

How Can You Tell...?
Week 1
Romans 12:1-2, 7:14-25; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 5:7-9
"A New Way of Thinking"

Introduction

This is how we know that we know Him: if we keep His commands. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and yet doesn't keep His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him. But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in Him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as He walked. **1 John 2:3-6**

In recent weeks, I have, although unintentionally, had a lot of "down time". Having the flu and pneumonia will do that to you! And since I wasn't able to do much else, I spent a lot of time in prayer and contemplation. I, of course, had more opportunity to catch up on current events, only to discover that our country is more divided than ever. What did come as a surprise, however, was the growing schism that seems to be occurring within evangelical circles. To put it mildly, I am starting to hear people who call themselves "Christian" doing and saying some very un-christian-like things, and not only are they unrepentant for their sins, they actually seem to be taking pride in them.

More and more "so-called" celebrities are claiming the name of Jesus these days. But sadly, their lives appear to be no different than that of the average pagan. Now, I am not interested in declaring with all certainty whether or not a person's faith is genuine. That is God's job. But I also am not so open-minded that my brains have fallen out. We as Believers are called, in fact commanded, to inspect the walk of those within the church to see whether or not the walk matches the talk. I could quote you several verses on the subject, namely Paul's admonition to the Corinthians to clean up the sin within their own ranks (**1 Corinthians 5**). But for the sake of simplistic clarity, I will refer us all to the words of The Apostle John:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **1 John 4:1**

So, while I was incapacitated during my illness, I began to think about my own mortality, and if I would never have the opportunity to preach another sermon. We all know that one day that will be the case. We just do not know when that day will come. But as I began to think about all this (morbid as it would seem to be), I started to think about what sermons would I be sorry that I have not preached. And then it came to me, that I would really like to do a short series on how we can know for certain if a person truly has a genuine saving faith in Christ. How exactly do we do as John has told us and "test every spirit"? As I began to ponder this all the more, I can say with certainty that The Bible actually does give us all the information we need to be able to "test every spirit". We can examine a person's life and tell whether or not they are a follower of Christ. So, over the next few weeks, we are going to see what God has to say about the subject, so that our discernment in these matters will increase.

As I stated before, many famous people claim to follow Jesus. Movie stars, politicians, and the like are often making some type of public profession as it were. But are they worshipping the real Jesus? I say this because many of the things that they avidly support are in direct opposition to The Word of God. How can these things be? The book of **1 John** tells us that if we claim to know Him, then we will walk as He walked (**1 John 2:3-6**, see verse above). So rather than just take the word of everyone who claims to be our bother or sister in the faith simply because they said so, should we not at least look to see if they are indeed trying to *walk as He walked*?

There are no perfect Christians, as we will see in this study, but there are some indisputable facts about a person who has been truly regenerated by The Holy Spirit. They are different from this world in many ways. And when no difference can be seen by those who truly know Him, then in all fairness, a few more questions should be asked. So over the next few weeks (I know not for sure how many), we will see what The Word has to say about the attributes of a truly *born-again* Believer. And as we will see in

today's study, it starts with a monumental shift in the way a person thinks, when He has experienced new birth from above. It is a radical change on the inside of us, which leads us to a new way of living. So let us look together at the inception of the transformative nature of saving faith, namely a *New Creation*, which leads to a *New Calling*, followed by a *New Conflict*. Please allow me to explain.

A New Creation (Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1-2

First of all, before anyone says it, I am aware that there is an actual verse of Scripture that refers directly to the Believer becoming a new creation in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a NEW CREATION: the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17

But I chose **Romans 12:1-2** for a reason. You see, the book of *Romans* is Paul's textbook for Christianity 101, if you will. Therefore, he gives a great deal of information as to how our faith works in this epistle. And you will see in the first verse, he begins by telling us just how to become a Believer in the first place. Saving faith is not simply saying "*I believe*" in Christ. It is submitting ourselves to the Lordship of Christ *because* we believe. To become a Christian is to believe that Jesus is fully God, and therefore, surrendering ourselves completely over to Him, hence what Paul calls becoming a "*living sacrifice*". A sacrifice has no will of its own, it is placed upon the altar as an offering, to be done with as God sees fit. This is Biblical Christianity. *The Bible* doesn't tell us that we become Christians by confessing that Jesus is "real". It says we are saved when we confess that Jesus is **LORD (Romans 10:9)**.

Now look what happens next when you submit yourself to Christ as a "living sacrifice", **Romans 2** tells us that our mind becomes "*transformed*". This means that within us there is a rebirth, a regeneration. Our old way of thinking is replaced with a "new mind"; within every Believer resides the mind of Christ (**1 Corinthians 2:16**). To be baptized into Christ is to be placed in Christ and to have Christ *in us*! And that, my friends, changes everything. This new mind that has been placed within begins to transform our very nature, it begins to reshape us into the very image of Christ, so that old things are passed away and all things become new, as Paul would say.

So how can you tell if a person has genuine saving faith? Because of their changed nature. **You cannot stay where you are, and go with God.** There are a great deal of people out there who claim to believe in Jesus, but there is no change within them. I have often said to many who had no evidence of transformation, and yet claim to be saved, "I believe that there are rocks on the moon, but that has not changed the way that I live." A person who truly believes in Jesus will submit themselves to His Lordship, and when they do, they are transformed. The Holy Spirit of God never shows up without making a difference. So do not believe every spirit, my friends. See if there is a change in the person who claims to follow Jesus. Jesus described it to Nicodemus like the effects of the wind.

The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of The Spirit.

John 3:8

Just like the wind, you cannot see The Holy Spirit, but you can most certainly see His effects. And if there are no drastic change in a person, you can rest assured that he has not had a real encounter with The Spirit of The Living God! The Spirit gives us a *new mind*! A true Believer will always be completely transformed. They are a new creation. So always look for the evidence of this inner transformation, when a person claims to be a Believer! **No transformation, then no salvation. No exceptions.**

A New Calling (2 Corinthians 2:14-17, 5:9)

Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. **2 Corinthians 5:9**

A direct reaction to having this “new mind” is to have a *new calling*. To be a lost person is to be consumed with the disease of self-love. However, in Christ, we go from an insatiable need to serve ourselves to a longing to please Christ. It is our new calling that comes from being changed from within. For is impossible to be born-again and have no desire to serve The God who saved you. To love Christ is to follow His commandments:

If you love Me, you will keep My commands.

John 14:15

I believe this is also a reality that causes confusion in some Believers. For if we are truly called to reorder our steps and follow Christ, then how are we to make life decisions the likes of which are not spelled out specifically in *The Bible*? For example, how do I choose my career, what kind of car should I drive, whom should I marry, should I have children? And the list goes on... and on. None of these things are listed out for us in The Scriptures. For example, Sandi and I have been married for nearly forty years. I can still recall the night that I asked her to marry me. To be honest, I wasn't even sure she would say yes at the time! And it certainly was not like I could find some verse in 2 Hezekiah (there's no such book btw), that would say, “and someday, “*Scott, you must marry Sandi, thus sayeth The LORD.*” That would have certainly come in handy!

So, how do we know when we make the right decisions? Because we have the mind of Christ. Therefore, we must filter every decision we make as to whether or not we are acting according to God's will! That's how. If I take this job, will it glorify God? Is there any Biblical reason that I should not marry this person? If I buy this house or car, will I still be able to serve others or give of my income to the poor and to the work of the church? These are just a few examples of how we seek God's will in all things. And once we determine that a decision has no Scriptural edict which forbids us from going forward, we then bathe that decision in prayer and The Holy Spirit will in fact guide us and help us choose the right path forward. You see, because we have been given a new mind, we know how to prioritize our decision making processes.

I have learned that if what I am doing is pleasing to God, I will have a peace that comes from doing so. And every single time I could feel a tug pulling me away from a decision, I have learned to listen. God's desire for each of us is that we walk in His ways, and He has promised that He will guide us, if we seek His direction in all things. But a person who has not been transformed by the renewing of their mind never bothers to seek God's direction! They just stumble blindly through the darkness doing whatever feels good to them at the time. And remember:

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

Proverbs 14:12

And speaking of death, when a born again Believer is a *New Creation* with a *New Calling*, some people will be drawn to them, while others will be repulsed. Our new mindset, that leads us to please Christ, will have one of two powerful effects upon those whom we encounter. Listen to the words of Paul:

But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in Christ's triumphal procession and through us spreads the aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life. Who is adequate for these things?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Did you catch that? To God and to those whom God calls, our ministry, our calling, if you will, is a sweet smelling fragrance, the very aroma of Christ Himself. But to those who do not love our God, we are as offensive to them as a rotting corpse! **So how do you know if a person has been truly born again?**

They have a new way of thinking, a new way of living, Which causes them to despise sin and to love the things of God! Show me a “believer” who is offended by The Word of God, and I will show you a charlatan. Show me a “believer” that everyone loves, and I will show you a compromiser, who is not in love with the commands of Christ. And that is how you will know who is, and is not, born-again from above.

A New Conflict (Romans 7:14-25)

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin. For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is sin that lives in me. So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self I delight in God's law, but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our LORD! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin. Romans 7:14-25

Because we have a renewed mind in Christ Jesus, we are now also at war with our own flesh. It is an inner struggle that the lost person cannot begin to understand. For although we are made alive in Christ and have our eyes open to His righteousness, we still live in a body that is steeped in sin. I love how Paul describes this inner conflict. In His heart, he longs not only to obey every command of Christ, but he also agrees that every command is just and righteous. So what is it that keeps him from complete obedience? His flesh is at war with his spirit! His new nature and the old one do not get along. Every single born-again Believer knows exactly what Paul is talking about, for we each have a *new mind* trapped in an *old body*.

Allow me to give you an example of what I am talking about. As pastor of a church, I despise gossip. I have seen it destroy many church relationships in my tenure. It is divisive, and quite frankly, I think it may possibly be the worst sin a Believer can commit. And I believe that God feels the same way. Listen to this passage:

The LORD hates six things; in fact seven are detestable to Him: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers. **Proverbs 6:16-19**

Did you notice how that passage was worded? The first five examples say that God hates the “parts of the body” that commit these sins, but the last two, the ones that involve a person’s out-of-control tongue, God says in those instances He hates the *whole person*! I truly believe it is worded this way as a warning to those who cannot keep their mouth shut, who go around constantly tearing others down! So when I read that, I say, “Amen, LORD, you are exactly right. You see just like Paul. I agree that the command is good.” But would you like to know the truth? Sometimes, I catch myself doing the very thing I despise. Running my big mouth about someone, when I ought have stayed silent. Why on earth would I do the very thing that I despise more than any other?!! Because I have a new mind, trapped in an old body. There is a continuous struggle going on within every born-again Believer. And I am telling you this for certain, if someone doesn’t have this inner conflict between their new mind and their old flesh, rest assured, they have never been born-again from above.

Lost people have no inner struggle, for they only have one “god” whom they serve, and that is themselves. There are plenty of verses in *The Bible* that describe the heart of a lost person, but this one always comes to my mind:

The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable — who can understand it? **Jeremiah 17:9**

You see, the wicked, do not have the inner conflict that a Believer has. Oh, every person is born with an inward conscience, but repeated self-indulgent sin over time will sear it to the point of little or no effect (**1 Timothy 4:2**). But the born-again Believer cannot live in sin without feeling conviction and an inner turmoil, for our new mind is ever longing to please Christ above all else. So we are in a constant struggle against our own flesh. **Rest assured, if there is no inward conflict against the flesh, then a person is most definitely unsaved.**

But here is the good news. **Despite the fact that we have this inward conflict, we have been forever forgiven.** Paul, in the description of his inner turmoil, asks the question, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” **And the answer is a resounding Jesus Christ our LORD!** In him, we have forgiveness. And one day, we will all be delivered from this sinful body forever, and the struggle will be over, once and for all!

“A body of death” was actually a term used for a method of punishment that was reportedly once used in Paul’s part of the world to punish a murderer. The tribes from that region would actually strap the dead body of a murdered victim to his killer’s body, thus causing the murderer’s body to decay along with his victim. It was a horrific way to die, and Paul used this as an example of how miserable we are at times, when we truly want to live for Christ but our corrupt flesh gets in the way. The good news is that we will one day be set free from this body and be a sinless priesthood, glorified in the image of Christ. And this is our hope.

So there you have it, three ways that you can identify whether or not a person has truly been born from above, they are a *New Creation*, with a *New Calling*, accompanied by a *New Conflict*. A person who lacks these things has *never* had a genuine faith-saving encounter with The Risen Christ! But for those who have had this encounter and understand these truths, I have one word of encouragement for you today as you continue in your struggle to live a life that is pleasing to Him:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus...! **Romans 8:1**

TRUTH!!!