

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

by Ric Dolphin

Dolphin's practical guide helping readers examine whether they have genuine saving faith, presenting the biblical marks of a true Christian and offering assurance to those who trust in Christ.

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Originator: Ric Dolphin e-sword Complier: Eric A. Haakenson eric_haakenson@yahoo.com How To Know If You Are A Christian

Verse 1.

I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he hath made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for his own.

Refrain:

But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Verse 2.

I know not how this saving faith to me he did impart, nor how believing in his word wrought peace within my heart. (Refrain)

Verse 3.

I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing us of sin, revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in him. (Refrain)

Verse 4.

I know not when my Lord may come, at night or noontide fair, nor if I walk the vale with him, or meet him in the air. (Refrain) Do you ever wonder if you are a Christian? Many people have asked that question, and it is one with which I have wrestled, as well. There are some pat answers such as "pray the sinner's prayer" or "accept Jesus into your heart" or "believe and be saved." If you believe you have done these things, and yet are deeply troubled over the assurance of your salvation, these answers may seem to fall short. The reality is that no man can assure another of salvation, for assurance of salvation is God's work and not the work of man. "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:16-17). So the one whose soul is in turmoil should determine to go to God and seek both salvation and assurance from Him and not man.

God's Word gives us tests to take so that we may know if we are in Christ or not. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to reflect upon their lives to see if they are Christians: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). So because we are exhorted to test ourselves to see if we are in Christ, the Word of God provides the tests we are to take. The

first test is based upon relationship. Do we have a relationship with Jesus Christ? The song quoted above states that there are many things we do not know, such as:

- The mystery of divine grace and God's election: "I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He has made known."
- The mystery of saving faith. The second stanza acknowledges that even our faith is a gift from God: "I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart."
- The mystery of regeneration: "I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin."
- The mystery of Christ's return: "I know not when my Lord may come, at night or noontide fair, nor if I'll walk the vale with Him or meet Him in the air." But then the song's chorus reminds us that there is one thing that every true Christian does know, "I know Whom I have believed." We may not know and understand all the deep theological truths of Scripture, and we may not understand all the workings of God in providence, but we do know whom we have believed. All true Christians have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We know Him because we live in a relationship with Him where He communicates to us, we hear His Word and follow Him, and we communicate with Him in prayer. It is a love relationship that we have, for when He speaks to us our hearts burn within us and we experience love for God.

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

Some people say, "I pray all the time, I tell God all about my day, and I am always talking to God" but they do not speak of how God has changed their lives by the power of His Word. They do not speak of relationship with Christ or what they are learning from Him. This evidences a heart that does not know God in relationship, for relationship is not one-sided but rather it is interactive, talking and listening, hearing and communicating. Relationship with Christ is based on His forgiveness extended to repenting sinners:

Hebrews 8:10-12NASB

(Hebrews 8:10) "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

(Hebrews 8:11) "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.

(Hebrews 8:12) "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."

Sin separates us from God and we can only have a relationship with Christ when we come to God as a sinner in need of His salvation, confessing our sins and turning from them to Jesus Christ.

People can know a lot about God and yet not know God. Knowing God comes from repentance of sin and receiving forgiveness and grace. It is walking with God daily in relationship, based upon

His redemption.

Micah 6:8 is a well known passage of Scripture that details God's requirements in our lives:

"He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). This "walking humbly with your God" speaks of relationship, of friendship, of interaction and fellowship.

Many people know Micah 6:8 but it's important to understand that we are only able to do justice, love kindness, and walk with God in daily relationship if we have been redeemed from habitual sin and made new creations in Christ. That is why Micah 6:8 follows Micah 6:4: "Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt And ransomed you from the house of slavery, And I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam."

Micah 6:4 provides the foundation for Micah 6:8. It is only those who have been "brought up" and "ransomed from the house of slavery" that can "walk humbly" with God. A relationship with Jesus Christ is built upon His work of redeeming love where He paid the price for our sin on the cross and purchased us out of the slave market of sin. If we are living in habitual sin we are not walking humbly with God. So having a relationship with Christ is the first test to determine whether we are a Christian or not.

Next, the books of First and Second John provide additional tests to take to help us determine whether we are in Christ or not. There are four specific tests mentioned. They are:

Doctrine

Deeds

Devotion

Disciples Let's look at the Scriptures which will help to explain these four tests. The first test in First John is doctrine. What do we believe about the Person of Jesus Christ?

1 John 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4:1-3NASB

(1 John 4:1) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

(1 John 4:2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

(1 John 4:3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Christians are those who believe that Jesus Christ is fully God Who came in the flesh to redeem sinful man and give him eternal life. Jesus Christ is the Almighty God, the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, the Creator and Redeemer of mankind. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man and to deny either His Godhead or His perfect Manhood is to evidence that we are not Christians.

Doctrine is important when examining whether or not we are truly believers. And yet there are many who have correct doctrine, who believe that Jesus is fully God and fully Man, yet they live in habitual sin. It is a requirement to have correct doctrine about the Person of Jesus Christ, but it is not enough to simply believe these facts about him. The life must evidence that Christ is living within the heart of the Christian. So the next test, after Doctrine, is Deeds.

1 John 2:3-6NASB (1 John 2:3) By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

(1 John 2:4) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

(1 John 2:5) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

(1 John 2:6) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Our deeds evidence whether we are in Christ or not. God's Word is clear that His kingdom is not about "talk" but about power (1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Corinthians 4:19-20). The passage above in 1 John tells us that there can be a discrepancy between our words and our lives. We can say, "I have come to know Him," that is, profess to be Christians, while our lives evidence that we don't keep His Word. If this is the case, then the passage tells us the truth is not in us. In other words, we are living in deception. An example of this deception is one person who was going through one of our courses here at Setting Captives Free. She was providing brilliant answers to the questions. She seemed to have it all just right; her answers were highly spiritual and lofty and were filled with Scripture passages. However, it came to our attention that though she was married she was emotionally dependant upon another man—a married man, and they were planning a life together after divorcing their spouses.

"The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;" (1 John 2:4).

1 John 3:4-10NASB (1 John 3:4) Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

(1 John 3:5) You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

(1 John 3:6) No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

(1 John 3:7) Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

(1 John 3:8) the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

(1 John 3:9) No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

(1 John 3:10) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

If we want to know whether or not we are Christians we need to examine not only what we believe about Jesus Christ but also how we live our lives. The deeds we do reveal the reality of our profession of faith in Christ or the lack of it.

1 John 1:6-7NASB

(1 John 1:6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

(1 John 1:7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Right here it is important to understand that there is a fine line between being an unbeliever and being an immature Christian who falls often. The difference is that the immature Christian who falls often always rises again (Proverbs 24:16), in other words he does not simply give up and live in sin but returns to God in repentance and seeks to walk upright again. The third test of salvation is Devotion. Do we love God and others?

1 John 5:1-4NASB

(1 John 5:1) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

(1 John 5:2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

(1 John 5:3) For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

(1 John 5:4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

1 John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Genuine love for God and for other people cannot be manufactured or conjured up by will-power; it is a gift of God that He gives when He changes the heart in salvation. This love for God expresses itself in love to other people, and as we love people we are given assurance of eternal life. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

Sin makes us self-centered and immature, and we withdraw from others for fear of being discovered. When God saves us and changes our hearts we respond in love and the expression of love to others assures our own hearts that we have passed out of death (the self-centered living of the habitual sinner) into life (the God-centered life of love). The next test of whether we are a Christian or not is Disciples. What do those who follow us believe, how are their lives, and do they evidence the reality of having Christ in them?

2 John 1:1-4NASB

(1) The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, (2) for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

(3) Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

(4) I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.

If we are Christians we carry the “seed” of the Word of God within us, and that “seed” will be shared with many others, some of whom will repent of their lives of deception and will embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. They will become our “children” in the Lord, our “disciples” who follow us and evidence the reality of the new birth. So when contemplating the very serious and most important question that could ever be asked, because of its eternal ramifications, “Am I a Christian?” it is important to discover:

Am I in a relationship with Jesus Christ?

What do I believe about Jesus Christ?

How does my life line up with God’s Word? Do I truly love God and evidence it by loving others?

Are there others who have been impacted for eternity by Christ in me? And finally - what if we discover, through examining our lives in the light of God’s Word, that we do not possess Christ in reality? What do we do then?

If we find, after an examination of our lives, that Christ is not in us so that we “fail the test” (2 Corinthians 13:5), this means that the coming wrath of God will be poured on us (Romans 1:18) and that we will spend our eternity in hell, which will be the just penalty for our life of sin and rebellion. It then becomes a matter of extreme importance that we immediately run to Jesus Christ pleading for mercy. Perhaps He will be gracious and grant us repentance unto life, that we might come to our senses and escape the trap of the devil (2 Timothy 2:25-26). When we use the phrase “run to Jesus Christ” we mean that we must not delay in coming to the cross of Jesus Christ as an undeserving sinner, an enemy of God, under the wrath of God, and ask Him to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We must see Jesus as bearing our sin in His own body on the tree, as becoming a curse for us in order to remove our curse of sin, and as paying the full penalty for our sins, which is death, that we might have eternal life.

We must believe in our hearts that this Jesus Who died for our sins is Lord of all, and begin to confess Him with our mouths to others. For it is with our hearts that we believe and are counted as righteous and with our mouths we confess Him and are saved. As we have come to the cross for salvation we can receive freely of the grace of God, knowing that the justice of God is fully satisfied in the death of Jesus on our behalf, and that we can be satisfied in His forgiveness of our sins.

We now have new life in Christ. We become new creations in Him where the old is gone and the new is come. So it is important to examine our lives continually to see if the old really is gone. Grace triumphs over sin and makes us more than conquerors in Him so there should be a progressive overcoming of sin and a progressing on toward perfection. Stumbles are inevitable,

but because grace is stronger than sin those stumbles become shorter lived and less frequent. Because grace turns our weaknesses into strengths we can begin to discover that not only are we experiencing victory where once we lived in defeat, but we also find that temptation's power over us is broken and sin's hold on us is released.

How do we know if we are Christians or not? We examine our lives in the light of God's Word and see if the fruit from our life-tree indicates a righteous tree or a sinful tree.

"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29).

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