

A plea to professing Christians

I have known a great many professing Christians who were obviously not regenerated; some of these I loved dearly. Later, a few were truly regenerated and converted but many were not. I still continue to meet such from time to time.

In this paper my object is to lay out arguments to help such religious folk see that their profession is not enough to get them to heaven. They must be born again and must truly submit to Jesus as Lord. God willing, some of these folk may truly turn from their sins and find God in genuine faith.

Biblical professing Christians that were not born again

First, we need to see that this is not a modern phenomenon. It has always been the case that some followers of Christ were merely superficial in faith and later fell away.

Deserters from Christ

Those who drew back

'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, **'Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father'**. From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Jn 6:63-66

On the occasion of Jesus' teaching being too difficult for the natural mind, many of his followers deserted him. These were people who had believed him to be the Messiah and who had followed him for months as disciples of a rabbi. The Lord affirmed of such that only those chosen by God could really follow him. The calling of God leads to regeneration of the heart and this leads to true faith and repentance. Those who are not called are not regenerated; those who are not regenerated are not given faith or repentance.

Those who acted in the flesh alone, perhaps stimulated by just the mind, the will or the emotions, did not exercise true faith because they were not elect. Even faced with the glory of Christ himself, and having seen great wonders, such people deserted him.

Judas

Judas is the most clear and obvious example of this type of person. He was not only privileged to hear the true Gospel but also spent three years side by side with Jesus. He heard the Lord's words; he saw the Lord's deeds; he heard the Lord prayers and even saw his glory.

Yet Judas was not elect and was sent to perdition. Not only that, he actually betrayed his own professed Saviour into the hands of his enemies for silver.

Deserters from Paul

For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. Phil 2:20-21

All those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. 2 Tim 1:15

But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. 2 Tim 2:16-18

Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica. 2 Tim 4:10

At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. 2 Tim 4:16

Deserters from John

Even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. 1 Jn 2:18-19

Wolves in the flock

From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Acts 20:30

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked **out** for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude 1:3-4

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 2 Pt 2:1-2

False prophets, and other sorts of wolves amongst the sheep, started off as professing believers. However, the fact that they became wolves proves that their profession of faith was merely superficial and was not real. The apostolic age saw very many examples of men originally in the church becoming heretics and despots leading people astray into errors.

The message of the parable of the sower

This familiar parable reveals several classes of people who hear the Gospel.

And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among **thorns**, and the **thorns** sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matt 13:4-8

Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matt 13:18-23

Seed on the wayside

These are people who do not understand the Gospel preached; the word stays in the heart for seconds before it is snatched away by the enemy. Therefore, these are people who ignore the Gospel and are not a part of the church.

Seed in stony ground

Seed on stony ground cannot get roots deep into the soil to get water; therefore they wither and die.

These are people who receive the Gospel with joy but have not root in their heart. They are part of the church for a time, rejoicing with believers, but in the end they fall away. In times of persecution such folk disappear very quickly.

Seed among thorns

Seed falling amongst thorns can get a certain amount of root into the soil but the dominant weeds take all the nutrients and starve the seed; thus in time it dies.

These are people who receive the Gospel and join the church like the above. However, they also have no root in their heart and the care and anxieties of the world or the deceit of riches attract them away from their confession. In the end the world lures them away and they fall.

Seed in good ground

The important point: 'When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart ... But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces'.

The key point is having good ground, a regenerate heart; without this one cannot understand the Gospel.

Several types of people hear the Gospel and may even rejoice in it; however, only those with a good heart will bear fruit. That is, only the elect of God, whose heart has been prepared by the Holy Spirit, will be renewed in their thinking and truly respond with faith.

The key issue is regeneration. It is not a matter of profession but calling: 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain', (Jn 15:16). The calling of God is evidenced by a person bearing fruit. Those who bear spiritual fruit and glorify God prove that they are true disciples that have been regenerated.

Summary

The apostles and the Lord himself experienced people committing themselves to follow the Saviour only to find them abandoning the Way and deserting him in time.

Apostasy of followers is not a new phenomenon.

If it could happen to the Lord while he was present on earth, it can happen today when he is out of sight.

What was wrong with these deserters?

Their repentance was faulty

Repentance is a deep change of thinking that results in a reversal of direction in life to follow Christ instead of sin and selfish motives. Genuine repentance is an ability given by God to abandon sin and obey righteousness.

It results from regeneration of the heart, or being born again. Those who believe in Christ truly will be granted grace to repent. This repentance will then be seen in the person's life, proving that his repentance and faith were real.

The repentance of superficial believers is not a deep-rooted change of thinking about everything, but a one-off action of confession and contrition; perhaps based on heightened emotionalism. Thus many that claim to repent in a highly-charged meeting, as a reaction to a call to faith by a stirring preacher, very often fall away and leave the church within weeks or years. The repentance was never genuine.

Repentance is not a once-only action of confession of sin; it is a change of life direction based upon renewed thinking. Repentance is not contrition (the state of feeling remorseful and penitent).

Those who truly repent continue to follow Christ. Those who superficially repent soon fail to follow Christ. One test of repentance is when persecution comes. Those whose repentance is faulty quickly fall away in the face of persecution, whether it is violent or merely jibes at work.

Their faith was faulty

Saving faith is not something that arises from the flesh; it is a gift from God to the elect alone (Eph 2:8). No one can work up faith to believe in Christ for salvation. Scripture is assertive in denying human will-power in salvation:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Jn 1:12-13

It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Rm 9:16

It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Phil 2:13

Thus faith in Christ is far more than just assent of the Gospel, or believing that Christ existed. Faith is the apprehension of the grace of God in Christ; it is receiving Christ. John tells us that believing in Christ is receiving Christ. Thus faith is about apprehension of spiritual things; something impossible for the will of man.

So, a person with true faith will be in Christ. His whole life has changed and he is now a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). People with faith have a spiritual life; something which non-Christians have no conception of.

There are many versions of false faith, which are all based on human strength.

There is intellectual faith. This is when a person merely grasps Christianity at an intellectual level; Christianity is just like any other world religion that simply requires education and moral assent. Such people centre upon technical facts about the Bible but never hear God speaking to them.

There is emotional faith. This is when someone has had merely an emotional reaction to the Gospel presented in some form; often a melodramatic form. This is the opposite of intellectualism and it is the action of the affections rather than the intellect. Such people often talk about loving Jesus or cry about the story of the cross; indeed many women fall for this type of false faith. Such folk then seek further emotional experiences, such as the sort found in Charismatic churches.

There is mystical faith. This is an even deeper form of emotionalism that operates at a gut level. This is where facts and even common sense cannot operate. Such folk have often had some sort of exotic experience that brought them into this false faith; such as falling over backwards as a result of Charismatic ministry. One minute they were non-Christians; then they were knocked over backwards by some hidden force and when they got up they were supposedly Christians. Such experiences fail to honour the many Biblical texts that the Gospel involves counting the cost and taking stock of one's life before making a decision to follow Christ in complete commitment. There is no conviction of sin; no repentance, no commitment; no knowledge of the Gospel; just enjoyment of a mystical event.

There is volitional faith. This is when there is merely the action of the will. Often this results from a preacher emphasising making an immediate decision in a Gospel presentation. For whatever reason, a sinner then makes a decision to follow Christ as an act of will-power that has no root.

All of the above are actions of the human soul. The soul is the executive of the personality and expresses the motivations of the heart. They are all actions working upon the soul in some way.

However, true faith arises from regeneration, which is rooted in the renewed human spirit, which also changes the heart. The grace of God working in the heart and spirit then change the soul to be godly and faith is then expressed in the personality. True faith arises in the human spirit not the soul; indeed the grace of God in the believer actually regenerates the human spirit.

Thus grace from heaven (which is by the action of the Holy Spirit) working in a regenerated heart and a renewed spirit then work this grace out through the human soul, involving all aspects of it. Thus true grace in the spirit will express itself in the personality by renewed thinking (a changed intellect); true affections of thankfulness (changed emotions) and a genuine commitment to God (a changed will or volition). The soul changes were from pleasing the self to obeying God.

Their commitment was superficial

People who fall away from grace either have a superficial commitment or no true commitment at all.

People will make a supposed commitment to God for many reasons; some incredibly superficial. I have known down and outs come to church and state that they were Christians in order to get money and food. Many folk come to church and claim to be saved in order to gain friends and have a social life; so many people in the world just want to be loved and seek it where they can.

True commitment to God is demonstrated when the person obeys God's laws; especially when these laws cut across his personal choices and aspirations. Anyone can say that they are committed; but it is their actions which actually prove whether one is committed or not.

Some presentations of the supposed Gospel actually deny the need for any commitment of obedience to God. They deny that a sinner must commit to the Lordship of Christ. This is just heresy. You must have Christ as your Lord if you want him as your Saviour. He is Lord. If you receive Christ you receive him as your master.

They did not love God

Many claim to love God and yet treat this subject very glibly.

It is easy to claim to love something that you are not familiar with; but genuine love is shown in true commitment. A good man will love his wife in true commitment even though they may have turbulent relationship times; the commitment demonstrates true love.

When it comes to loving God many religious people have very different things in mind.

Often people who claim to love God really love the esoteric emotions they experience when indulging in certain types of religious experience. Thus Anglicans may express a love for God when they enjoy massed choirs singing in a great cathedral with an organ surging away while various rituals are being performed by priests in colourful vestments. Charismatics claim to love God when their emotions are stimulated by loud rock bands and corporate tongue singing. Witches claim to love God while performing various magic ceremonies involving dancing, chanting, incense and symbolic objects.

All such things are merely soulish and primarily emotional. It is as superficial as a young man or woman claiming to love a beautiful film star as they watch a romantic film. In fact, the people that designed the rituals mentioned above did so deliberately to inculcate feelings of awe in the participants. People mistake this awe for a love for God.

However, the Bible tells us clearly that love for God is chiefly demonstrated in obeying his commandments:

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. Jn 14:21

If you love Me, keep My commandments. Jn 14:15

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. Jn 15:10

This is what separates sheep from goats. Those who only profess to love God do not keep his commandments, and in fact, often do not even know what these commandments are. For example, keeping God's commandments involves disciplined study of his word to understand what is required of man. Professing Christians rarely show any interest in really studying the Bible in order to obey it. In fact many professing Christians today (especially in Charismatic circles) do not even read their Bible with any discipline at all.

Thus many superficial Christians are only stimulated by certain types of religious feelings rather than truly loving God.

They did not obey God's word

We have covered this to some degree already. Even many genuine Christians fail to appreciate the huge importance of knowing the word of God in depth and detail. Our lives

are meant to be given over to studying God's word in order to know God as our Father. It is our chief occupation; for only by knowing God's word can we know what to do in our lives.

To what degree do professing Christians honour the Bible? Is it somewhere down the list of hobbies and important things to do? A true believer will want to study Scripture, even though there may be times in their life when, through necessary exigencies, they may have little time to do this. The test is when they have time. Is free time given to some regular study of Scripture or does watching football/soaps/cricket/dramas/hobbies come first?

God puts chief store in his word:

You have magnified Your word above all Your name. Ps 138:2

This is vastly important! God puts his word above all the other things that glorify him and demonstrate who he is. Thus miracles, healings, resurrections and works of power (though they may glorify God) are not as important to know God as understanding his word.

It is only by knowing his word that we can actually know the thoughts and ideas of God's mind. We can only know God through knowing his word.

Therefore, anyone who ignores or disparages the word of God cannot be a true believer. Anyone who attacks it or denies parts of it cannot be a true believer. Anyone that puts it on a par with other religious works cannot be a true believer.

The real test is whether anyone actually obeys what God's word says. True believers will obey God's word; professing Christians will not.

A genuine believer will honour the Bible as Scripture. Professing Christians will not do this in practice (though they may give assent to its importance).

They were not called or regenerated

Underlying all the above is the root cause of conversion – regeneration, or being born again.

The Bible explains that no man can be converted unless he is first regenerated:

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Jn 3:3

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' Jn 3:6-7

He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope. 1 Pt 1:3

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever ... Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. 1 Pt 1:23-25

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights. Jm 1:17

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth. Jm 1:18

The reason why this is necessary is that we are, by nature, dead in sins ('And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins', Eph 2:1); regeneration brings us into new spiritual life.

A dead man is unable to anything, thus God must first bring his elect into new life before anything in conversion can take place.

Thus it is a lie that a man initiates salvation by choosing, deciding, exercising his free will, believing, repenting or doing any good work. Why, because no sinful man is able to do any good work (Rm 3:10-18). Only after the heart is changed and the spirit renewed can a man then believe and repent as a result of the grace of God.

Now professing Christians know nothing of all this. All their religion has been something they did or chose by their own power. Superficial believers have not been born again.

What are the essentials of becoming a genuine believer?

In a sense we have already explained all this in highlighting what is wrong with the profession of superficial believers; however, we will add some more points.

You must have had an experience of God

The true believer has met with God.

Genuine Christians may not have had an experience like Paul the apostle on the Damascus road. They may not have heard God's voice audibly, or saw a shining light, or have been struck blind; however, in their own small way every Christian has met with God.

This is something that professing Christians cannot understand. Every true convert has really met with God in Christ Jesus. There was a point where the Holy Spirit dealt with him and changed him. His eyes were opened and he was able to hear the voice of God. Perhaps not in an audible fashion but he knew with a certainty what he was to do.

Forgive me for a personal example of one part of my conversion. As someone who had previously studied the occult, when God touched me I knew instinctively that I must burn all my occult books. I immediately did so. Nobody told me to do this; I just knew that God required it of me. In this way, converts hear the voice of God.

True believers have had a confrontation with God at some point in their lives and have submitted to him as Lord.

You must be born again

We have covered the essentials of this earlier. However, to these we can add:

You must have new life, a spiritual life

True believers have a spiritual nature that sinners do not have. Having been regenerated they now have, as well as their old life, a new nature that is like Christ.

Thus believers have two natures; the old life which was from Adam and which remains corrupt, plus a new nature which is like Christ and which resides in their spirit. Thus Christians are commanded to put off the old life and put on the new as a matter of choice day by day. This is the basis of progressive sanctification.

Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:22-24

The new life is manifest in power to put off the old life

Amazingly I have met professing Christians that claim to have been a believer for decades who have no understanding of having died with Christ. I can only presume that such folk

do not read their Bibles much since this doctrine is made very clear in the NT (Rm 6:2; Gal 2:20; Col 2:20, 3:3). Consequently such people had poor testimonies and tolerated 'minor sins'. In fact, one has to question whether such ill-educated people were Christians at all.

Unless you have been born again and have died and have been raised with Christ, you will have no understanding of being dead to sins and living in resurrection life with Christ. Such folk are, therefore, dominated by sin and the flesh.

Genuine Christians will have at least some understanding of having died with Christ and needing to put on Christ every day. If they do not understand Paul's teaching in Romans 6, they can at least obey Christ's command to take up their cross and deny themselves.

True believers may not be theologically aware of the doctrine, but they show in their lives that they are able to overcome their old nature and put on the new man in practice.

You must submit to Jesus as Lord

A real Christian fully submits to Jesus as lord. He truly gives the Lord the mastery of his whole life leaving nothing hidden.

There are people who say that Jesus is Lord but, in practice, keep parts of their life hidden away as if God could not see. In these private areas they deny Jesus' Lordship. Thus they claim to follow God but deny him access to certain areas where they want to be in control, or even where they deliberately disobey God's word.

For instance: a person comes to Christ and accepts the Gospel but is in an adulterous relationship with someone, which they refuse to give up. Whatever that person thinks, they cannot be truly saved as they are not in submission to God's command to live righteously. Jesus is not Lord of their relationships.

Another person is not in direct sin but adores his tennis, both watching games and playing it. This person refuses to consider that this may be dominating his life as a Christian or that it takes superiority over everything, his family, his health, his time and his Saviour. This person may be a Christian but has some serious issues to learn and must come to submit to Jesus in every area. The Lord may not forbid tennis but may well ask him to cut it back. This will be a test for that person. If he cuts it back he is on the road to sanctification. If he refuses to cut it back he is probably not a true believer.

The true believer starts with the Lord. He submits his whole life to Jesus as Lord and works from that point. Everything in his life is submitted to God's will: relationships, jobs, hobbies, everything.

You must receive faith from God

Again we have explained this fully. Your belief in Christ must be a gift of God's grace and not just assent that you have worked up. Still less it must not be the superficial acceptance of what some preacher pressurised you into doing at some high-powered emotional meeting.

You must have closed with the past

This is what repentance means. Those who are in Christ have ceased to live according to their own desires and live to follow Christ. This requires a thorough change of thinking and motivations.

If someone says that this is difficult and that they need time to gradually change, they are revealing the fact that they have not received the gift of repentance from God who gives it freely to the elect.

You must become dead to the world

A Christian cannot live with his feet in two camps; he is either with God or against him.

The world is God's enemy; everything in the world is under the domination of Satan and works against Christ. However nice something in the world may seem, at some level it is working against Christ.

The true Christian is therefore someone who is not of the world even though he has to live in it. He may have to work in the world and live in the world, but he is not captivated by the spirit of the world and does not capitulate to its pressures. For instance, fashion: the believer does not have to have the latest thing, whether it be clothes, hairstyle, smart TV, car or anything else. He buys what he needs when he needs it.

Conclusion

Only those who bear fruit for God prove that they have been regenerated and truly saved. Thus we all need to examine the fruit of our lives and test whether we are converted or not.

What is this fruit?

Well the fruit is multifarious and varied; but it all stems from Christ.

In Galatians we are told key fruits of the Spirit, which are a manifestation of the character of Christ: 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control', (Gal 5:22-23). However, human nature can copy such fruit to a lower degree.

We often see church people who are patient, kind, good, and so on, who later apostatise from the church forever; this fruit was not of the Spirit. Therefore, we need to see the fruit listed above expressed in ways that describe a true disciple of Christ.

What will a true believe demonstrate?

A love for God

Above all else the true believer will love God, really love God.

This is not an emotional response to a loud worship time but emanates from a true heart in quietness and peace. Such a person loves God in all circumstances, even when life is tough and times are hard. In the deepest trial, the true believer never fails in his love for God but submits to his will.

Devotion to Christ

The true believer is devoted to Christ and makes him the pre-eminent thing in his life. In everything, Christ is the centre.

This is easy to say but hard to do.

A worshipful spirit

True Christians always worship; especially in private. Worship is not something relegated to a joyful time in church (which is often not worship but mere emotionalism) but is an attitude of the heart that undergirds their entire life.

Thus in times of pain, anguish, depression, anxiety, grief and other trials, the true believer still worships all the way through it.

Abounding in thankfulness

True Christians will often thank God for all that they have. This is not simply material possessions, but includes food, water, air, health, family, friends, circumstances, jobs and so on;

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eph
5:20

In everything give thanks. 1 Thess 5:18

It is a disgrace that many modern supposed Christians no longer give thanks for main meals (1 Tim 4:3-4) on the basis that this is legalistic. This is just a modern error since we are to be abundant in thanksgiving (Col 2:7). In fact, we should give thanks for all food.

In fact, Paul identifies one of the characteristics of unsaved sinners as being unthankful to God (Rm 1:21).

So, a fruit of new life will be the giving of thanks to the Father for all things.

A desire to study Scripture and obey it

The Bible is the great delight of true Christians. It brings them joy, wonder, provocation to good, reverence and many other stimuli.

If the Bible is some dead, dry book that you do not really want to read and get little from, then it is unlikely that you are truly saved.

Scripture is God speaking to you directly. It is enlivened by the Holy Spirit so that words jump from the pages and bring light to your soul. It unlocks problems and stirs to worship. It provokes to action and stimulates commitment.

The true believer delights to understand it, both at the technical level of seeking to understand the background, history, culture, languages, and so on; but also at the personal level of hearing God speak to your heart.

Chief of all is the way that Scripture opens the inner eyes to see the glory of Christ, in his person and words.

A turning away from previous sins

Believers do not become perfect when they are converted; neither do they ever become perfect in this life. Indeed, the old nature continues to be corrupted and our sanctification is based on our ability to progressively learn to put the old nature off and put on Christ.

Having said that, most people that become Christians have significant and obvious sins that characterised them as sinners. What should happen upon conversion is that the new life begins to overcome the old life by immediately dealing with obvious sins.

Again, forgive a personal example here. In my case, among my many sins before I became a Christian was profuse swearing. I did this deliberately to provoke people because I foolishly thought that words had no power and people ought to get used to profanity since it did no harm. Upon conversion I immediately stopped swearing. No one told me to do this, and it wasn't even a deliberate choice. I just stopped. The Spirit of God in me just stopped me swearing.

Now this may not happen to everyone but it happened to me. For other people it may be something else. Whatever the sin, there should be some sort of personal impact of being born again in the personality that leads to turning away from obvious sins. Dealing with other sins is the work of the Spirit over many years.

I will give an opposite example of what is not conversion.

The story is told of a Victorian convert of a famous evangelist. This man was a pickpocket thief and famously became a professing Christian. Upon being asked to give his testimony to a meeting, he said proudly, *'I used to be a pickpocket before I heard the Gospel; indeed I used to pick 50 pockets a day. Now that I am a Christian I only pick 30 pockets a day and by God's grace soon I hope to only pick 20 pockets a day.'* Of course, this is not conversion at all but fleshly renovation.

Part of the fruit of being truly converted is turning away from known sin. Indeed, Jesus approved of reparations when necessary for known sins (Lk 19:8-8). For example, those who have stolen ought to give the items back and ask forgiveness.

A desire to serve the brethren

One of the key proofs of a true believer is a love for the brethren. Such genuine love will not allow anything to split him from a brother, whatever the provocation.

I have lost count of the supposed Christians I have met who seemed zealous for the faith, only for a time to come when they sinfully shunned a fellow believer for some trivial reason, or even to cover sin. John tells us that such folk cannot be true Christians.

True believers will not just be a good friend to other Christians, but will earnestly seek their edification and will lay down their life to serve them in whatever way they can.

An avoidance of the world

This is expressed in many ways; such a person lives with a light touch of the world. They are in the world but yet dead to it at the same time.

Thus this person can drop things of the world immediately when necessary. I wonder how many churchgoers would readily drop all their sports watching, or their TV soaps, or their music, or their social nights out? Things that are not sinful in themselves can still be a snare to believers unless they have a light touch with the world.

God may allow one person to enjoy his football and yet forbid another to indulge. The true believer does not hesitate to drop what God calls him to.

Regarding more obvious worldliness, of course the true believer has no truck with such things: for example the National Lottery, gambling, carousing, drunkenness, fan worship etc.

Growth in grace

The new life in Christ is not static; it constantly overcomes and renews.

We make all sorts of mistakes and fail often, but overall there is a continual growth in grace amongst those who are truly saved.

The true believer can look back on years of being a Christian and see that there has been change, real development of faith and character. Indeed, a large part of this will be a growing understanding of how sinful we are. Things that we excused when we were young appal us when we have grown older in faith. The more light we have in Christ, the greater depths of sin we sin in ourselves, just as the more light enters a room, the more dust you see.

A longing for the Second Coming and the restoration of all things

The true believer looks to heaven constantly and rests in the hope that Jesus is coming back in glory to take us to be with him forever in bliss.

He makes no home in this world but longs for his true home in the glory.

These are just a few examples of the sort of fruit that a true believer will express. They may not all appear at once in a very young believer; indeed for some it will take years to understand these things; but there will be a start even in a young convert.

However, some things, such as a delight in Scripture and a love for God, ought to appear right from the start in true believers.

The plea

If you are someone that has considered yourself a Christian but has read this and has been shocked, I urge you to take time to consider what I am saying. I urge you to go to God on your knees and confess that your confession has been superficial, that your faith has been worked up and your repentance has been faulty.

I urge you to pray openly and honestly to God and ask him for mercy on you. Knock on the door of heaven and ask God to truly save you. Seek the grace which God freely gives to all those who truly come to him.

Don't come in your strength, or in your haughtiness, or resting on your experience; come humbly as a penitent sinner seeking mercy to escape from hell.

Those who truly seek will find.

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