

## Who am I? The Certain Self

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
New King James version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Last time we started a new series with a broadcast on the 'Sovereign Self', a characteristic of today's society – 'I am in control.' Today we will consider the 'Self' from another angle - the 'Certain Self.'

In order to introduce this subject, let's start with some ways that people view themselves. First up, many people today can seem very certain of themselves! Success comes to them easily – perhaps even too easily. Maybe they have been born with a unique set of favourable circumstances to their credit which makes life just 'click' for them. Perhaps it is access to money, or often, just as importantly, access and connections to influential people to assist them in opening doors on their way to success. And it can often be the case, either by choice or oversight, that they fail to recognise or credit how many of those privileges – a positive life experience, wealth or social connections – have contributed to their success, instead, allowing themselves to believe 'I did it my way!'

Another category of stories I come across are of those people who have hit the buffers in life. Perhaps they were successful to some degree, but something came in to derail them on their journey – a personal or family crisis, an economic downturn, physical or indeed mental health challenges. But often we hear these stories when the person is back on the way up – they tell how they overcame adversity and got back on track. Still, there, the focus is often on how 'I did it' – the centre of the story is the individual.

And then there are many others – perhaps the majority – who go through life feeling very uncertain about themselves. There's a phrase which has currency in business coaching which captures this quite well: 'Impostor Syndrome.' This describes the feeling of someone in a position in leadership of which they feel undeserving or are not really capable of fulfilling. Perhaps that's where most of us feel we fit, at least sometimes.

So we have a range of examples from people who feel very certain of themselves – but perhaps without good reason, not recognising the external influencing factors of their success – to those who feel quite the opposite. Either way, we should ask ourselves the question: can we really, and justifiably, feel in any way certain about ourselves - our position, our role or our calling in the lives that we lead? Is there in fact another way to look at this? Does the Bible have something to say to us? Well we can start by looking at some words in the Bible about this subject.

The first verse in my search that I came across in the New Testament which deals with certainty happened to be from 1 Timothy 6:7:

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

Well, that kind of certainty might not sound like the most appealing place to start. And if you listen to it through the ears of secular Western culture, you might think it hardly needs to be said! Most people believe that anyway – don't they? Well, sufficient to say in passing, that the words of Scripture here are placing a kind of strong bookend on our lives to break any hope of a causal link between our material successes in this life and a valuable reward in the next. But is that the only thing we can be certain about?

Perhaps we can go further back in our Biblical search to the Old Testament book of Proverbs and chapter 22:

“Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge; for it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; let them all be fixed upon your lips, so that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?” (Proverbs 22:17-21).

Here, we are given Biblical assurance that we can ‘know the certainty of the words of truth.’ If there's one thing I'd like to you to remember, it's this: that the Bible calls us to the certainty of understanding itself as the Word of God. And it's not only that we seek this understanding of the Bible for our own interest – we're also told that we should seek out certain truth so that we in turn can answer others who come to us for help.

Moving back to the New Testament, we see this principle from Proverbs very much taken up by the apostles, those early followers of the Lord Jesus who were gifted to provide a unique and foundational ministry to the early church (Ephesians 2:20). Think of John the apostle. He so valued his experience in his young life of having known, served and having been loved by his Master, that he later simply described himself in his gospel as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ He wrote a general letter to first century Christians as follows:

“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

“And we know Him...”, he writes – with absolutely certainty. This is not something remembered later in life somewhat vaguely from so many years earlier – but rather, he knew. And he did not just limit this to himself, but also the whole apostolic group too: “We know.”

He also asserts the knowledge of certain blessing that God has brought Christians into.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:12-13).

He adds an equally stunning claim:

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 John 2:20).

There is no doubting to be found here in John's writings. He is an example of certainty and assurance.

The apostle Paul encourages Timothy to find his assurance in the Scriptures, writing in his second letter to Timothy:

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Luke provides the same rationale in the preface to his gospel, where he explains to Theophilus the purpose of his letter is so that,

“You may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:4).

These are just some examples. If we take in the spread of writings throughout the New Testament – whether in the gospels, or the writings of Paul, Peter, John, Jude and James – we will see throughout that there is great exhortation to certainty. So these examples do give us encouragement to be certain. But still, I find from time to time the idea that to be certain, or to hold to absolutes, even in Christian belief, is just – somehow – not quite right. Isn't it good, we're told, to question and to doubt? Isn't this the only way to make progress? Surely a faith that doesn't doubt is just blind faith, isn't it?

Well, our faith, and the Scriptures which hold the truths of that faith, are never afraid of questions – because, as the apostle Peter once expressed in very simple terms, all of the answers to genuine and searching questions are to be found in Christ Himself and His word. When many of Jesus' wider group of disciples found His teaching too challenging to handle, they turned away, no longer to follow Jesus. Addressing His inner circle, Jesus asked them, “Do you also want to go away?” But Peter, often the spokesman of the group, was first to reply, and he recognised that there was only one place to find answers, saying,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

As Peter, I am fully convinced that the certain answer to all of our questions and needs is in Christ, and His word, the Bible.

Putting legitimate questions to one side, the apostle James addresses the rather different matter of doubt. He tells us that yes, we are to approach God with our questions, but, we must do it in faith – trusting God and believing His word. He writes,

“...Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

Here, James presents doubt in a rather excoriating manner – not as honest questioning, but rather an attitude of unbelief in God that is celebrated, enjoyed and entertained for its own sake. It is quite different from honest enquiry.

God Himself gives us the final word. In his promise to the people of Israel in an earlier day, which we can also take to heart, He says:

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

So I conclude that there are areas of understanding that the inspired writers of Scripture want us, and encourage us, to be clear and certain about. [And while we should allow for differing levels of maturity in Christian experience, there is an exhortation to work towards a unity not based on ignoring differences but rather working towards a common understanding.](#) The apostle Paul writes as follows:

[“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” \(Philippians 3:15-16\).](#)

[There is a promise here that we can grow towards this and God will reveal truth to us. Now we might be tempted to look at this promise sceptically when we see the great variety of difference in the Christian sphere. Indeed I recently read a suggestion from a church leader that if we don't agree with things in our local church, we shouldn't question the leadership but just move on and find one that we do agree with. And while there are guidelines in Scripture as to separation in cases of moral and doctrinal evil, he wasn't really addressing matters at that level. I would suggest here we see a giving up of the promise given to us in Philippians 3. We are to work together as a local body of believers, converging towards a common maturity of faith.](#)

So if, as I suggest, it is desirable and indeed possible to live life with our ‘Certain Self’, and indeed to increasingly find growing fellowship with others as we do so, we should also consider how is this to be made possible? Surely the certainty of our standing, our life and our future cannot be based upon some level that I have successfully attained – returning to the thought of ‘I did it my way’ we encountered earlier. Is there something greater in play here? Where – or to put the question more accurately, in whom, is our certainty to be grounded? Let's see if we can find out.

### **To be ‘In Christ’**

I would like to take us to the example of Andronicus and Junia. In Romans 16:7, we read,

‘Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are note among the Apostles, who also were in Christ before me.’

So here we have two disciples whose faith was of such a character that the apostles considered them to be particularly noteworthy. They were described by Paul as having come to faith in Jesus before Paul. So how did Paul choose to describe their position? Did he say, ‘...who also became Christians before me’ – simply describing their change of belief status – or did he describe their process of conversion and faith – perhaps ‘...who also came to understand who Jesus is and put their faith in Him before me?’ No, he does not use anything approximating to these expressions – either of which would may have been strictly true, though somewhat perfunctory descriptions. Instead he uses a phrase to describe their protected and privileged position. They were, he says ‘in Christ’ before me. That quality and position of being ‘in Christ’ can tell us so much. This is what it is to have the certainty of a Christian – to be ‘In Christ.’

Allow me to illustrate this idea. The platform Instagram is great for displaying photographs which can then be catalogued using ‘hashtags’ – for example, searching ‘#lake’ will call up pictures with lakes; #mountains, pictures of mountains; and so on. Some of the pictures can look amazing, often because people use filters. If the light is not quite right, you can change it with a computer-generated filter to make it look brighter – or greener – or bluer whatever you like. So sometimes you will see a bit of a reaction against this idea and you can search for pictures that are tagged ‘#nofilter.’ What does it signify? In a way it is supposed to mean the plain, unvarnished truth –

unmodified, unchanged, the real thing, if you like. The idea of not having a filter is sometimes considered to be more honest, raw or real. It stands in contrast to the many filters that are put on to make things look better than they are.

But let me apply this to our own lives. What kind of filter do we need in our lives? Would you want to really want your life to be open for all to view with '#nofilter?' Indeed, who would feel confident standing before God with 'no filter?' If you are a regular and careful listener to our broadcasts, I'm sure you'll not be surprised to hear that one day each of us will stand before God, and we must ask ourselves this searching question: do I want to find myself standing before God with the full unvarnished, raw truth of my life under His view? As the Bible says,

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

To be before God with 'no filter' is actually to have our shame and sin on full display. In fact, we really do need our lives to be seen through a filter! What – or indeed who – is that filter? Well, to be 'in Christ' is, reverently speaking, to be seen by God through the filter of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need Christ as our filter. Throughout the New Testament we can find that God does indeed see so many aspects of the Christian's position through the filter of Christ. Allow me to give you some examples:

- In terms of judgement: God does not see our sins if we have trusted in Christ, because Christ has borne the punishment for them on our behalf,

'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 6:23).

- In terms of salvation: it has been won for us, as we read,

'...The elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory' (2 Timothy 2:10).

- We are made a new creation:

'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- We are also brought into practical daily experience of the love of God:

'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God...' we read in Romans 8:38-39, '... and it goes on to say, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

- Our life here and now is presented to us as fit for God's service:

'For we are His workmanship – created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them' (Ephesians 2:10).

- The Christian's future heavenly position is anticipated as a settled fact:

'...[God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 1:20).

- Paul also deals with the certain position of those who have died before the return of the Lord Jesus:

‘And the dead in Christ will rise first’, he reassures the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

So even in death our position is certain in Him.

So we can be sure that to be in Christ is to be seen through Him – to be brought into a position where our salvation, our current life, our future life and our future position are all assured. God does not look at us to see if we measure up, but instead looks through the filter of Christ to see us as complete in Him. But we must pause to make sure we ask (and answer) the vital question: what if God does not yet see me through the filter of Christ? How can I access this privileged position in Him? How do these blessings come to me? How does that salvation come to me? How is my future assured?

Well, in the middle of a large and long letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome, to explain the gospel in great detail, he summarised the answer to this question perfectly:

‘That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved’  
(Romans 10:9).

This is how to become ‘in Christ’ and to enter into that privileged position. We are to confess Him as our Lord with a real belief that He has won the victory over sin for us – as evidenced by His rising from the dead on the third day.

Indeed, seeing ourselves and our circumstances as ‘in Christ’ allows us to have confidence in God’s mastery over situations where we might otherwise despair. When Paul was under an extended period of house arrest, as we read of in Acts, he wrote to the church at Philippi:

‘But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ...’ (Philippians 1:12).

Here he even puts the inanimate objects that are holding him prisoner – his chains – under the banner of being ‘in Christ’ – so that he does not attribute his captivity to the power of the Roman Empire but rather accepts and owns the blessings that arise from the position he finds himself in. As he continues:

‘...And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear’  
(Philippians 1:12-14).

What great certainty comes from seeing all of our circumstances as ‘in Christ!’

### **In Review**

We started our time today thinking about the ‘Certain Self.’ We have considered the range of life experiences that can make people more or less certain about themselves. But in turning to the Scriptures for guidance, we have seen that certainty and knowledge are not things to be reticent of, but in fact are to be encouraged in the right way. And we can approach God with our uncertainties and find all our answers in Him, without doubting. But most of all we have been directed to understand how we can live with Biblical certainty. With the knowledge that we can

come to Christ simply by believing, we find we can then live lives where God sees us as completely 'in Christ.'

What a place of privilege and assurance that God offers to us! Let us take up these promises with confidence.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, The Certain Self, talk number T1339 in our series Who am I

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