



# 2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Mar 21<sup>st</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: March 20<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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March 21

## **1 Corinthians 1:2**

Yesterday we set out to answer this question, if grace is what unites us together as brothers and sisters in Christ, then how do we know who has been united? Stated more succinctly, what are the evidences that a person has received grace? If we are not careful to answer this question, we open ourselves up to grave danger.

The kind of inclusivism that runs rampant in our society seeks to eradicate any and all lines that would separate people. The idea in the religious realm is that all of us are on the same journey, we may have different convictions about God and Christ and religion but we are headed in the same direction. This means that culture would have us believe that all faith systems are equally valid and that our job is not to disagree with another but to include them as equally valid “seekers”.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it flatly contradicts biblical teaching. In our passage today we read Paul’s words to the Corinthian church reminding them that they are to be “sanctified” which denotes a person or people who are “holy”. The term means set apart and, in the context, it reflects the conviction that God’s people are to be noticeably and visibly different from their surroundings. It is our job to draw a clear line between our own corporate and individual lives and the world and this is for God’s glory and the good of those around us so that they can see that Christ is the exclusive way to salvation as they observe the difference He makes in our lives.

With this as the backdrop, it is important to note that one way we are to discern whether or not a person has been united to us by grace is through the spiritual power that results from their saving faith. Paul’s assumption in the text is that those who have been saved by Christ will be sanctified in Christ. Furthermore, we know from the rest of the Scriptures that sanctification is a function and blessing of the Holy Spirit who is received at the moment of salvation. Simply stated, if a person has received the Gospel, they have received the indwelling Spirit and the Spirit of God indwells a person for the purpose of sanctifying them.

To receive Christ is to be sanctified because receiving Christ results in the reception of the Spirit (as we saw in our text on Sunday) and the reception of the Spirit is for the express purpose of our growth in holiness, among other blessings.

This is exceedingly basic to many of you, but it is important to consider for a day or two. Folks, the simple truth is that sanctification is imperative in our lives if we claim to be benefactors of grace. Paul is not creating a subset of Christians in his writing; he is obviously pointing to the reality that those who have been saved by grace through faith will grow in their holiness by virtue of the spiritual power that God grants through His Spirit. So, how do we know if a person has been united to Christ and His body by grace? One answer is the ongoing and progressive evidence of sanctification which is manifest in their lives.

March 22

**1 Corinthians 12:4-11**

Yesterday we began to answer the question, how do I know if someone has been united to the church by grace? It strikes me that this is a pertinent question to ask about “them” but it has as much significance as it relates to “me”. I hope that you read these devotions and examine your own lives to see if you are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). It is imperative that we do the hard work of self-examination in order to discern our own hearts and, by God’s grace, we have many different ways to test the legitimacy of our own confession and the testimony of others.

Today’s passage shows us another way that the Spirit testifies of our salvation. Remember, we have said that the evidence of grace was clear in the lives of the Gentiles who received Peter’s message. One of the ways that the Spirit testified of His work in their midst was by giving the gift of tongues to those who heard Peter’s sermon.

Now, we want to be careful here. There are some who claim that this means that ANYONE who comes to know Christ will be given the gift of tongues but this is simply not in accordance with the biblical testimony. There are others who were clearly converted in the book of Acts who did not receive that gift (Paul, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Philippian jailer) and the point of the passage is not tongues at all.

Instead, the gift of tongues was meant to cement the work of Christ amongst the Gentiles to the Jewish leadership of the church who would struggle with their conversion. It was a visible, indisputable piece of evidence that God had united the Gentiles and Jews through His grace in Christ.

While we do not expect people to exercise the gift of tongues specifically, we do believe that all people are given at least one spiritual gift at their conversion. This is the point of Paul’s writing in our text today. Notice how he does not draw a line between the “haves” (those who possess a spiritual gift) and the “have not’s” (those who don’t), instead he simply assumes that every person in the body has been given some spiritual gift, by the Holy Spirit, with which to contribute to the life and ministry of the church.

This means that those who have received grace will demonstrate their conversion by exercising true, spiritual gifts that are the product of their salvation. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, you have some gift by which you have been equipped to benefit the body. Do you know what that gift is? Have you experienced joy as you have seen God use some skill or strength to benefit others in the body? Do you have the gift of hospitality or teaching or administration? Are there things in our church fellowship that occur as a product of your giftedness? If so, there is more evidence that God has made you a partaker of His grace.

God has not saved any of us to be consumers and mere receivers of other’s efforts. He has saved us to use us in His body and He has equipped us for the task ahead. Next time the Lord uses you in His service, remind yourself to praise Him for the gifts He has given you by His grace and through His Son!

March 23

**Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5**

Well, I think I set the record for most passages used for one devotion! My purpose in utilizing these texts is to demonstrate the clear pattern in the Scriptures. The book of Acts is helpful for many reasons, perhaps chief among them is it shows us how our forefathers in the faith set out to obey the clear commands of Christ which still apply to us today. As such, the book is a wonderful resource that shows us how these men implemented various practices as faithful Christians within the life of the church.

As we consider how we know if a person has been united to us by grace, it is important to note that baptism is a primary piece of evidence. Over the next three days we will examine the biblical teaching on the subject as it relates to baptism and conversion, so it is important to start with the order of those two events.

Many people have grown up in traditions that practice infant baptism. The idea is that a person is baptized prior to the realization of their personal salvation (there are varied ideas on the subject, so take my statement as a generalization meant to distill the very basics on the topic) but this concept is foreign to Acts. In the book of Acts baptism **ALWAYS** follows conversion. As such, baptism is not an act of salvation but a public declaration that salvation has indeed taken place in a person's life.

In many ways, it is to be the first act of obedience in a believer's life as it publicly aligns him or her with Christ and testifies to those around them that they are indeed walking with Christ. When baptism precedes conversion, it loses its significance as a demonstration and declaration of saving faith but when it follows conversion it is a visible testimony of a person's confession

What does this mean? It means that baptism is a primary way in which we discern whether or not a person has received grace through faith. It also means that baptism is meant to be expressed in the company of others (preferably the local church) because it is more than an individual act, it is a public statement that is to be viewed and comprehended by those who are a part of the same body of Christ and who now have responsibility to encourage and hold accountable a new brother or sister in Christ.

March 24

**Matthew 28:16-20**

Yesterday we said that one of the ways we discern whether or not a person has been united to us by the grace of Christ is through baptism. Baptism is a public declaration of saving faith and, therefore, it is a prime way for us to discern a person's standing before the Lord.

One of the reasons why baptism follows conversion and is so meaningful to the person and the audience is wrapped up in the significance of the act itself. You see, we don't believe that baptism is a good idea because some mere mortal just came up with it, we believe that baptism is an important and necessary act because of its divine origin.

Today's text is a familiar one! It is often preached in the context of global missions and/or the church's responsibility to make disciples. Both of these topics are important and faithful to the text, but I do believe that sometimes the doctrine of baptism is neglected in the process of our study.

I want you to notice two things here as it relates to baptism and evidences of grace. First, notice that Jesus also assumes that baptism follows conversion. He states that we are to "make disciples" and then, after they are disciples, we are to baptize them. The flow is obvious, disciples are made only at conversion and it is after conversion that they are to be baptized into the body of Christ. I don't want to belabor the point, but this was obviously the interpretation of the early church and the Apostles as baptism followed conversion in every specific account.

Second, I want you to notice that one of the points of significance with baptism is found in our adherence to this command of Christ. Folks, baptism is not a good idea or something you should consider, baptism is a command of Christ! We are to be baptized because Christ tells us to be baptized and this means that the act of baptism should be one of the first acts of obedience by a disciple.

Now, this is important because we know that those who are truly saved by grace will be obedient to Jesus. This doesn't mean that we are always obedient, but it does mean that the general trajectory of our lives will be faithfulness to His commands. If a person is saved and refuses baptism, he or she is in unrepentant sin which is a huge red flag as it relates to evidence of grace in their lives. A person who comes to know Christ and understands His clear commands should submit to Him in the endeavor and this is a wonderful testimony that he or she is intent on following Christ by virtue of the change that has taken place in their hearts at conversion.

March 25

**Acts 10:47**

I've learned that one of the things that binds people together the tightest is shared experiences. Think about the people that you are closest with; don't you have a ton in common? Your family can get together and laugh about so many stories that you experienced in unison, you bond with co-workers, friends and the like who enjoy the same things and you easily empathize and commune with people who have the same struggles and problems. This is why support groups form and kindred spirits are easily detected amongst the hurting.

I believe that this is a natural outworking of the human condition and I also believe, whether you see the connection yet or not, that this is one of the purposes behind baptism. We see Peter mention one of the reasons for his command to baptize the Gentiles in verse 47 when he says, "have they not received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" The point is that Peter is recognizing in that moment that the same conversion he enjoyed is currently being experienced by another group of folks.

In spite of all the cultural and previously religious reasons that would argue against baptizing the Gentiles, the reality of the Holy Spirit's work of saving them binds the Gentiles and the Jews together in that moment and baptism is the picture of what they both enjoyed.

When Peter instructed his brothers, and presumably himself, to baptize their new brothers and sisters in Christ, he was telling believers to participate in an ordinance that visibly demonstrated their shared conversion in Christ.

When we are baptized, we are showing to the world that we have been buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. In spite of all of our differences, baptism is the reminder that we share the most important thing in common and as such it is a marvelous means of uniting the body of Christ and demonstrating our shared unity in the grace of God.

This is one of the reasons why it is so easy for believers to celebrate and get emotional over a baptism! When I see a new brother or sister in the baptistry, I am witnessing their testimony that God has moved in their life to save them just as He moved in mine some years before. It creates worship in my heart towards God who saved us and a bond in my soul with that new believer in light of my shared experience with them and my love for Christ and my brothers and sisters who are now in Him for all eternity. This is the corporate view of baptism and it is one of the reasons why we believe baptism is to happen within the context of community. Instead of robbing our brothers and sisters of the joy of seeing new people who have been added to the family, baptism is the public celebration of God's moving and the reminder that all of us share the joy of hope and resurrection together.

March 26

**Acts 16:15**

The final line of our passage for the week was incredibly important. The Bible says that upon the conversion of the Gentiles they asked Peter to stay for several days. This might seem like a throw away line to you but I do believe it is incredibly instructive. What we have here is a picture of new believers who want to be in fellowship with others.

To be clear, I believe there are many motivations for their request of Peter. Certainly, they wanted to be taught more and hear more stories about their new Savior from one who knew and walked with Him personally, but I think there may be more to it than that.

You see, salvation results in love for Christ but it doesn't terminate on Jesus alone. Instead, salvation leads to a love of our brothers and sisters in Christ because they are a part of our most precious, eternal family. One of the sure signs of salvation and one of the pieces of evidence that we are unified in grace is found in our love for the brethren. Those who are truly saved will long to be with their brothers and sisters, look forward to their company and prioritize time together.

Now, I'm not saying that all of us are extroverts who love to be with people all the time (I'm an extreme introvert by nature) but I am saying that we will hold dear our family and we will see to it that we spend time with them. This was the heartbeat behind the Gentiles invitation to Peter in Acts 10 and the sentiment of Lydia in Acts 16. In both cases, the newly saved party wants and longs for fellowship with believers.

One of my goals for this week's study is to hopefully unveil the more corporate dimensions of the faith. I fear that many in the West make Christianity too much about the individual. That kind of thinking is revealed in popular phrases like "I don't go to church to worship, I can worship on my boat or at the ballfield". While it is true that we can, and should, worship wherever, it is equally untrue that the Christian life is **ONLY** about me and my personal relationship with the Lord. The reality is that we have been saved into relationship with Christ, but we have also been saved into a relationship with the family of God. Our desire should be for the good and growth of not only our own souls but also the souls of our fellow believers and our conviction should be that our fellow believer has been gifted by the Holy Spirit with gifts and insights we need in order to further our own walk with the Lord. This means that we are motivated to fellowship by virtue of our love and concern for one another and our conviction that others can help and encourage us along the way as well.

March 27

**1 John 4:20-21**

Today's text rounds out our time together this week and it is a straightforward and blunt statement from the Apostle John! If you have time today, I strongly encourage you to read the entire epistle of 1 John. The text is dedicated to the topic of assurance (how do I know that I am truly saved?) and it is a marvelous and helpful text.

Nevertheless, for our point today, the Apostle is dealing specifically with the subject of our relationship with one another underneath the umbrella of assurance. One way that you and I know that we are truly believers is that we love our brother in Christ.

Two points of interest here. The first is the definition of love and hate. Many people would say that they don't "hate" their brother, they're just not all that interested in spending time with him! This might sound like a convenient escape but it misses the larger truth that hatred is not just active opposition but indifference. For instance, would anyone say that a parent doesn't "hate" a child when he or she ignores the little one? I hope not! We would argue that hatred is neglecting the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of a child. The point is that hate is both active and passive. Conversely, we would argue that one could not love a child without being active in their lives, pursuing relationship and looking for ways to help them grow and develop.

The point I'm making is obvious, I hope! We define love by active concern not passive indifference. In the same way, John is teaching us that our love for our brothers must manifest itself in tangible action for their benefit. You cannot love from afar (see the parable of the Good Samaritan)!

Second, notice that love for our brothers is the definitive way that we show love for God. John says that we cannot love God who is unseen unless we love our brother who is seen. Why? Because love for God always manifests itself in concern for the things that God emphasizes and loves. You cannot say you love God and despise the ones He came to redeem. Conversely, if you do love the brothers in Christ, you have good evidence that God's love resides in you.

So, how do we know that grace has united us? One answer is that we love the ones that God's grace extends to in our midst. Love and concern for our brother is a good indicator that the love of God has indwelt us which is the hallmark sign of salvation.