

How do you know that you are saved? That's a question I think we as Christians struggle with from time to time. I'm not asking how do you know how someone is saved, nor am I asking how someone in general might know that they are saved. Those are two very different questions. What I'm asking is: how do you know that you are saved? How do you know that you're going to go to heaven? That's what we call the assurance of salvation. How can we be certain? How can we be sure that we actually belong to God? Or in other words, where do you turn to when you're struggling with doubts?

Many, unfortunately, turn towards themselves when wrestling with this question, and they look inward as a way of trying to find assurance. Someone might say, "Well, I'm a good person. I've done the best that I can. I've been a kind person to as many people as I can meet. Surely that must mean something." Turning inward in this way as a way of trying to silence those doubts. If you want a good example of this, go to a funeral. The next time you go to a funeral, pay very close attention to what people say about the deceased. They'll usually talk about how good that person was, saying things like: "They were such a good person. They did so much good in their lives. They went to church often," and so forth. All of those things, of course, are fine. We want to speak nice things at a funeral. But they sometimes carry with it this idea that for these reasons that's why we know they're in heaven. For these reasons, that's why we know that they're ultimately at peace. It happens more often than we care to admit. And we take this same way of thinking, unfortunately, and we can also apply it to ourselves. To say that: "I've done the best that I can. I've lived the best life that I can. I go to church as much as I can. And for that reason, I'm pretty sure that I'm going to make it into heaven." That's something that is trying to find assurance within ourselves, looking inwardly as a way of answering those doubts.

But if we do this, Christians, we haven't been paying very close attention to anything that Paul has been saying in the book of Romans up to this point. Because Paul has made it very, very clear all throughout the book that no one is going to get into heaven because of how good a person they are. All have sinned, Paul says. All have fallen short of the glory of God. No one is good, no, not one. No one gets into heaven because of what they have done. And I know that we know that. At least we should know that. We know that we are saved by faith and not by our works. We say that very much as Lutherans. But someone can still know what the Bible says and yet still turn inwardly when trying to find assurance. Because we want to know. We want to be certain. We don't want to have these doubts. And so someone might say something like, "Well, I believe in God, and for that reason, the fact that I believe, that's how I can be sure." So we need to be careful. We need to always watch ourselves, and in fact look for our assurance somewhere else.

So where do we turn then when we're trying to find certainty? Paul points us to the right place. He says: "the Holy Spirit." And maybe that's kind of shocking to us, maybe even a little bit surprising. Why does Paul point us to the Spirit? But think about this, Christians. Count how many times Paul mentions the Spirit in our reading for this evening. He mentions the Spirit no less than fifteen times in the space of seventeen verses. That's more often than any other passage in Paul's letters. This is the place where he talks about the Holy Spirit the most. So Paul definitely wants to point us to the Spirit as a way of finding our certainty. The Spirit is the one who causes us to know that we are saved. But he doesn't do it so much by who he is, but rather

more by what he does. It is the work of the Spirit that gives us assurance, and this is what we see happening in our reading for this evening.

Because pay attention to what Paul says, for example, in verse 2. He says: "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." Now, that word "law" can also be translated as something like "power," so the power of the Spirit of life or the power of sin and death. So it is by the power, by the working of the Holy Spirit that we come to believe. In fact, we wouldn't be Christians at all unless the Spirit was working within us. It is the Spirit who causes us to know that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to condemn our sin in the flesh, to forgive us, to make us his own. It is the Spirit who causes us to become something new, a new creation, so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, so that we might be able to do what God wants us to do. It is the Spirit who causes us to see that this isn't just true for everybody generally, but it's also true for you individually. The Spirit causes you to know that Jesus died for you and for your sins. We are Christians because of the work of the Holy Spirit. And this happened when we first came to faith, whether that was when you heard the Word for the first time or when you were baptized. Whenever it was, that was the Spirit at work, causing you to know who Jesus is, causing you to believe in him. So we can find assurance in that. We can know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit is the one who brought us to faith.

But the Spirit doesn't just give us faith, Christians. Paul tells us that the Spirit also lives within us. He dwells within every believing heart. In verse 9, for example, Paul says: "You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." So if we don't have the Spirit, we are not Christians. It's that simple. But those who do have the Spirit believe in God, and the Spirit then dwells within them, making us into his temple. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 16: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells within you?" So this dwelling within us, this living within us should be a comfort for us, because it shows that God is not far off somewhere, but rather here, living within our hearts. Because we are his living temple, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit living in us is also at work in us. He's changing us. He's making us into something new, now that he's taken up residence. If you think about it, he's moved in, and he's fixing up the place. He's renovating. He's changing things, making us into a fit habitation for the Almighty God. He's taking away our sins, taking away our corruption, and making us more and more like Jesus. And that's a good thing, because as Paul says in verse 11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." So in other words, it was the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. The Father sent the Spirit on Easter morning to raise the body of Christ from the grave. And that same Spirit who raised up Jesus is the Spirit who lives within you when you believe in God. And if he can raise Jesus from the grave, he can certainly raise you too. He is raising you up into a new life to be more and more like him. So that also gives us assurance, so that we can know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit lives within.

Of course, that leads us to ask: how do we know? How do we know that we have the Spirit living within us? In two ways. First of all, because God says so. God promised to give the Spirit to those who believe in him. And when God says something, he always does it. He never goes back

on his Word. We can trust and be confident because of what God has said. But that's not the only way. Paul makes it very clear in our reading that it's also because we experience the Spirit at work in our lives. Now, maybe that makes us a little bit uncomfortable. Maybe it sounds a little bit like we're going back to looking at ourselves, to looking inwardly for our assurance. Because there are certainly people who do that sort of thing, who will base their assurance entirely on their feelings. They'll say that: "I know that I'm saved because I really feel like God is with me. I know that I'm saved because I really feel the presence of God in this place." And that is a dangerous thing. We don't want to fall all the way into that trap. But I wonder if, in our desire to fix that, we don't go a little bit too far the other way. Because Paul makes it very clear in our reading that the Spirit not only makes us the children of God. The Spirit also makes us aware that we are his children. The Spirit makes us aware that he is at work in our lives, and we can see him at work in what he's doing. So in other words, the answer here is not one or the other, to say only the mind or only our experience. But rather both of them together, so that in our mind and in our experience, we can see the Spirit at work and be confident that we are saved.

Because notice what he says here in verse 13: "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." So if we don't have the Spirit, we're going to die. That much is clear. But if you have the Spirit, by him you put to death the deeds of the body. In other words, that's our Christian life, our fight against sin, the way that we live as Christians. In other words, the experience of our daily lives. So we can see the Spirit at work in our lives. We can see him changing us. We can see him leading us to do what God wants us to do. We can even see him giving us emotions, giving us strong feelings about God. These are good things. Paul says in Galatians 5: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." All of those things are characteristic of our lives as Christians when we have the Spirit. When he is living within us, all of these things become part of who we are. If we don't have them at all, we don't have the Spirit. It's that simple. But when we have these things, we know that the Spirit is at work within us. Now of course, we're not going to do them perfectly. We will often be very weak, very feeble when it comes to these kinds of things. And that was Paul's whole point in the previous chapter: that even as Christians we still struggle with sin. But the Spirit is still at work, Christians. He is still making us more and more like Jesus, so that he's causing us to be loving. He is teaching us what it means to be patient. He is teaching us what it means to have self-control. That is the Spirit at work within us, and by that we can know that we are the children of God.

As Paul says in verses 15 and 16: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." So the Spirit has adopted us, made us the sons of God, and he bears witness within us that this is true. How does he do that? Through the things that he has given to us. Because the Spirit speaks through the Word of God, bringing us God's will and teaching us what it means to follow after him. The Spirit works through the sacraments, giving us peace, giving us comfort, giving us the forgiveness of sins. The Spirit prays with us, helping us to call on God as our Father, even giving us the words when we don't know what to pray. In all of these things, Christians, the Spirit is at work in our lives, and we can know that we are saved because of what he is doing so.

So ultimately, we can know that we are saved. We can be certain that we will go to heaven because of the work of the Holy Spirit, both in our minds and in our lives. Because we can know that we are saved because of what the Spirit is doing for us, giving us faith, making us to be Christian. We can also know that we are saved because of what the Spirit is doing in our lives, changing us and making us more like Jesus. In both of these things together, we can know that we are saved. We can be certain. We can be confident because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Holy Spirit, giver of all good gifts, bring to us the certainty of knowing that you have made us the children of God. Cause us to follow after God in all things and to do what is pleasing in your sight. For you live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, now and forever. Amen.