion.
 - a. Remember the Lord won't be examining us on the day for His own benefit – He knew what we would do and why before He ever created us or the world.
 - b. He will do it for our benefit, and for the angels and for the world as they look on, that everyone might see that His judgment is just.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we move on to one more argument that works are the best evidence, or the sign that stands out above every other sign: namely, because works are the end of every grace the Spirit produces in our hearts.
 - a. We saw before that the love the Spirit produces in our hearts when He quickens us to life is the fountain from which every other grace of the Spirit flows – such as faith, repentance, joy, spiritual knowledge, humility, fear, thankfulness, etc.
 - b. This evening, we'll consider that each of these graces in turn must produce holy fruit if it is genuine, showing us again that our works are the best sign that we are converted.
2. We'll see two things:
 - a. First, though there are other evidences of grace we can use to examine our lives, works are the best evidence.
 - b. And second, that works are the best evidence because they show that all the other evidences are genuine.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let's consider that though there are other evidences of grace we can use to examine our lives, works are the best evidence.

1. Evangelical obedience is the best evidence both to ourselves and others, it is the best sign that tends to verify or vindicate all the other signs as being genuine.
 - a. Certainly, this is what Jesus tells us in our text. How can we know we love Him? If we keep His commandments.
 - b. There are other signs or marks that we love Him, but this is the greatest, this is the best and the most satisfying.
 - c. There may be many good reasons to believe that a particular tree is a fig tree, but the best evidence is when it actually grows figs, so when your life produces good fruit, that is the best evidence that you are a good tree.

2. It's true that when you were first converted you might have had some assurance of your conversion without much in the area of works.
 - a. When the man found the pearl of great price or the treasure hidden in the field, the fact that it was in his heart to sell everything to have that treasure gave him some assurance that his commitment was genuine.
 - b. But when he actually sold all that he had to possess it, this showed him that he really did desire that treasure.
 - c. What we do is the sign that confirms all the other signs.

- B. Second, let's consider some examples that show us that our works are the best evidence that all our other evidences are genuine.
 1. We saw earlier that love is the fountain from which all the graces of the Spirit flow, which is why putting this love in our hearts is all the Spirit needs to do to convert us.
 2. But now let's consider that each of the graces that flow from this love all result in Christian obedience: *The evidence that they are there and that they are from the Spirit of God is the fruit they produce.*
 - a. How do you know that the knowledge you have of God is a saving knowledge and not merely an abstract knowledge?
 - (i) It's by what you do with that knowledge, as our text reminds us, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me."
 - (ii) How can we say we know God – that we have a loving relationship with Him – if we deny Him with our lives? Paul writes to Titus, "They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (1:16).
 - (iii) Saving knowledge is not just knowing things about God, but it is loving Him in a practical way, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).
 - b. How do you know whether your repentance is a gracious and saving repentance?
 - (i) The Jews said they were repentant when they came to John; but John told them if they were, they should "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8).
 - (ii) This is the same message Paul preached; he told Agrippa, "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but *kept*

declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (Acts 26:19-20).

- c. How do you know you have a saving faith, and not merely an historical faith? It’s through your works.
- (i) James writes, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God” (2:21-23).
 - (ii) When a body moves that’s evidence that it’s alive. So works are the evidence that faith is alive.
- d. How do you know that you’ve truly come to Christ and received Him? It’s by forsaking all for him.
- (i) Christ tells us that we must forsake everything if we are to come to Him.
 - (a) He told the rich young ruler, “If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matt. 19:21).
 - (b) He told His followers, “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33).
 - (ii) How can you know whether it’s in your heart to do this? It’s by actually giving up everything to follow Him.
 - (a) This was a test the young ruler failed, but it’s one we can’t fail if we are truly His.
 - (ii) When we must choose between Christ and something else, the evidence that we love Christ more is that we choose Him and turn away from the other.
- e. How do you know that you really trust Christ? It’s when you do something that depends on that trust.
- (i) It’s when you take the more difficult or dangerous road because you really believe the Lord will help you or that your sacrifice is worth it.
 - (ii) Jesus told His disciples before He sent them out to preach, “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).
 - (iii) Those who trusted Him actually put their life on the line.
 - (a) This is what Abraham did when he left his own country and relatives for the land God would show him, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*,

dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:8-10).

- (b) This is what Moses did when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and chose “to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,” because he considered “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (vv. 24-26).
 - (c) This is what Paul did when he suffered what he did for the sake of Christ and His Gospel, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).
- f. Do you have true humility?
- (i) It will show in the way you live.
 - (ii) “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).
- g. Do you have a gracious fear of God? Then you will hate evil and turn away from it.
- (i) “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life and loves *length of days* that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:11-14).
 - (ii) “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13).
 - (iii) “By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil” (Prov. 16:6).
- h. If you are genuinely thankful, it will show in your life. “What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD. I shall pay my vows to the LORD, oh *may it be* in the presence of all His people” (Psalm 116:12-14).
- i. If you sincerely desire the Lord, you will seek after Him and worship Him.
- (i) “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple” (Psalm 27:4).
 - (ii) “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:1-5).

- j. If you have a holy joy, it will show in joyful obedience: “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. . . . I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, *even* to the end” (Psalm 119:14, 111-112).
- k. If you have the desire to live the Christian life, it will show in how you actually live it.
 - (i) “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:25-27).
 - (ii) “Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim. 2:3-5).
- l. And of course, the stronger these gracious fruits are in your lives, the greater effort you will put out to serve the Lord: We must never think we’re stronger in grace than our works show.
- m. And so the Spirit produces love, love produces these many fruits, and each of these fruits issues in action – in works of holiness or obedience.
- n. The love the Spirit gives us is the greatest evidence of our conversion, but this love is seen mainly by our obedience to God’s holy commandments, especially, under trial, when we are forced to choose between Christ and something else, we choose Christ.
- o. Next time we’ll consider how the fact that works are the greatest sign we’re converted does not contradict the truth that we are justified by the grace of God through faith alone and not by our works. Amen.