

What Is a True Christian?

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[0:00] The most frightening passage in all the Bible!

As found near the very end of the great Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 7, I want to read these words to you, Matthew 7 verse 21 to 23, and we're going to be everywhere today, so.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven.

But on that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

[1:32] Here we have people thinking they are about to enter heaven only to be told by the judge of the universe, who judges perfectly and righteously, that they are about to be cast into hell.

And these were not passive people. They prophesied, which is a word used for preached.

There were some pastors in this group who had just been informed by Jesus, you're not going to heaven, you're going to hell.

They cast out demons and they did mighty works. And note that Jesus used the word many to describe their numbers.

Frightening. Frightening. In light of this passage, I want us to consider the Apostle Paul's writing by inspiration and inerrancy and authority of the Spirit of God, who gave to us this command in 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 5 to 6, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

[3:07] Test yourselves. Test yourselves. Underline that thought. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this is about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?

Unless indeed you fail to meet the test. I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

Well, we find ourselves worshiping together on this last Sunday of the year 2019. In about 61 hours or so, we will see the year 2020 being ushered in.

In light of that, in light of that, and in obedience to God's command for us to examine ourselves, I thought it appropriate to take a final exam for the year 2019 to see how individually each of us measures up in comparison with the Word of God.

And I do know that many of you write, and actually you retain much more when you write these down, but if you choose not to, that's okay. Everything you're going to see up here, there are copies in this foyer and that foyer for you to take home.

[4:32] And we have enough for everybody, not just per family. Now, to do this, we're going to depend upon the Apostle John.

We've already read Jesus and Paul. We're going to depend upon the Apostle John. John wrote five books that made it into the canon of New Testament Scripture. We're going to focus on the epistle known as 1 John.

And there we find an exam. And we're going to take that exam this morning. And again, this is the process to give us the assurance that we are indeed saved and a member of the body of Christ, provided, of course, we pass the test.

If we do not pass, we will deal with that at the end. And what do we do? And we'll handle that. Test question number one.

And this is about believers, true believers. Have you enjoyed fellowship with Christ and with the Father? In 1 John 1, verses 2 and 3, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[6:27] John here is going beyond his earthly enjoyment of Jesus that he had been sharing with the disciples for three years. He speaks here of an eternal relationship resulting in the enjoyment of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

This relationship begins at salvation and should lead us to the assurance that we are indeed one with the Godhead.

So ask yourselves, have you experienced such fellowship and communion with the Father and with the Son? Do you love being in the presence of God and enjoy sweet communion with Him? Do you have a very real sense of the overwhelming grace by which God has saved you and by which you live moment by moment?

As the Old Testament prophet said, we can't even take another breath without the grace of God. Bottom line is this, with whom do you fellowship?

[7:37] Not only at church, which is very important, we're fellowshiping in the name of Christ, but anywhere and everywhere you find yourself. If you can honestly say, my fellowship is with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ, you have passed the first critical test in examining yourselves.

Test question number two, are you sensitive to sin? 1 John 1, 5-10, this is the message.

We have heard from Him and proclaim to you that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[8:57] If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. True believers have a correct view of who they are and who Christ is.

The Lord is absolute light. Those in fellowship with Him strive to walk in the light of Christ Jesus.

People walking in darkness are lying about their relationship with the Lord and they are not practicing truth. We all know that light and darkness do not and cannot coexist.

Light always overcomes darkness. One of the most telling things concerning an unbeliever is their denial of sin in their life.

Some claim to have no sin. Others claim to have never sinned. I've actually heard people say, and this includes a member of my own family who has since passed on, I have no sin.

[9:59] I'm not a sinner. True believers understand that they battle the world, the flesh, and the devil. We can't even fulfill for one second the greatest commandment to love God with all.

And the second greatest commandment to love our neighbor as ourself. But as true believers, we deal with our sins through confession. We go to the Lord and confess them.

We are never to sin knowing that all we have to do is to confess and then be forgiven. You don't say, well, I'm going to do this sin. I'll confess later. That's a false belief system.

That's called antinomianism. I'll talk about that later. That's a big word that means against the moral law of God. I love what Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say.

The unbeliever leaps into sin and loves it. The believer lapses into sin and loathes it. We go to the Lord as often as it takes in confession.

[11:03] In that manner, we can maintain our fellowship with God or if our sins have broken fellowship, we restore broken fellowship. If this describes you, you've passed the second test.

Number three, do you obey God's word? All these are in 1 John, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. By this, we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. These two verses could not be stated more clearly.

If we strive to keep his commandments, we know him. That means we know him savingly. If we are unconcerned about keeping his commandments found throughout Scripture, the word of God declares us to be liars devoid of truth.

That's the description of an unbeliever. Now, I am not speaking here of obeying the commandments unto perfection. To do so in this unredeemed flesh is impossible.

[12:22] Not unto perfection but it is to be the direction of our life. Christ himself said, be ye holy as I am holy. Again, that speaks to direction.

That's our direction. what is the greatest evidence of a saved life? I've asked people that. I get some interesting answers. But before you yell out an answer, let me tell you what it is. The greatest evidence of a saved life is a life of obedience. There's no greater evidence of a saved life than that of obedience.

though we fail many times, saved people strive to obey Christ in all things. Unbelievers are unconcerned about obeying Christ.

He's sort of an add-on especially when we're in trouble or at Christmas and Easter. People just add him on for a brief period of time.

[13 : 24] Test question four, do you reject this evil world? 1 John 2 verse 15 Do not love the world or the things of the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Now, let me be very clear.

This does not refer to the physical world. We're not talking about the world of streams and hills, oceans and waterfalls, sunsets and snow-covered mountains or looking up into the night sky where we see the glory of God.

We love those things because they're all part of God's creation. He put them there. The world spoken of here is the world systems that are under control of the evil one.

Through the permissive will of God, Satan is temporarily referred to as the God little g of this world.

[14 : 38] The entire world is under his sway. In that system we see crime, false religion, errant philosophy, immorality, materialism and so forth.

We see that every day. It will be like this until Christ returns. There are times when true believers fall into the trap of loving certain aspects of the world system.

The apostle Paul did that and he devoted Romans chapter 7 to describing his sin. But with our new life in Christ we will not dwell there.

The indwelling Holy Spirit will rescue us even from ourselves. Jesus declared that true believers are not of this world.

We're not of this world. He did say in this world you're going to have tribulation. But be of good cheer, he said, I've overcome the world. We belong to another place, to another citizenship.

[15 : 45] Our citizenship is already in the heavenly places. I really trust that you've passed this test. Test question number five.

Do you eagerly await Christ's return? Are you anticipating the return of Christ? 1 John chapter 3 verses 2 to 3.

Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure. I don't know about you, but I long for that day.

I want to see him as he is. The great hope of every true believer is the return of Christ. Living in the daily expectation of the return of Christ was intended by the Spirit of God to purify us and lead us into holy living.

[17 : 03] When we understand that in the next 30 seconds we could be standing before Jesus, it has an impact on how we live our lives or should, doesn't it? the apostle Paul may have said it best in that wonderful book known as Titus.

In chapter 2, verses 11-13 he said this, for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This passage speaks to all who by faith have committed their lives to Christ and trust him unreservedly. It's very interesting, people say, I'm a believer, I'm a believer, that's a good, that's a good thing, it means I have faith, but in Greek that word means I trust Christ, I've committed my life to him.

It's deeper than in English. It is important to point out that in our anticipation of the return of Christ, we do not and we should not live recklessly.

Okay? We don't go sit on a mountaintop and wait for Jesus to come back. We don't go out in the woods and sit down on a tree stump and wait for the trumpet to blow and Christ to descend.

[18 : 44] Our hope spoken of here has feet to it. We watch, we wait, we worship, and we work.

We work. Four W's, I haven't even been to seminary. going to see you. We how wonderful it would be if when he returns, Christ finds us busy with the work of his church and worshipping him.

If you truly find yourself longing for the return of Christ, you've passed another critical test. test question six, and this is where I start meddling a little bit.

Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? 1 John chapter 3 verses 4 to 10. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

Sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

[20 : 06] No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. I sometimes wish John would be a little clearer.

Little children, let no one deceive you. whoever practices righteousness is righteous as he is righteous.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he is born of God.

But it is evident who we are, the children of God and who the children of the devil are. We can differentiate, we know who they are. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is the one who does not love his brother.

[21 : 18] sister. And let me add sister in there as well. Again, this passage is not teaching sinless perfection. We already know that having read 1 John.

It talks about our sins in there in several verses. We know that we battle sin daily in our unredeemed flesh. The pattern was broken at salvation, the pattern was broken at the cross, but we still live in unredeemed flesh.

The operative word in this passage though, is that word practice. And it's in there several times. It's very important to get your hands around that word.

That's talking about unbroken patterns of sin. These are characteristic of unregenerate people.

Sin as a life pattern is incompatible with true salvation. Now, most people in the world think they're going to heaven.

[22 : 24] Most people think they're going to heaven. I've said up here before, you know, we hold fiercely to justification by faith. Most people in the world hold to justification by death.

Well, you die and you go to heaven. They don't know Christ. They don't know the Father. They don't have the Holy Spirit. You just die and go to heaven. Many of them, and I was in this camp for a long time, base it on the fact that they are good, which they are not, or that they're at least more good than bad, which they are not.

I live my life wanting to tip the scales in favor of good. And then I got married and got informed that I wasn't tipping those scales. and that's when I got saved.

But if a person could make a practice of sin after being saved from sin, that would mean that the salvation provided by Christ is incapable of defeating sin and is therefore ineffective.

And beloved, that is unthinkable. We're talking about the sovereign God of the universe, the God who spoke into existence everything there is.

[23 : 46] He can defeat sin in our life. We are not to make a practice of sin. Never.

A true believer may sin and sometimes may sin frequently. The true believer should be driven to his or her knees in confession and true repentance frequently.

Ravi Zachariah, a great man of God, he begins every morning with one hour of prayer on his knees. Martin Luther in a monastery prayed between two and fifteen hours a day or confessed his sins from the previous day.

How much trouble can you get in a monastery in fifteen, twenty? You're getting in a lot of trouble today, but not back then. Sinning frequently is not the same as practicing sin.

I'm not encouraging you to sin at all. I'm not encouraging you to sin frequently. But it's not the same as practicing sin as if there's no accounting before God.

[24 : 49] The Bible teaches every person is going to stand before Christ, saved and unsaved, individually. Think about that today. People that sin with no worry about accountment to the Lord, that is a person who rejects God's authority, doesn't care what the Lord Jesus thinks about his sins.

That person has not been regenerated and is outside of Christ. Such a person is part of that antinomian cult that I mentioned earlier. Again, antinomianism means against the moral law. It is a belief that since we are saved by grace, we can live any way sinfully we so desire. Grace has saved us. Do whatever you want to.

John had to deal with that. Paul had to deal with that. It was prevalent in their day. It is prevalent in our day. That is a soul damning lie. Paul addressed such beliefs with these words in Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 2.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might abound? And then Paul says, by no means.

[26 : 04] how can we who died to sin still live in it? I'm told in the Greek language Paul said, are we to sin so grace can abound?

No, no, no, no, no. That's what Paul was saying. It is the strongest negative in the Bible.

Test question seven. Do you love other Christians? Do you really love one another? And Christians out there and the Christians who are being persecuted and will die today for their faith, do we really love them?

Whoever says that he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

[27 : 20] Loving fellow Christians comes naturally to true believers. Paul said this in 1

Thessalonians 4.9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

Strong message from the Holy Spirit through Paul. Paul then goes on to teach us that our love for one another should increase over time.

As followers of Christ we haven't loved as fully as we should but we have loved. I say that with confidence because loving one another is inherent with our new nature in Christ.

John said this we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever does love abides in death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. And then Jesus told us that we're not only to love one another but our enemies.

[28 : 36] Our enemies? Because you know what the prevailing attitude was in? Love your brother, hate your enemy. Despise your enemy. Jesus wanted us to love even our enemies.

enemies. And the Lord in every generation put a mark on believers. I won't go through them all but you know Abraham had the mark of circumcision.

Moses it was the mark of Sabbath worship. Do we have a mark? Yeah, we do. John 13 35.

By this mark, I added the word mark but that's what he's talking about, by this mark all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

And let me say this to you my dear brothers and sisters, there are times in churches when we're unloving. I don't think you've experienced this here but it has happened. Going back a long time ago, there was a time.

[29 : 41] There was a time. And God by grace brought us out of that and made us stronger. But let me say this, God gives the world a right to make a judgment call.

When he sees us loving one another, the world can say, boy, they must be followers of Jesus because he said they were going to love one another. And when the world sees us not loving one another, the world can say, I don't think they're believers in Jesus because he said they would love one another.

And then they carried a step further which is frightening. And Jesus said they would love one other and since they don't, I don't believe Jesus is the true Messiah and who he said he was. Isn't that a frightful indictment on a church that's not loving?

And the love spoken of in all of these passages is sacrificial love, agape, if you will. If you don't know what that is, let me tell you, it is the type of love where one is willing to go to the cross for sinners.

sinners. That's agape love. If you have such a love in your heart, you've passed a very major test in this examination.

[30:55] Test question eight, do you experience answered prayer? 1 John 3, 22, whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

now, let's be clear, this is not your ticket to a free lunch. You can pray most fervently this afternoon for a billion dollars in your bank account and a Boeing 747 in your hangar and I can assure you that's not going to happen.

That's not going to happen. And even in this passage, God has put conditions. We need to be, first of all, keeping his commandments and doing those things that please him.

Do you want to experience answered prayer? I'll give you the key. Pray the scriptures. You find scriptures where it is the will of God revealed for you to be doing something and you pray those, God will answer that prayer.

And the New Testament is filled with them. I read a chapter, I don't remember the book now, I wish I'd looked it up. It had 31 verses and 25 of those verses was what God wanted us to do, commandments of what he wanted us to do.

[32:25] Pray the scriptures and he will answer. Test question nine and don't worry, there's only 11.

Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit? 1 John 4 13, by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

And let me say, I meant to look this up, it's in the Bible. If he who has not the spirit doesn't have Christ, you don't have Christ, you don't have the spirit. When you are born from above, and that's the Greek word, born again, born anathen, from above, you receive the Holy Spirit of God.

He takes up residence in us. He comes to live in us and abide in us, never leave us or forsake us. And I love, this is the first thing a new believer testifies to.

Go back, remember, go back. John 4, 14 to 15, and we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

[33:42] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. If you can say that and you believe it and you tell lost people that, that's from the Holy Spirit.

putting the Spirit of God on display, not in silliness, and we have plenty of that, don't we? That's one reason to stay away from so-called Christian channels.

He doesn't do anything silly, he doesn't do anything that is a violation of his word. When you see the Spirit of God put on display, it is through an increasingly holy life, that is a powerful display of his presence in our life.

How do you show the world that you have the Spirit of God living in you? How do we do that? Well, one way is by exercising the fruit of the Spirit.

Okay, what is the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians chapter 5, verse 22 and 23. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[34:56] That's what we are to put on display. People go through life and they say, what's Jesus really like? I'll tell you. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

We're to be like him. Another way we bear testimony that we have the Spirit of God is by the exercise of our spiritual gifts for the edification of the church.

Now, you may be sitting here saying, but I don't have a spiritual gift. Or I don't know what my spiritual gift is. I want to say this with kindness.

Every true follower of Christ has been given at least one spiritual gift. gift. Some may have more than one, but everyone has at least one gift.

And what are some of these gifts? And this is not an all-inclusive list. Giving. Baptist people start with that one. Giving. And that's more than money.

[36:10] The gift of mercy. My wife's gift. The gift of mercy. Exhortation. Teaching. Another one of her gifts.

Administration. Evangelism. And being a pastor teacher. To name just a few. Do you pass this test? It's a critical test.

Test question number ten. And here we come to a passage that actually contains the word test. It took us a while.

I'm on page eleven. It took us a while. Can you discern between spiritual truth and spiritual error? Believers can do that. Can you do that? First John four one to three. Beloved do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God for many false prophets have gone out

into the world.

[37 : 14] By this you know the spirit of God every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

There may be times when you have to test the spirits. Several years ago we had a guy visit this church came to Monday night men's night came down to the police department to visit me when I was still the police chief before my retirement said he was an angel sent from God he had flown over the solar system to get here talked about how massive Jupiter was I noted that he was missing an eye that troubled!

me a little bit but then he started talking about his mother and his sister so I said to him one on one you know angels don't procreate angels aren't born they were created by Christ angels don't have children he told me about one of his children he said yeah that is a problem isn't it he would you buy me a bus ticket to Arizona I was glad to do it I I raided Diane's bank account and I bought him a bus ticket to Arizona and he wanted to come back he talked to Dr.

Coleman but he never came back every false religious system in the world fails this test every one they cannot discern between spiritual truth and spiritual error I say that emphatically because every false religious system attempts to undermine the great truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ everyone they even attack his name Lord Jesus Christ do you know what we mean when we say that he is the sovereign king he is Yahweh the most sacred name of God he is the savior Jesus means savior he is the anointed one meaning the anointed one sent from God the father false religion rejects these truths that Jesus Christ is an eternal being that left heaven and took upon himself human flesh and dwelt among us some of them get mad some people that knock on your door and if you're busy just bring that up and they're going to leave false religion totally rejects the truth of

Romans 4:25 which states Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses! and raised for our justification! false religion!

[40 : 10] false religion hates the doctrine of justification false religion wants nothing to do with such a god as this false religion and their teachers are of the world system controlled by Satan that we talked about earlier but from the very moment of true salvation we know who Jesus is and what he's accomplished we may not know it in great detail that takes time but we know the Lord himself gives by grace a spirit of discernment to the newest of believers by this knowledge we confess Christ as Lord and we know that the Bible is his truth and his word new believers cannot take in meat but they do crave the milk of the word the Lord himself gives by grace this spirit of discernment the beauty of all this is you don't need a seminary degree to understand truth from error the

Holy Spirit takes up residence in every new believer and by that we are able to distinguish between truth and error if you are not swayed by the myriad of false claims made about the Lord Jesus then you have passed this critical test and this brings us to the final test in our exam this morning test question number 11 have you suffered rejection because of your faith 1 John 3:13 do not be surprised brothers that the world hates you that's what the spirit of God uses there hates you this is perhaps the most difficult question for Americans let's face it we don't want to be hated and if we're persecuted probably the first reaction is well I may fight back and the second reaction is you know what

I'm going to consult an attorney I may have some legal action here that's the American culture we live in we don't take things lying down very easy we would do better to consider what the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit had to say on this topic consider these words of Jesus while at the same time asking yourselves this question what would cause someone to persecute me not me you or me John 15 verses 18 to 20 he's just talked about abiding in Christ and this is what the Lord says powerful words if the world hates you you know that it hated me before it hated you if you were of the world the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you remember remember the word that I said to you a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will also persecute you that's the God of the universe if they persecuted me they're going to persecute my sons and daughters that's an emphatic statement that's going to happen the apostle

Paul wades in on this in a great passage 2nd Timothy 3:12 all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted how many all I once told a brother in Christ many years ago you know I really haven't been persecuted for my faith I'll never forget his response be more godly it will come and we both laughed and the more I thought about it the more I realized that is absolutely true that

is absolutely true there's a connection between godly living and persecution from the world now in our country persecution takes a different form than it does in places like North Korea or much of the Arab world here you might not get the promotion you deserve maybe you get laid off when others don't our persecution is very mild compared with many places in the world but I want you to mark this thought down concerning persecution in America beloved it's coming it's coming and the church needs to be ready for that well there you have it

I hope that you pass the test I should have said this from the start but I saved it until now God doesn't grade on a curve it is not you did good on number two and you slack off on number four I just picked those numbers God wants his children to pass each test now what if some of you didn't pass any of the test go back and examine what you took to be your salvation experience examine yourself as Paul said was it centered on you or upon Christ ask God to reveal to you what true salvation is is it not what the world says it is you might even want to arrange a meeting with the pastor discuss it with him what if you were lacking in some of these you did really great in most of them go to the

[46:09] Lord get on your knees repent ask the Lord to come in help you! Thank you.