

What is a genuine Christian?

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[0 : 00] Well, has anybody been to a flea market recently? Put up your hand. If you've been to a flea market in the last, say, month. Okay? Not a lot. That's a pity.

You've got to love a good South African flea market. You've really got to go along from time to time. Because you can find all kinds of bargains in a flea market, can't you? And good stuff too. If you look around, name brand stuff.

You can find in a flea market for amazing prices. And I was amazed the last time I visited a flea market. For a hundred grand, you can deck yourself out with not only a Rolex watch, but some Ray-Ban sunglasses and a genuine leather belt and still have change for an ice cream.

It's amazing what you can get at a flea market. I'm not joking. It's pretty good value for quality stuff, isn't it? Until, of course, you're walking away with your newly acquired name brand merchandise and you happen to look a little bit closer at it.

And you realize that your sunglasses aren't Ray-Bans. They're Bay-Rans or something like that.

And you look at your Rolex. And Rolex isn't supposed to have two L's in it, is it?

[1 : 08] And by the time you get to your car, your genuine leather belt has already started to crack. And you discover that all the quality stuff you bought is actually all fake. I don't know if you've ever been in that situation, but I certainly haven't.

It's very disappointing, is it? Our world is full of fakes. You don't have to look far to find imitations and fakes. You've got to be careful because sometimes they're really good fakes and it's really difficult to spot the genuine article.

It's really difficult to spot what is not a fake. And I'm sad to say that the same is true of the church on earth today. And not only today, but in the time of Paul and even before Paul, Jesus himself said that lots of people who call themselves Christians are going to be fake.

Because the fact is, anybody can come to church. Anybody can call themselves a Christian.

Anybody can say the Apostles' Creed. But that doesn't mean that they are a Christian.

And the question that I want us to consider this morning is, how do we know what the real deal is?

How do we spot the genuine article? And that's an important question for us to ask.

[2 : 22] Not so much to evaluate other people, but to evaluate ourselves. To evaluate ourselves.

Because the Bible says in 2 Corinthians, if you call yourself a Christian, this is what the Bible says, you must examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.

Whether you are the genuine article. And it's the job of all of us to look and ask that question about ourselves. And so what is a genuine Christian then?

That's what we need to answer this morning. What is a genuine Christian? Well, we find the answer to that here in Romans chapter 8. And so turn with me and let's have a look at what Paul says.

Now, he starts this chapter, Romans chapter 8, which is an incredible chapter. And he starts it by reminding us of the Christian message from verse 1 to 4.

And I really encourage you to meditate on these four verses. Romans 8, 1 to 4. Meditate carefully when you go home. And go to Bible study this week where you will study them in more detail.

[3 : 24] Because it's here that Paul reminds us, in these four first verses, of the amazing news that he spent the last seven chapters in Romans explaining. And he says, this is the nutshell of the gospel message.

He says that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation because what the law couldn't do, which is to make us right with God, we saw last week, what the law couldn't do, God did by sending his son as a human, specifically to live the life that humans have failed to live.

And then to take the judgment for the sins of other humans in his human flesh and give those people his righteousness in the sight of God, to save them from God's judgment and to give them eternal life.

Now that, that is what I've just said there. What Paul summarizes in Romans chapter 4, that is the single greatest news that the world has ever heard. And that is the news that we exist as a local church to proclaim to the world.

And it's in those four verses that you will find the whole gospel message of the Bible summarized. But we need to move on from that. As I said, I encourage you to meditate on those verses at home. [4 : 39] Read them, pray for God to open your mind to truly grasp each of those phrases in those four verses. And go to Bible study to dig into them. But our question this morning is, who are the people that this verse is talking about, that these verses are talking about?

Who are the people who are in Christ Jesus? Who are the people who have been saved by his death and given eternal life? Well, let's see, because Paul says who these people are in verse 4. He says it's those people who no longer live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. And that right there is the definition of a genuine Christian.

That's the evidence of the real thing. It's someone who lives their life according to the Spirit of God. But what does that mean?

What does that mean? Well, Paul spends now the rest of this passage from Romans chapter 8, 4 to 17, telling us what that means.

[5 : 44] He unpacks what it means to live according to the Spirit, so that you and I can ask that question of ourselves and ask, am I living according to the Spirit? And he describes five specific things I want us to see this morning, that the Spirit does in the life of a genuine Christian.

And so here they are. You ready? Let's go through these five things. Firstly, the Spirit causes a genuine Christian to want what God wants.

Have a look at verse 5. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Okay, so we have two types of desires here. Desires of the flesh and desires of the Spirit. Now, what does the Bible mean when it talks about flesh? We've got to stop there and just understand this concept of flesh.

Now, it doesn't just mean your skin. When the Bible talks about flesh, it's not just referring to your skin. It means you on earth. It means your fleshly self, your natural human self, the part of you that you can see and touch and smell if you want to.

[6 : 51] And that natural human self that is referred to in the Bible as the flesh, that natural human self, the body that you walk around in, the mind that you think with naturally, has its own wants and desires.

We all have wants and desires that are natural to us. And not just physical desires like food and sex and clothing and comfort, but also more complex desires like self-worth and status and esteem and meaning.

Things like that. We all have a set of natural desires, whether we know it or not. In fact, it was the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow who came up with the very well-known hierarchy of needs. If you've ever studied tertiary education or even just read books on psychology, you would have come across this hierarchy of needs, which defines the fundamental needs or desires really that drive all human beings.

And so it starts with, at the bottom, physiological needs, basic stuff like air and water and food. And if you don't have one of those basic physiological needs, you're not going to worry about anything above it.

[8 : 00] That's why it's a hierarchy. Until you've got that first level, that's how the hierarchy works. And so, you know, if you're trapped underwater craving for air, you're not going to be thinking about the car you want to buy, for example.

You have to get the physiological needs before you worry about the ones above it. But once those needs are satisfied, then you move to the next level. Needs of safety and security. That's what you'll be thinking about and concentrating on.

And then you get those and you move to the next level, which is needs of love and belonging. And then the next level, which is esteem and status and society. And then you finally, once you've got all that, you start looking for self-actualization, which means the reaching of one's full potential.

And Maslow said, every human will subconsciously be seeking for one of those needs, will be on one of those levels. Everyone here will be on one of those levels. And wherever they are in that hierarchy, the pursuit of that particular need will be what absorbs them, what drives them, what they prioritize in their day-to-day thoughts and actions.

And these natural human desires that we have and we pursue without even thinking about it are what the Bible calls desires of the flesh, desires of the human self.

[9 : 14] But now when we look at Romans chapter 8, what we read about is an alternate set of desires called desires of the spirit. But these are not natural human desires.

In fact, they're desires that we can only have when God's spirit lives in us, because they are the desires of God himself that he puts in our hearts.

They're not natural. They don't come naturally. They only come when God's spirit is truly living in you. And Paul says that a genuine Christian who has God's Holy Spirit will not only have these new desires, but they will set their minds on these desires.

That is, the desires of God that the Holy Spirit gives will take priority over the desires, the natural desires of the flesh. Not that they won't have those natural desires.

We all have those natural desires. But it's that a genuine Christian will choose the desires of the spirit over the desires of the flesh. And they will often sacrifice what they want, whether that's money or career or status or whatever it is.

[10 : 26] They will sacrifice that rather to do what God wants, namely seeking after his kingdom and his glory and spreading the gospel, the desires of God. And that, Paul says, is the first thing that the spirit does in genuine believers.

He makes genuine believers start to want what God wants. All right? Secondly, the spirit causes a genuine Christian to live a new life now.

So Paul goes on to describe the life of a genuine Christian in verse 10. Listen to what he says. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the spirit gives life because of righteousness.

And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you.

Now, what he's saying here is very similar to what we looked at two weeks ago in Romans chapter 6, if you can think that far back, which is that those in Christ have effectively died to their old life in the death of Jesus on the cross.

[11 : 38] And when they put their faith in Christ, truly, they started a new life. That's what Jesus calls to be born again, which is a life that starts here, but it lasts into eternity.

And Christians have already begun to live that new life internally now, even though we're still waiting for the old life to die away. Verse 10, even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the spirit gives life.

In other words, a Christian is living two parallel lives at the same time. To illustrate, has anybody ever seen that advert with Jean-Claude Van Damme standing on two Volvo trucks?

You've seen that advert? Okay, it's quite an amazing advert. He's standing on the rearview mirrors of these two Volvo trucks, and they're driving in reverse.

And as they go, they slowly kind of start separating, and he does the splits, which is... You should watch it on YouTube. It's available. And it's an amazing advert. It's obviously advertising Volvo and how fancy their trucks are.

[12 : 44] But that is actually a great picture of a Christian living two parallel lives. That's kind of the tension that we live under. But the difference is... Now, the difference with a Christian is that for a Christian, one of these trucks, one of these lives, is heading for a cliff, and it's going to be destroyed, while the other is heading for eternity.

And what's more, these trucks are slowly separating more and more and more and more for a Christian. These lives are getting further and further apart the more we grow as Christians.

And so a Christian's job is not to do the splits like Jean-Claude Van Damme do and try to live both lives at the same time. A Christian's job is to jump on the new life, the new truck, and start living their new life now, even while both lives are still riding together.

You get the picture? That's what a Christian is called to do. Don't try to do the splits, because eventually the trucks will be too far apart. Jump on the new life, even though both lives are still running in parallel.

Because a Christian knows that the new life is going to take them to eternity, while the old life is going to be destroyed. And that's the reason we jump on the new one. And so what a Christian does is they focus on the new life.

[13 : 58] They focus on the world to come. They focus on eternity. They set their thoughts and plans and focus their energies there in the world to come, not here in this life.

That is what a Christian does. And when they do that, when a genuine Christian is focused on the life to come, truly focused on the life to come, and setting their hearts and their thoughts and their focus on that life, then people notice.

The people around them, the people they work with, the people they play soccer with, whatever it is, notice. especially when that person is going through trouble. Because even then, when they are focused and setting their minds on the life to come, even when they are going through trouble, they are still filled with a deep, steady joy.

Because they know where they are going, and that changes everything. And that can be seen. It is interesting. 1 Peter 3.15, when Peter tells Christians to be prepared to give an answer for the faith, he says, always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have.

In other words, he is assuming if you are a genuine Christian, people will notice that you have a hope that they don't have, and they will ask you about it. And then it will create an opportunity for you to tell them about Jesus.

[15 : 09] But a Christian's hope is evident. It is seen. It is assumed that people will notice it. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians, this is what he says to a genuine Christian. These are some really encouraging words.

2 Corinthians chapter 4. He says, Therefore we do not lose heart. Although outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

And that, that right there is the second thing that the Spirit does in the life of the people in whom he dwells, the life of a genuine believer. He causes them to start living their new life now and fix their eyes and their minds on what is coming, not on what is here now.

Thirdly, the Spirit causes a genuine Christian to fight sin. Verse 12. Have a look. Paul says, Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it.

[16 : 26] For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Okay, so what he's saying here is that every Christian who has begun to live their new life now will also work to ruthlessly destroy the sin that remains in their life.

The remnants of the old life that we're leaving, that sin will stick on us, and a Christian's job is to ruthlessly work, to cut that away, to destroy it, to get rid of the remnants of that old life.

Because now, we are living our new life, but the problem is, we won't see the end of that old life until our bodies die. And so, this will by definition be a lifelong struggle that Paul's talking about, this fighting of sin.

We will be fighting sin ruthlessly every day until we die, and our sinful flesh and our sinful lives are finally gone. And we live our new life completely without sin.

However, until that day, we will be fighting. Until that day, a true Christian will be engaging in that battle every single day to fight sin. So in other words, a genuine Christian is someone who's signed up for war.

[17 : 41] A genuine Christian has gone to the recruitment office, and they've got on the plane, and they've landed in the front lines, except this war that they're fighting is a war against their sin, and it's a war that they fight every day, until the day they go home.

And the very fact that a person is part of that battle daily, the very fact that a person hates their sin, and wants to destroy it wherever they see it, that is a mark of the Holy Spirit's presence in their life. And it's a way that you can know that the Holy Spirit is in you, if you're a Christian. You'll grow to hate your sin, and you will, more and more every day, you will want to fight it, and you will want to do away with it, and you will want to destroy it, which means, that you will want to put disciplines in your life, to guard against the particular sins, that you struggle with.

You won't just ignore them, you will fight them. That is the third mark of a genuine Christian. Then fourthly, the Spirit causes a genuine Christian to call God Father.

Have a look from verse 14. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again.

[19 : 00] Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship, and by Him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit, that we are God's children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. Now this passage, really, it gets to the heart, of God's plan for His people, from eternity past.

This passage right here. The reason that God sent Jesus, to die for our sins. The reason that He sends His Holy Spirit, to change us, and cause us to fight sin in this life, to prepare us for the life to come.

All of that, is for one end goal, that God had in mind, from eternity past. And you know what that goal is? That is, so that we can be part of His family, and that we can be His children, and that we can call Him Father.

That is God's ultimate end goal, for every single thing that He's done. To adopt us, as His children, for eternity. And we need to understand, just what an amazing thing that is, to be a child, of the Creator of the cosmos.

[20 : 14] To be in His family. Family. You know, people often, without thinking, will call God their Heavenly Father. They'll just assume, that He's their Father. Assuming somehow, that all humans, are naturally children of God.

But that's not the case. The Bible, says that's not the case. David Seckham, in his commentary on Romans, says, that's like calling the cockroach, that lives in my house, my child.

Alright? I mean, it's a bit of an insult to us, but it's true. Because not only, are we as humans, so not like God, but we're even sinful, rebellious humans, who deserve no place, in God's glorious new world at all.

We should be forever grateful, that we even have a servant's position, at the edges of God's kingdom, and yet we find, that God wants us to live, in His very household, as His children.

Which is amazing. And even more, it gets even better, He wants us to be heirs. He wants us to inherit, what He has made. Co-heirs with Christ, it says.

[21 : 18] You see that, in verse 17? Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. Do you know what that means? Do you know what it means, to be a co-heir of Christ?

It means that, Christians, those who are in Christ, are set, to inherit, all that God has created, or ever will create, as sons and daughters of God, and the stewards, of His new world, forever, ruling over, all that He has created, forever.

And that is what it means, to be adopted into God's family. That you, if you are a child of God, will be set to inherit, everything that He has made. A new world, under the rule, and the management, and the stewardship, of God's sons and daughters, living in perfect relationship, with Him, and one another, and creation around us, forever, and ever, and ever.

But how do we know, who those people are? How do we know, who are God's genuine children? Well it's those, who in this life, can call God Father, and mean it.

Those, are who God's children are. In other words, it's those who experience, what only God's Spirit can give, which is real, intimate, daily relationship, with God, as your Father.

[22 : 35] I wonder, if you, have yet experienced, that relationship, with God. Because that's the fourth thing, that the Spirit does, in the life of a Christian.

He causes, a genuine Christian, to be able, to call God Father, and have that intimate relationship, with God today. And then finally, the fifth thing, that we see, is that the Spirit, causes a genuine Christian, to suffer with Christ.

Christ. That's the fifth mark, of a real Christian. And this mustn't be ignored. You know, we'll often skip over, the verses that talk about, Christians suffering with Christ.

But have a look at verse 17. We can't ignore this. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed, we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also, share in his glory.

You see, a true Christian's path, to sharing in Christ's glory, in the future, is to share in his sufferings, in the present, now, on this earth.

[23 : 42] What sufferings, is he talking about? Well, firstly, just the sufferings, of being a child of God, and yet still having to stay, in this broken world, for a time, and experience, its pain and

frustration.

But more so, the sufferings, that will come our way, as we identify ourselves, with Jesus, in our world.

Because if the world, persecuted Jesus, when he came, you can be sure, it will persecute, all those who bear his mark, and have his spirit, inside them. Whether that's in the form of, exclusion, or mockery, or just general hostility, and in some cases, punishment, and even imprisonment.

But whatever form it takes, one thing is certain, as Paul says, in 2 Timothy 3.12, everyone who wants to live, a godly life in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted.

Purely because, you see, the world around us, is opposed to Christ. And so, it will come into conflict, with genuine Christians, who don't hide their faith. Every time, it will.

[24 : 48] Because when Jesus came, the world, was in conflict with him. The world, conspired against him. The world reacted against him. And when Jesus lives, in the heart of true believers, the world, will do the same, against us.

And you know, it's often in a time, of persecution, which will show up, who are the genuine Christians, and who are the fakes. And so, I end this morning, by asking you, in all seriousness, which one are you?

Which one are you? Are you the genuine article? Ask yourself, in the depths of your heart, does the Holy Spirit, really live in you?

Because if he does, these things will be true of you. Now, don't misunderstand, what Paul is saying here. He's not saying, these are things, that you must do, to be saved. No, he's saying, instead, that these are things, you do when you already, are truly saved.

These are things, that will happen, in your life. And they are the evidence, of the Spirit, working in your life. And these are the things, you can ask yourself, do you see these things, in your life? And so, examine yourself, to see whether you are, in the faith.

[25 : 58] And if these things, are not true of you, and you know it, then pray. Speak to God, repent of, your ignoring him, repent of your unbelief, and come to Christ, and pray for the Holy Spirit, to come into your life, and take control.

And listen to what Jesus promises, if you do that. He says, if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts, to your children, how much more, will your Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit, to those who ask him?

If you know, that you don't have, the Holy Spirit living in you, God promises, to give, the Holy Spirit to you, if you would repent, and ask him, and come to Christ.

But now, if these things are true of you, and you know, the presence of the Holy Spirit, in your life, then you must know, that you have signed up for war. That's what it means, to have the Holy Spirit, in your life, in this world, is to sign up for battle.

You must know, that God's Spirit, has invaded your sinful flesh, and liberated you from sin, and now he calls you, to take up arms, and fight, to daily put to death, the deeds of the flesh, the sins, that you will face, every day, until you enter eternity.

[27 : 11] 4, verse 13, if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if you live by the Spirit, you will put to death, the misdeeds of the body, and you will live. And you will live, and you will live, as a child of God, and a co-heir with Christ, in a glorious eternity, and let that be, what you live for every day.

Let that be, what gets you out of bed, in the morning. Let that world be, what your focus is on, until you get there. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're reminded, of the glorious eternity, that you have prepared, for your children, and we, we pray, that you would help, each of us, this morning, to know, whether or not, we are truly your children.

Lord, this is a sobering reminder, that it's easy to fake, being a Christian. And so we pray, that you would help us, convict us, help us to examine, our lives, and help us, Lord, to accept, the Holy Spirit's work, in our life, so that we will, grow to want, what you want, that we will grow, to fight sin, in our lives, that we will know, what it is, to call you Father.

And that, as you will, we will suffer, with Christ, because we will not, be ashamed, to proclaim, who our master is. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen..