

THE DISTINGUISHABLE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN
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By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples (John 13:35)

I heard the late Dr. John Scroggie tell a thought-provoking story when he was the guest preacher at a youth conference in Aberystwyth, Wales. During his pastorate in London he went to visit a member of his church whom he believed to be a childless widow. She worked for a local match factory making matchboxes by hand. He climbed up many steps to reach the top floor where his friend lived in a small room beneath the roof. She greeted him enthusiastically and after a short conversation said, "Pastor, would you like to see my daughter?" Dr. Scroggie confessed he had no idea she was a mother, but answered, "I would be delighted to meet her. The lady went across to another room and returned, carrying on her outstretched hands the tiny, undeveloped body of her child. The speaker said to his youthful audience, "When I looked into the tiny face, I knew the child had been born an idiot - She had tiny toes, legs, hands and body but her face was twenty-seven years old. The mother said, "Pastor, I would not be without her for all the money in the world."

The famous preacher appeared to be a little emotional as he remembered the incident, but he continued. Of course that mother adored her daughter, but would it not have been more wonderful had she been able to look upon a radiant young woman who possessed a very healthy body?" John Scroggie said. "God also has children like that. They were born into His family, but unfortunately never learned to walk and talk: they never developed. The Lord continues to love them with an everlasting love, but would prefer to see them as radiant, energetic Christians." That introduces a very important question. What are the signs by which it is possible to recognize a growing child of the living God? The New Testament supplies at least seven answers.

A Challenging Faith ... Accepting Christ

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

174

This statement reveals the way souls are born into the family of God. No person is ever naturally born a Christian. All are sinners, and entry into the family of the Lord is only made possible by a spiritual birth. The Gospel is a life-changing message which, when accepted and believed, transforms a sinner into a saint. Old things pass away, and all things become new. Believing the Gospel indicates trust in the Savior, and that initial incident is the first evidence of a new life.

A Close Fellowship ... Abiding in Christ

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me (John 15:4).

Christians are said to be in Christ: that is, they are joined to Him. A believer does not make a decision and then depart alone to a remote part of God's domain. True disciples are never separated from their Lord - they abide in Him as a branch abides in the vine. That union makes possible a flow of divine energy from the Savior to His followers and through them to others. We are unable to produce it: it must emanate from the Lord. There is no substitute for the Holy Spirit. Without His assistance human effort fails. Jesus said, "Without me, ye can do nothing" (John

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15:5). True Christians can easily be recognized: they are like the Lord.

A Constant Follower... Advancing with Christ

And he said to them all. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).

The evidence of continuing faith is the desire to follow Christ, and the courage to endure hardship. True believers never become tired of the Lord's company. They are consumed by a desire to know more of His Word and sit at His feet. Any person who does not possess an appetite for the bread of life can hardly be a Christian. The cross is the symbol of faith. People who have been to Calvary never refuse to carry their own cross which ultimately will be exchanged for a crown.

175

A Continuous Faithfulness... Acknowledging Christ

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me (John 14:21).

Unfortunately there are many people who profess to be followers of Christ, but they do not obey His commandments. Probably this is the greatest evidence of Christian growth. It remains a very important fact that, although God may give life, it is our responsibility to feed, nourish, and exercise what has been given. To remain as an undeveloped baby is a tragedy. Our heavenly Father can hardly be proud of anyone who continues to be a disappointment. John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John :4). If the apostle could be disappointed in believers, how much more may God be disturbed by those who fail to live according to their profession.

A Considered Fact... Association with Christ

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

Spirit-filled Christians learn how to die! No intelligent, healthy person wishes to expire. The apostle referred to a different kind of death, when the self-life is rejected with its inclinations, temptations, and desires. Had the disciples been required to choose between the excitement and miracles of the Lord's ministry and His death at Calvary, their choice would have been automatic and easy. The same fact may be applied to Christians of this age. To deny the desires of the flesh is difficult. Only consecrated people welcome identification with Christ in His death.

A Commendable Fervor... Announcing Christ

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

When the widow's son at Nain was given a new life, "he that was dead sat up, and began to speak" (Luke 7:15). People who

176

owe so much to Christ and who seldom, if ever, mention His name, are not consecrated followers. We have a story to tell to the nations, and the glorious privilege of spreading the Gospel is

THE DISTINGUISHABLE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN

something which all should share. Many believers never have the privilege of traveling overseas to become missionaries, but neighbors are within reach of everybody. When men and women fervently love the Savior, they cannot refrain from mentioning His Name. When folk belong to Christ, they talk about Him, and their testimony is supported by sanctified living.

A Complete Future... Anticipating Christ

For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

We are pilgrims pressing onward
To our home beyond the sky:
We are each day getting nearer
To that glorious place on high.
Earth has lost its gay attraction,
Heaven alone can satisfy:
We are going home to glory
Where we know we'll never die.

Paul was convinced he and his converts could share that certainty. He wrote, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved" (Phil. 4:1). Likeness to Christ is self-evident: people recognize it before they hear about it!

F. B. Barton, in the year 1914, published a story that he had read in The Brooklyn Eagle. It referred to a remarkable incident that had taken place in China. A slave girl was brought to the hospital in Canton. The child was blind and an outcast among her people. She was becoming lame and was of little use to her owner. After an examination, the doctor said she would need an amputation, whereupon the mistress hurriedly left. The girl worked around the hospital but unfortunately contracted leprosy and had to be sent to a leper colony. However, she did not leave as she had

177

arrived. She had heard about the matchless love of Christ, and had become a believer. When she left the hospital, she did not travel alone; the Savior went with her. After two years she had a group of leper Christians around her and in five years had a leper church. Summarizing the complete event. The Brooklyn Eagle said: "Today, she is the center of grateful Christian life and service."

That slave girl had no wealth, but she possessed great riches. Many modern Christians have all they need but remain poor. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

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