

# Evidences of Eternal Life - Part 6

by Paris Reidhead

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*Paris Reidhead explores the critical role of the Holy Spirit as the witness of eternal life, emphasizing personal conviction and genuine conversion through the experiences of John Wesley.*

**Duration:** 48:39

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:24, Galatians 4:4-6, 1 John 3:24, 1 John 4:13, 1 John 5:10

**Topics:** "Eternal Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenging and impoverished environment in which John Wesley preached the word of God. Wesley believed in the power of salvation to transform lives and make individuals into new creations. The evidence of this transformation was seen in the witness of the spirit. The speaker also highlights the closed doors Wesley faced in the churches of England and the state of the Church during his time, which was described as lacking vibrancy and spirituality.

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## Transcript

We're now down to evidence number six. However, you have to put six in three places. The first six is in verse 24 of chapter three, the second half of the verse.

The second six is opposite, verse 13 of chapter four. And the third six is after verse 10 of chapter five. I read them in that order.

And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the spirit he hath given us. Verse 13 of chapter four. Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

And chapter five, verse 10, he that believeth on the son of God hath the witness in himself. In a convenient place next to one of those three sixes, you want to write and make sure you have cross-reference to Galatians 4, 4 to 6, which I quote. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And since we are sons, he has sent forth the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father, the witness of the spirit. All of us are familiar with the fact that the doors of the churches of England closed to John Wesley. Most of us do not quite understand why.

We think perhaps it is because he was fundamental in his theology. But at that time, there was no liberalism. If any of you have any question about the orthodoxy of the Church of England, I suggest that

you read the 39 articles.

Orthodoxer than which you cannot be, the excellent statement of historic Christianity, with certain little exceptions that one might want to make. Now, it was not because he was fundamental in his theology. You might say it was because of his preaching holiness.

He's associated with the message of holiness. But that was not why the doors to the churches in England closed to this Anglican clergyman. I'll tell you why.

It was because he dared to say that no one had the right to think themselves to be a child of God unless they had the witness of the spirit to the new birth. You can understand what that did to the Church of England. Everyone in the Church of England was a member of the Church of England.

Although there were a few that were secretly Catholics, but there were maybe a few who were Puritans and some who were among that company that would be known as pilgrims. But you could safely say that England was a land where all the people were members of the church that became members. When they were baptized and according to the teaching of the church that constituted being placed in the church.

Oh, subsequently, they would undergo catechism and a certain other ritual. But at that time, the transaction was done. Now, Wesley comes along and says, I'm sorry, friends, but that's not enough.

Good as it is, it's not enough. The state of the church in the time of Wesley has been described by some historians. It wasn't a very vibrant, exciting and spiritual organization.

In fact, there are records that in some of the parishes, the rectors had to get outside work to support themselves because the amount of money given by taxes and contribution was so little that they couldn't live. And the interesting thing is that some of the jobs that the priests took. In fact, there is a count of one church that had a sign in the vestibule saying the rector of this church has become proprietor of the Golden Ox pub and he offers drunk for a ha'penny.

Dead drunk with straw for a penny in the pub run by the rector. The prisons were a terrible disgrace for as much as a shilling owed and not paid. A man and his family could be put in prison.

The streets of London were mostly mud. And the indifference to human life was such that if a person was shot or were killed with a sword, he'd lay right there unless someone claimed his body and the horses and the coaches would simply press his body into the mud and that would become his grave. The stench of rotting human flesh and of awful that was cast out of the windows into the street where there were no sewers was indescribable.

It was a time when it was said that one man, for instance, went to the club which had introduced something called baths and he was asked if he wouldn't want to have one. He said, oh no, I'm already greased and sewn up for the winter. Sew up the underwear and there it was.

That was that way. Another man was asked if he wouldn't. He said, no, I've had a bath three months ago.

And personal cleanliness, handling of food, all the things that you would consider to be important were in the crudest of states. And poverty rampant, the few rich and the many poor. And into this environment came this man who dared to say that one could experience salvation that would totally change one's life.

And would make them into a new kind of being, a new creation. And the evidence that one had become a partaker of that change was in the witness of the spirit. Now John Wesley had gone as a missionary from England to Savannah, Georgia at the request of George Oglethorpe to send somebody there as a missionary to the Indians.

But when Wesley got there, he found that the clergyman in the church in Savannah and in a nearby village had left. And he, being the only ordained Anglican priest, was forced to serve in both parishes. And had no opportunity to meet with and learn the language of and minister to the Indians.

On the way over, he had had on that vessel with him, which had had an extremely stormy crossing, a company of Moravians out of Germany. Also going into the south coast of the U.S. And the storm was so severe it had blown away the masts. They thought certainly day after day they were going to sink.

The Anglicans were down the lowest part of the hold of the ship, screaming in terror. And the Moravians were out on the deck, tied to the rigging and tied to the rails, saying, Lord Jesus, we're going to see you face to face shortly. And the difference in the demeanor of the Anglicans and the Moravians was so telling, so significant, that Wesley never forgot it.

He was the priest who served the English coming over and the Germans had their own pastor. And he talked with them some. Well, after he'd been in Savannah for a little while, Wesley had two kinds of trouble.

The first kind of trouble was with the mayor of Savannah, who was one of the officials in the local Anglican church, of course, whose daughter was married to a man in the community, but who was living in an open, flagrant affair with another man in the community. And Wesley, consistent with what he had been taught and believed, refused to serve communion to the daughter of the mayor until she gave up this infamous behavior. And the mayor proceeded to make life unbearable for Wesley.

That was the outer pressure. But the inner pressure was even worse. The inner pressure was that Wesley had discovered that he didn't know God.

He wrote back to his bishop, saying, I came to convert the Indians, but alas, who will convert me? For I find I have not life in Christ. Well, in due course, the mayor proceeded to force Wesley to return. And by the way, it's interesting that there is a little park in Savannah, still there, I'm told, I haven't seen it, with a medallion and a stone that says, it was at this place that John Wesley shook the dust off his feet against Savannah.

You say, well, what does that have to do with it? There were godly men pastoring churches in Savannah who had prayed for an evangelistic crusade or revival and found as they read the history that there had been no visitation of God since the early 1700s. And then one of them looking through the history found a reference to the fact that Wesley had shaken the dust of his feet off against that town. And the men got together and they set up a day of prayer when they would go down to that place and ask God to forgive Savannah for having sinned against him and against John Wesley and ask him to remove the curse that Wesley had placed upon Savannah.

I never heard of that until I was told that by one of the men who had been involved in that event. And they said that that's precisely what they did. And they asked God to forgive Savannah and remove this.

I do not know just what they've had since, but I do know that they became convinced as they waited on the Lord and studied the word, searched their hearts, that Savannah had... You know when the Lord says shake the dust off your feet, he must have had something in mind. Well apparently they were convinced that it had been continued until that time. And they wanted to have God begin to move on the generations who were living there now.

At any rate, Wesley went back to England and he went to his bishop and he said, I've written to you saying I am not converted. I do not know him. Should I give up preaching until I know that I am indeed born into the family of God? And the bishop said, No, John.

Preach, but preach honestly. Tell the people where you are. Tell them what you seek and urge them to join you in the seeking.

And then when God has brought you into that assurance of life in Christ that your heart so yearns for, then tell them what he has done. But do not cease preaching, for there are many like you who would join you in that same quest. Well, it wasn't long.

Wesley was invited by his brother Charles down to Oxford where they were meeting there with George Whitefield and Isaac Watts and certain others at Oxford. And one evening one of the Moravians came in and read and translated Martin Luther's introduction to the book of Romans dealing with justification by faith. And there in that little upper Roman Aldersgate Street it was said, Wesley did declare that as he saw the finished work of Christ and realized that it was on the basis of repentance and faith that his heart reached out to receive the first time the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal sovereign and savior.

And he said, And my heart strangely burned within me. That strange burning of heart is what he subsequently came to call the witness of the Spirit. It was that inner knowing that transcended the necessity of further proof.

That inner sensitivity, that inner knowledge that he was a child of God, that is what he called the witness of the Spirit. Now let us go back. In Job we are told there is a spirit in man, in the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.

There is a spirit in man. You remember that God breathed into man and he became a living soul. That which he breathed in we would associate with the human spirit.

We are told by Paul that the part of a man that knows the things of a man is the spirit of man that is in him. You are here. How do you know you are here? Well you say I see where I am.

Well in good. I feel the cushion under me. I hear what's happening.

No. All of these things are mere confirmation. The part of you that knows you are here and not home is the spirit of you.

That's the part that knows everything. Are you married? The part of you that knows you are married or single as the case may be is the part, is the spirit within you. The part of a man that knows all the things of a man is the spirit of man.

Now with the unconverted the human spirit has no contact with God. I talked to you earlier about the effect of sin. We were spiritually dead.

That is God refuses to communicate to the human spirit of the impenitent. He may work in behalf of the impenitent. I've known him to do certain things, that the cry of the sinner because he's a God of grace but there's no immediate communication between God and the sinner because of his impenitence.

But when the sinner has been awakened and convicted and brought to repentance and exercised faith, then that human spirit is quickened, repaired, begotten again. I don't know what term you want to use. Use them all.

As long as what it has the effect of saying is that God begins to communicate to the human spirit. That's the point. In response to repentance and to faith.

Now if a person knows that they're unconverted, if they know that they're under conviction of sin, if they are conscious of the fact that they have chosen to obey God rather than to please themselves, if they have reached out to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in saving faith, they know it. Part of their consciousness. When God responds with pardon and forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, they know it.

How do they know it? Because God, the Holy Spirit, tells the human spirit you can call Almighty God Abba Father. That's how they know it. Now let's think for a moment.

What's the alternative? The alternative is that which I practiced for many years and for which I'm so deeply grieved. When I would, in my zeal, in my eagerness, not willing for the baby to come to full term, but wanting to get the baby in Christ and right away, I would take a shortcut. And I'd been taught how to take shortcuts.

I'd been told it was the right thing to do to take shortcuts. And the only thing that was the matter with all that was the babies didn't live. There wasn't any evidence of life.

But I would ask them, I'd take them to a verse, are you a sinner? Sure. Well that doesn't mean conviction. All that means is recollection.

Anybody of adult age can recall things that would be sin. But recollection of sin is a far cry from conviction of sin. Recollection is a function of the memory.

And conviction is the work of the Holy Ghost. Causing one to see that what they are is a rebel and a traitor, an enemy against God. So I would get a recollection of sin.

And then I would get a recognition of a verse of Scripture. Do you see that? Yeah, I see it. Can you read it? Yeah, I'll read it.

Do you believe it? Now, what does that mean to believe it? That means does your intellect dissent to that this is true? And the person says, yeah, I believe it. Okay, now what's that mean? Well, I don't know what it means. I'll tell you what it means.

It means that you're saved. And I told them it was an assumption based upon the fact of the function of the memory and the intellect. And then I would give them a verse of Scripture to certify as genuine what had been assumed.

And my tragedy of this was that it ended up into a spiritual abortion with nothing but stillborn corpses lying here and there. Products of my evangelism, my personal. And then God began to show me, as I've explained to you how, and yesterday and the day before, how the Spirit of God began to take me back to

the Word and back to others and other days to learn how they did it because there's really nothing new under the sun.

And so I found out that there is some process here. That everything in the Christian life that begins as a crisis is preceded by a process and followed by a process. And the first thing in the process is God awakens the sinner.

And we use Scripture and prayer to the point of awakening. Once they're awakened, then we use Scripture and prayer intercession designed to bring them to conviction, to take sides with themselves with God against themselves. And then to repentance, this change of mind or intention.

And then to saving faith that results in the work of regeneration. And the way they find out that they're born of God is not because somebody tells them, but that God tells them. And you might ask, what do you do differently now than you used to do? Well, the answer is this.

Now I try to tell them how holy God is and how righteous is His law. And then to show them how sinful they are and how guilty they are of breaking the law and are under the sentence of it. And then to show them what God did in the sending of Christ and what Christ did in His work on the cross.

And then to show them what they must do in response to what they have seen in the work of Christ on the cross. And then tell them, now look, when you do what God requires you to do, He will do what you need to have done. And when it is done, you will know it.

And when you know it, you come and tell me. Do you see the difference? I used to tell them and nothing happened. Now I wait and let them come and tell me.

Sometimes it takes a long wait. But it's worth it. Because when you try to short circuit it and you tell them, then you're left.

You give them assurance, friend. When that goes, they got a right to come back to you and say, give me another dose. I don't have it anymore.

But if you let them wait until they meet God and they come and tell you, then I say, it's not your responsibility anymore. They tell you God is witness to their spirits that they're a child of God. And they'll know.

Say why? Will it be a burning like Wesley said he had? No, no, no. How do you know? Well, you know because you know you know. Just the same way you know you're here, not home.

One will know they're born of God. And that's beyond the necessity for further proof. It's an instant in knowing.

It's a knowing from within. That's what the witness of the spirit is. And immediate knowledge given because God the Holy Ghost communicates directly with our spirit.

Here we are. What part of you is born again when you come to Christ? Your body? Hey, look. You remember when you cut your finger? There's a scar.

He didn't give you a new body the day you were born again. Did he? A memory? Did he take away the memory of the past and you begin with a blank tape? He made new. Your spirit.

Now if God has quickened and regenerated your spirit, you're going to know it because the part of you that knows anything is the spirit of you. That's what's going to know. And so in our witness, in our personal work, what we are doing is prouiding people to Christ, pressing them to him and letting him tell them that they're born of God.

Now we find here that he says and hereby we know that he abideth in us by the spirit which he has given us. It is the immediate testimony of God the Holy Spirit that he has taken up, brought life to our hearts. And so back to our scenario.

You're sitting there with someone who says I'm not sure. I'm a child of God. And you are saying to them, well do you, does his spirit witness that he's abiding in you? I don't know what you mean.

Well the text tells us hereby we know he abideth in us by the spirit which he has given us. And if you don't know, isn't that a matter of concern? Well yes it is. Go down to verse 13 in chapter four.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us because he hath given us of his spirit. This is the work of God the Holy Ghost coming to give to us the witness that he is in us by the Holy Spirit. And in chapter five and verse 10 he that believeth on the Son of God and hath thee witness in himself.

Well what witness is it? It's the same witness that you have in verse 13 of chapter four and verse 24 of chapter three. They're together there. And it's so important for us to realize that this is the last note in modern preaching.

And I urge you and I exhort you and I entreat you to recognize that the only alternative to the easy believism and the antinomianism that characterizes our day and time that's filled our churches with such a large proportion of those that are unconverted is that we return again to this emphasis and ministry that the Holy Ghost is the spirit of adoption. And he has never given that right to any human being. He has never abdicated.

He has never rescinded. He remains the spirit of adoption. He is the only one in the universe that has the right to tell a person they've passed from death to life.

You can tell them how but you can't tell them when because you stand outside. You don't know what's going on in the human heart. You say well that's certainly gonna cut down the number of responses I get.

So be it. If that's the case, so be it. Let the chips fall where they may.

So be it. No one has the right to tell a person they've passed from death to life but the God who brings them out of death into life. It's a sovereign prerogative of the Holy Ghost to tell a person that they're alive in Christ.

Now, the consequences of this for Wesley were enormous. The church doors closed. In fact, at Epworth where his father had been rector for many, many years, the then rector refused, totally refused to let John Wesley, Anglican clergyman, speak from the pulpit that his father had occupied.

And as I told you in another service, Wesley went out and stood on his father's tomb and proclaimed to the people of the community that the only one that has the right to tell you that you are born of God is God the Holy Ghost. The churches of England closed because it meant that if what he was saying was so, the churches of England were built out of names written in a book, a baptismal record, of people that were

doubly damned, dead in their trespasses and sins and assuming that because they'd passed through a religion ordinance that they were children of God. Thus immunized to the work of God because of what had happened to them.

And Wesley has spoke that day to the entire community, far more than ever could have gathered in the church. And that opened the outdoor ministry of Wesley. Somehow the message got out and reached the rector that he was going to be going to another town.

And so with zeal, not accompanied with wisdom, that rector sent a man on horseback quickly over, speeding over to the other town to tell the other rector that he'd closed the door, wouldn't let Wesley preach. He urged the rector of that town to do the same and to announce to the people in the village not to go near Wesley. Well you know precisely what happened, don't you? When he got there, everybody in the village was out there waiting to hear him.

Had the best promotional system as possible to get, the opposition of the local clergy. And so he was able to speak to that community. And he would say, if you read his record of this, because he kept a journal, today I spoke to 700 or to 300 or to whatever hundred it was.

And two came, three came. Or in the morning I had them come and, but after he got to Bristol, there was a company of believers and they decided they needed a place to meet. And there was a foundry that had been abandoned and for a little bit they were able to buy it.

And they bought the foundry and cleaned it up and fitted it up as a chapel where they could meet. Well they had to make payments. And so they decided that the people didn't have the money when they came on Sunday because they got paid sometime else.

And the best thing to do was to break the congregation up into groups of about 11 and have one person go from home to home and collect the money that they could use to pay for the foundry, for the building. But the men who went, the people who went found out there were problems and so they'd come back and Mr. Wesley would talk about them. So it was decided that instead of having one man go to 11 homes or whatever they were, they would have all of them come to one home or one place.

And that when they came, everybody would give not only the money that they'd collect for the payment of the building, but everyone would give a report of what had happened to them during the previous week. And the text that he used is the text for these small groups was from James four. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed.

Because they didn't have money enough for doctors and medicine wasn't very effective anyway. And so there was a lot of sickness and they said, well, let's pray. God honored that prayer.

One occasion, Wesley was out with a farmer who had a lot of cattle who were sick. Some had died and Wesley, the farmer said, will you pray for my cattle? I can't afford to lose them. So Wesley went out in the field and stood there and he prayed for the sick cattle that they'd get well.

And they did. Well, there wasn't much confession that the cattle had to make, but the people had a lot. And so they'd get together and they would tell what they'd done.

How'd it happen? If they'd failed, they'd tell it. Confess your faults one to another. Well, do you see what he had? He had the most marvelous group therapy sessions the world's ever seen.

These people were coming together, loving one another, praying. What bound them together? One thing, they all had the witness of the spirit that they had been born of God. And until they gave satisfactory evidence that they did have the witness of the spirit, they were not assigned to one of these groups.

That was the thing that bound them together because they found only those that gave good evidence that the spirit of God had borne witness with their spirit that they were children of God could participate in this small group ministry without having, without problem and difficulty. So the class meeting as it was called in historic Methodism was made up of people that knew they'd passed from death to life. They still had problems and they were still growing but that was the precondition for their being part of it.

Well, you have that. Now in just a few moments I want to take what I would then call the seventh evidence of the new birth. I find this in the first chapter, the first verses of chapter five.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also by him that is begotten of him. And I put seven after just before two.

By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous. And I check verses three and four for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world and this is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith.

I would simply say this in respect to this seventh evidence. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.

Evidence that we're born of God is that we overcome the world. Now we've already seen all that is in the world. But I want to give you an insight that I trust is going to encourage strengthen your heart and make this more useful to you as you share it with others.

This is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous. Dear friend, anything that makes the commandments of God appear to you to be grievous is of the world. I repeat it.

Anything that causes the commandments of God to seem restricting, binding, prohibiting my pleasure and joy and thus grievous is of the world. How do you know it's of the world? Because it causes one to regret the fact that they're under the commandment of God. Anything that makes the commandments grievous is of the world.

And to love God is to keep his commandments and anything that comes from any quarter within or without that makes those commandments seem too heavy to carry and to cause us to resent their presence is of the world. And therefore, it's imperative for us to understand that we are going to become very sensitive to what we hear, what we read, what we see, what we say, what touches our lives and should it cause the commandments of God to seem weighty and undesirable, we know that is of the world. And we are going to assume and refuse and reject everything that causes any infringement on the love we have for God and to love God is to keep his commandments.

Who is he that is born of God? He that overcometh the world. How are we going to be sensitive to what the world is? How are we going to know what the world is? The world is anything that makes God's commandments seem undesirable to us. And therefore, God has given us a built-in touchstone by which

we can test whatever it is that comes from any quarter from which it comes.

If it makes the commandments heavy and undesirable, then that's of the world. Because the enemy of our souls, the God of this world, has hated the commandments of God even since he lied to Mother Eve and said, you shall not surely die. And therefore, he is going to use every subtle means as well as the more overt and more obnoxious and difficult.

He's going to use a variety of subtle means. But the one that's born of God is the one that overcomes the world because he loves the God and he loves, thus he loves the commandments and he becomes sensitive by virtue of the fact that as soon as he feels the commandments are heavy, he knows that that thing that caused the commandments to appear grievous is of the world and he rejects it. Heavenly Father, seal to our hearts what we've had in these morning services and grant that we'll recognize that there's tremendous need in the world, our world, our church world, to go back again to thy word.

We hear John as he says, as he writes the gospel, these things are written that you might have eternal life. And as he writes this first letter, these things are written that you might know that you have eternal life. There are so many today, Lord, make up the membership of our church communities.

Occupy the pews. Give no biblical evidence of having been born into thy family. Oh, give to us the courage and faithfulness to bring thy word and let thy word do its work.

We ask, Father, that thou will bring honor and glory and praise to the Lamb that was slain, God who became flesh and dwelt among us, very God of very God, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name and for whose sake we pray. Amen.

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