

Msg #133 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

“How To Tell If You’re A Christian”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about the scripture that Kim, our announcer, just quoted. If you heard the introduction to today's program, or to any program of ours in the past, you would have heard her quote the words of 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, which tells us to come out from among the evilness of this world and become a separate people. You know, being separate from something can in no possible way be seen as mingling with something. You don't mingle or mix with something and still be separate from it. We aren't supposed to be mixed up with the world or with the things of this world. Many times I've quoted the scripture of Colossians 3:1-2 which says, "if you then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

You see, if we truly have risen up into new life in Christ, then why would we continue to live the same life as we lived before we were born again? If we've been born again, then we're no longer the same flesh and blood persons we were before. The Bible tells us that we must be born again. However, not born again back into the same old flesh and blood nature, but that we must be born again this time in the spirit. God is a Spirit, and as it says in John 4:24, those who worship God must worship him in spirit. If you're going to be a follower of Jesus Christ, then you have to be motivated with that same spirit that was in him. If your motivation for Christianity is just to get to heaven instead of going to hell, then you're not really motivated by the same spirit that was in Christ.

When you're baptized into Jesus Christ, you're only in Christ when you've put off the old man that you used to be. The Bible actually says that we are in him, and that we are members of his

body. As I've said before, the spirit that was in Jesus Christ when he walked this earth was the Holy Spirit of God. If we are members in the body of Christ, then we can have no other spirit than what was in Jesus. However, if we continue to seek after the things of this world, and become mingled and mixed with all that the world is mingled and mixed with, then how can we claim to be separate?

Righteousness is a quality that God gives to his people, but only to those people who put on righteousness by having a true desire for righteousness and a true desire to put away wickedness. Let me put it this way. If you claim to be a Christian, but your thoughts are continually on the things of this world, then you're probably not a Christian. I know this is difficult, but we might as well face facts now, because sooner or later you're going to have to face the facts anyway. It's a lot easier to take a look at yourself now instead of arriving at the day of judgment and finding out then that you came up short.

So, let's talk about what it takes to become a Christian. The first thing you do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. When you believe, then you will be convicted of your sinfulness. The very next thing you will do is to repent for your sin. You will confess to God that you are a sinner and will ask him to forgive you, telling him that you believe in his son Jesus Christ who died for you. Once this has taken place, truly from your heart, then God will forgive you for all your sins and you will be washed white as snow. Of course, we know that your sins are still there, but they're covered over by the blood of Jesus. They don't show any more. And, when God looks at you, he only sees the blood of his son Jesus Christ, and therefore considers you to be clean.

Clean, is an interesting word. It's pretty simple. When you're clean, there's an absence of dirt. But if you take anything that's white as snow, and you put a smudge of dirt on it, you can no longer consider it to be clean. We know that when we become a Christian we haven't automatically become perfect. Jesus is the one who caused our sins to disappear, but we're still stuck in this fleshly body, and this fleshly body is a long way from a Holy Spirit body. Our flesh is the problem, because it is our flesh which makes us desire the things of this world. If we were absent from this body of flesh, and just had the Holy Spirit of God, we wouldn't have any problem being perfect. But because we still occupy this body of flesh, we are still subject to that sin nature.

Now, the flesh keeps pulling us away from God, and God's Holy Spirit keeps pulling us toward God. This is a battle that goes on until the day we die. The flesh is really strong, and it causes us to go after things that will stimulate it. Of course, we know that if something is fed, it will grow. Whatever is fed will increase in size and strength. This is a pretty simple concept. Any appetite you feed will become a stronger appetite. If you feed your flesh with the things that it desires, your flesh will become stronger and stronger. However, if you feed your spirit man with the things it desires, then your spirit man will become stronger and stronger.

God wants us to become strong in spirit. That's why the Bible makes it so clear that we are to die out to the flesh. It even says that flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. The only way you get to heaven is to be born again, and, it has to be a process of being born again in spirit. If you really haven't made a determination to set the flesh aside, if your determination is not really to see your spirit man grow in God, then how can you claim to be a follower of Christ? If you have no spirit for godly things, how can you live a godly life?

Think about this. Jesus was born into a body of flesh. Because he was in the fleshly body, he was subject to desires for the things of this world. However, he overcame those desires, and the words that he spoke, and the works that he did in this world, were a total rejection of fleshly desire. He only spoke God's words, and he only did God's works. This is why he was perfect. Now, we can't be perfect, because we're not God. But this doesn't mean that we can't desire perfection. In fact, if you don't desire to be perfect, then you're not a Christian at all. True Christians may not be perfect, but every true Christian truly does desire to be perfect. True Christians hate the thought of sin, even though they find themselves falling into sin. True Christians struggle in a constant battle, trying to cease from sin. False Christians claim to love God, but then spend all their time loving the things of this world. True Christians get excited about God, but false Christians get excited about things that appeal to their flesh nature.

If you truly become born again, you will make a determination in your heart to put on righteousness to the best of your ability. You may have some pretty bad sins hanging around you, but I guarantee you one thing. If you're a true Christian, and you find yourself still sinning, you may not be able to cease from every sin that has a hold on you, but for certain you will feel sorrow because of your sin. When true Christians sin, they feel bad about it. If your conscience is seared, like, seared with a hot iron, and you don't feel bad about your sins, then you've still got them. One of the absolute bottom line requirements to be forgiven is to be in a state of sorrow for your sin. If you're not sorry, then you really don't want to turn away from them.

And this is another point. Repentance actually means to turn away from something. If you're doing something wrong, you can't just tell God you're sorry. The concept of repentance requires a turning away from something. However, because your flesh is so strong, you may not be able to immediately turn away from every sinful thing that you do, but you will have a true desire to turn away. Personally, I don't like it when ministers or other people imply that a true Christian doesn't sin anymore. I think that's a bunch of baloney. The real difference between Christians and non-Christians is that the true Christians have a true desire for goodness. And, because of this, their lives do significantly change and the sins begin to ebb away. The change takes place very fast at first, and then more gradually as the person gets greater and greater victory over his flesh. It's a process, but not a process that has a slow start. You first get rid of a lot of the easy things, and then you begin a life time work of getting rid of the harder things, one thing at a time.

I've heard of new Christians living exactly like they were before, nothing changing. To me, this is not Christianity. If a person truly has a heart for God, then they will also hate the wickedness of this world. They may not be able to overcome it instantly, but there is no way they will go

back to the same old style of life they had before. That's why 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 tells us that we are to come out from among them and be a separate people. We're not supposed to look just like the Joneses down the street, but we're supposed to be different.

You know, it's an interesting thing, but there's a lot of people who play games with Christianity, and think they can still wallow in the mud and still be called clean. But it's like telling a child to wash their hands. When they come away from the sink, and their hands are still covered with dirt, you tell them to go back and do it right. Even false Christians would tell the child to go back and do it right. So, they themselves have no excuse. They know what it means to do it right. And that's what God wants us to do, is to do it right.

However, it's not always easy to figure out whether or not you're really doing it the way you should. But, there is a simple rule of thumb that we can use to determine if we are pleasing to God or not. The Scripture that gives us this rule of thumb is, 1 Samuel 16:7. In this scripture the Lord is talking to Samuel about anointing David to be King of Israel. It reads like this, "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Now, notice that the last part of this verse says that God does not see as man sees. Man sees the outward perspective, but when God looks, he doesn't look at us on the outside, but he looks at our heart. Humans aren't very good at looking in the hearts of other people. But, God is. God can look right down into your heart and see exactly what's there. Now, this is where the rule of thumb comes into play. If you really want to know whether you are pleasing to God or not, all you have to do is to find out what's in your heart. Oh, not so simple just yet, huh. Well, that's because we have a hard time looking into our own heart to know what's there. We're flesh oriented. That's the way we think, because we were made to be flesh and blood creatures. But, you know, we can still do this. We can see what's actually in our heart, because that's another simple rule of thumb. The key to knowing what's in your heart is to realizing that nothing gets into your heart unless it passes through your mind.

Now, take this slow and easy, but think of it this way. When you see or hear something, you make a decision whether that thing is good or bad. Your convictions of what is good or bad is what your heart is all about. It is your heart that loves or hates. However, you can't have any convictions unless you hear or see something first. Information passes into your eyes and through your ears, then you make a decision whether to receive it as true or false. Romans 10:14 very clearly tells us that we cannot believe without hearing. This means that your thoughts, beliefs, and convictions don't get into your heart without your mind processing the information. Therefore, the simple rule of thumb is this. If you have thoughts, beliefs, and convictions in your heart, these thoughts, beliefs, and convictions will also be in your mind. So, if you truly do have a love for Jesus Christ and his righteousness in your heart, then you will also be thinking about Jesus Christ and his righteousness in your mind.

What ever your mind is focused on will demonstrate what is truly in your heart. If you are thinking about money, then that is also what your heart is focused on. If you're thinking about food and clothing, then that's what your heart is focused on. Now, money, food, and clothing are not things which are opposed to the spirit of God. God wants us to have money, and he wants us to have food and clothing, but the rest of the formula for this rule of thumb depends on one more concept, which is simply this. The money, food, or clothing must be for the purpose of satisfying a need, and not just as a stimulation for fleshly desire. In other words, what is the money or goods for? Is it so that you can accomplish spiritual goals, or is it just to stimulate your flesh? The question is, "Will the attainment of these things help you to maintain your relationship with God, or will they inhibit your relationship with God?"

You see, the bottom line of this rule of thumb hinges on whether things bring you closer to God or draw you further away. In this world there are many things that will take your attention from God. However, because we still inhabit these bodies of flesh, there is a certain amount that the flesh requires in order to live. God sanctions provisions for the flesh. He gives us food and clothing. He gives us the finances we need to meet our obligations. However, when the provisions become just fleshly stimulation, and the body begins to revel in the feelings it gets from these things, then we have gone too far.

As I read earlier in Colossians, chapter 2, it is our affections that must be centered on things above and not on things of the earth. Your mind must be occupied with heavenly things and not occupied with earthly things. As the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:23, all things are good, but all things are not expedient. This means that God has provided the earth to meet our earthly needs, but there is a limit to how much we should take. As Paul said in this verse, all things are good, but not all things edify, meaning that not all things build us up in our faith.

In Revelation 18, it tells us that there are many things of this world which stimulate the flesh. There is a list of these things, and they are also considered to be things that the great whore, Babylon the Great, pants after. She pants after these things, which is actually saying she breathes heavily. It describes her as being in bed with her lovers so that she can get all these baubles and trinkets of gold and silver and a whole list of other delicate and precious things. However, the list only contains things that stimulate the flesh. The great whore is in bed with the world.

When you are in bed with the world, it's like your flesh pants after the things in the shopping mall. It's like your flesh breathes heavily when you think about ice cream and pizza and peanut butter fudge. Or, it's like your flesh is getting excited and you are breathing faster because of your expectation of getting that flashy new car.

When you're in bed with the world, your mind is filled with the thoughts of this world. This simple rule of thumb of knowing where your heart is, is nothing more, or less, than recognizing what your mind focuses on each and every day.

If you're listening to this program, then I assume you're a Christian, or, at least that's your intention. But there's a great deal of deception out there in this world. We know that much of the church today is corrupt, and that there is very little emphasis on crucifying the flesh. There's a great deal of emphasis placed on receiving God's blessings, and, more often than not the emphasis is how much we can receive from God rather than how much we can give to him. However, true Christianity is not concerned with how much God can give to us, but how much we can give to God, and how much we can be like him.

The whole experience of being born again is supposed to center on the rejecting of the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. God is a spirit, and the Bible clearly tells us that we, as Christians, must worship God in both the real truth of his word, and also that we must enter into the truth of that word of God with spirit. If we don't have the real spirit of God compelling us toward a love of the truth, then we don't really have God at all.

Galatians 5:17 tells us that the flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we also accept him as Lord of our life. Christians, at least, true Christians, love the word of God so much that they want very, very much to conform to that word of God. If you love something, you want to make it a part of you. So, if you love God, then you will love his word and will want to make your life over anew until it begins to conform to God's word.

Before we were born again, we lived our lives according to every desire there is in the world. We wanted all things that were pleasing to the eyes, and we wanted others to exalt us, to look up to us. But when we become Christians, those old things need to be put aside. The Holy Spirit of God and the lusts for things of this world, are contrary to one another. They don't go together at all. In fact, the Bible tells us in James 4:4 that the friendship with the world is enmity with God. The word enmity means, a deep seated mutual hatred. If there is a deep seated mutual hatred between God and the world, and if you're in bed with the world, how do you think God will feel about you? Let me close by reading the whole verse of James 4:4, and you will clearly see how God will feel. It says, "You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore desires to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."