

“Whoever Practices Sin Is the Slave of Sin”
(John 8:34)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We began breaking ground on Stoddard’s insights into the marks of grace last Lord’s Day evening. We saw:
 - a. There are many difficulties in determining whether or not one is godly.
 - (i) Even the most sanctified have doubts, either during trials or when indwelling sin grows strong.
 - (ii) On the other hand, the ungodly often believe themselves to have grace without adequate evidence, because of man’s tendency to think more highly of himself than he ought.
 - b. The only way to resolve the issue is to take both to Scripture, where the righteous man may see God’s grace in His heart and be encouraged and where the unconverted may see his lack of it and be exposed.
2. Stoddard shows us how to test both in his sermon *The Way to Know Sincerity and Hypocrisy*.
 - a. His theme is simply that a godly man may know his conversion by the fact that he loves God.
 - b. Hypocrites, on the other hand, can know they are unconverted by the fact that they don’t love Him.
 - c. How can we know whether or not we love Him? By what we do.
 - (i) The gracious man, because he loves God, repents and believes in Christ, but the unconverted man does not.
 - (ii) When it comes to love, our actions speak more loudly than our words.
 - (a) If our lives are characterized by the practice of sin – of any sin – then we do not love God and are unconverted.
 - (b) But if we occasionally sin, this does not necessarily mean we are unconverted, because even believers struggle with sin.
 - (c) On the other hand, if we practice righteousness this doesn’t necessarily mean we’re saved, since even unconverted men can live outwardly obedient lives.
 - (d) The real question is what motivates these good works: love for self or love for God?
 - (e) If we can know that any of our works grow out of a genuine love for God, even one of them, then we can know all they all are, and that we are converted.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we’ll begin with the first part of Stoddard’s work: how a person can know that he is unconverted.

2. We'll look at two things:
 - a. We should not conclude we're unconverted because we sin.
 - b. But if we practice any sin, then we can know we are unconverted.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we should not conclude we're unconverted because we sin.
 1. Stoddard writes, "Hypocrisy is to be known only by their course of life. Men know it only by their walk" (Sincerity, 101).
 - a. Again, what we do shows what we are.
 - b. Our hearts direct the course of our lives: by looking at our lives, we can see what is in our hearts.
 2. However, in examining our lives, if we see that we do in fact sin, this does not by itself mean we're unconverted. "Particular acts of sin are not evidence of hypocrisy" (Ibid.).
 - a. Every saint sins.
 - (i) Paul writes, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good" (Rom. 7:21).
 - (ii) And again, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Gal. 5:17).
 - b. Believers have indwelling sin to contend with no matter how sanctified they may become in this life, and as long as that sin is there, it will express itself.
 - (i) It will do so internally: corruption will constantly "haunt" them, whether alone, in company, while working, or even while engaged in religious duties. It will express itself through "evil thoughts, desires, delights, fears, sorrows. . . . unbelief . . . pride and worldliness, frowardness and envy" (102).
 - (ii) Externally, it will give rise to such things as the wrong use of the tongue (James 3:8), the omitting of known duties, or committing of known sins, as well as sins of ignorance (102-103).
 - (iii) At times, it may break out in even greater acts of sin than unconverted commit. The corruption that is in the soul of the regenerate, though greatly weakened through mortification, may yet exert itself with great power. Stoddard writes, "Noah's intemperance, Lot's incest, David's adultery, and Peter's denying of Christ are unanswerable arguments that gross transgression is no evidence of a hypocrite" (103).
 - (iv) This can be a great comfort to the saint struggling with his sin, especially besetting sins.
- B. Just because we sin, doesn't mean we're unconverted; the practice of sin, however, does.
 1. If particular sins do not reveal whether a man is a hypocrite, since both the regenerate and unregenerate commit them, then what can? Stoddard says we can only discover this through the *practice*, of sin.

- a. He writes, “If a man makes a profession of religion, and lives in a way of sin against the light of his conscience, he is a hypocrite. . . . Titus 1:16: ‘They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him.’ . . . 1 John 5:3: ‘Herein is love, that we keep His commands, and His commands are not grievous.’ If men live in a way of disobedience they have not a spirit of faith, for faith sanctifies men. . . . 1 John 3:9: ‘He that is born of God sinneth not.’ . . . John 8:34: ‘He that commiteth sin is a servant of sin’” (104).
 - b. If a man practices any outward sin, whether the neglect of any known duty (sins of omission) or the practice of any known evil (sins of commission), he is unconverted (104-105). Such was the case with Hophni and Phineas (1 Samuel 2:12), Jehu (2 Kings 10:31), the Pharisees (Matthew 23:14), Judas (John 12:6), and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).
 - c. The cherishing of any inordinate affection – such as indulging in corrupt thoughts or desires – indicates the same. “If men allow themselves in malice, envy, wanton or profane thoughts, that will condemn them” (105).
 - d. This is true whether or not he ever acknowledges them. If a man “does not hate and mortify those corrupt affections, he is no saint” (106).
 - e. We need to remember that looks can be deceiving. Outwardly, the unconverted can appear to live better lives than the saints, “but if there is a way of internal sin their pretenses to godliness are vain,” even if “those corruptions do not break out in any scandalous way, those thoughts are an evidence of a rotten heart” (105).
2. There are other sins that reveal hypocrisy, such as living “in the omission of spiritual duties” (106).
 - a. These include failure to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – even if they are convinced the Gospel is true and experience some joy when they hear it (Cf. the rocky soil; Matt. 13:20-21) – and a failure to love God.
 - b. It doesn’t matter what a man says, if he has no “heartly love to God in his profession, in his obedience, he is not godly.”
 - c. Failure to love the saints indicates the same. John implies this in 1 John 4:8: “He that loveth not, knoweth not God” (106). The love the Spirit gives not only has God for its object, but those made in His image.
 3. Finally, if a man allows the practice of even one sin in his life, no matter what it is, this shows he is unconverted.
 - a. Stoddard writes, “If there is a great change in a man’s carriage, and he is reformed in several particulars, yet if there is one evil way, the man is an ungodly man. If he does choice service for the church of God, yet he is an ungodly man. Where there is piety, there is universal obedience. A man may have great infirmities, yet be a godly man – so it was with Lot and David and Peter – but if he lives in a way of sin, he does not render his godliness only suspicious, but it is full evidence against him. Men who are godly have a respect to all God’s commandments (Psalm 119:1). There are a great many commands, and, if there is one of them that a man has not a respect unto, he will be put to shame another day. If a man lives in one evil way, he is not

subject to God's authority; but he then lives in rebellion, and that will take off all his pleas and at once cut off all his pretences, and he will be condemned in the day of judgment. Luke 13:27: 'Depart from Me, all ye that work iniquity.' One way of sin is exception enough against the man's salvation" (109-110).

- (i) Would a servant be considered faithful if he obeys his master in all things, but once a year spits in his face?
 - (ii) Or would a wife be considered faithful if she does all her duty to her husband except in one area: she commits adultery against him with anyone she can find?
 - (iii) It doesn't matter how small or insignificant the sin is, if he allows himself to live in it without trying to overcome it, this is a sure sign of hypocrisy.
 - (iv) If he follows God under ordinary circumstances, but allows himself to sin under adversity, he is unconverted. Stoddard writes, "If a man is willing to serve God in ordinary cases, but excuses himself when there are great difficulties, he is not godly" (Ibid., 112).
 - (v) If he sins and afterwards is sorry for his sin, but continues to go through cycles of sin and repentance without making any progress in holiness, he is still a hypocrite: "Sometimes men take occasion to talk with them [*i.e.*, with unbelievers], and they are ready to own their fault; they are ashamed, and they shed tears, but after a while the temptation returns and they are as bad as before. They are like the dead fish that are carried down the stream, but they are sorry again, and so they keep on sinning and repenting" (113).
 - (vi) Stoddard has in view a man who repents for some other reason than for hatred of that sin because it is offensive to God. A true saint may go through a similar cycle as Stoddard describes above in his fight against his sin, especially a besetting sin.
- b. To summarize, the practice of any sin, whether internal or external, whether known or unknown, when there is full consent to that sin and no effort to put it off, this is a sure sign that a man is unconverted.
- c. Next time, we'll consider the evidence of sincerity. But for now, remember:
- (i) Even true saints sin, but the difference between the saint and the hypocrite is that the saint confesses and repents of his sin, turns from them to God seeking to obey Him, looks to Christ for His forgiveness and cleansing, and then moves forward in holiness; the hypocrite might forsake his sins for a time, but returns to them or others.
 - (ii) Don't let the enemy rob you of your comfort and joy because of your sins. If you love God and are fighting against them, you are His child.
 - (iii) Keep pressing forward in your fight against them. Amen.