

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13, NIV)

Being a Christian is more than beliefs, behaviors, and relationships. All that is true, but there's something behind the beliefs, behaviors, and relationships that is supernatural. Henry Scougal called it "The Life of God in the Soul of Man."¹

It's the life of God in *your* soul.

The answer you need to know

Has this miracle of God's grace happened in your soul? I can't think of a more important question. Have you been regenerated by the Spirit of God? Have you been born again?

I put this question bluntly, and I make no apology for that, because you need to be able to answer it clearly. If you are regenerate, you need to know that, so you can answer the devil's lies when he tells you that you are a useless, no good, pathetic apology for a Christian. If you are a believer, you know that he sometimes says that.

If you are not regenerate, you need to know that too! Nothing would be more tragic than to go through your whole life thinking that you are a Christian when in fact you are not.

There are many who miss what could be theirs. They do not find because they do not seek. They do not seek because they think they already have.

Satan's power lies largely in causing confusion. That is his primary strategy. If you are truly a Christian, he wants you to think that you are not. If you are not truly a Christian, he wants you to think that you are! "We are not," Paul says on one occasion, "unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11).

So I make no apology for putting this question bluntly. Have you been born again? Are you regenerate? Whatever the answer, you need to know it with crystal clarity.

How would you know the answer?

How can I know if I have been born again? God's Word clears away the confusion. The first letter of John gives us six distinguishing marks of a genuine Christian.

Hearing these marks should have one of two effects in your life today:

Either you will say, "This is the life that God has given to me. I must come to him and thank him for it." And the outcome for you is joy and thanksgiving.

¹ Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2010)

Or you will say, “This is the life that is possible for me. I must come to God and ask him for it.” Why would you not do that? If you do not already have this life, you have every reason for hope. This is the life that God offers to you in Jesus Christ.

Six Distinguishing Marks of a Genuine Christian

We looked at the first three marks last time:

1. Righteousness: Doing what is right

Everyone who does what is right has been born of him. (1 John 2:29)

The evidence of the new birth is seen in doing what is right. When you are born again, you have a new desire to please the Lord. “We make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor. 5:9). We do that by pursuing what is right. That takes courage. The evidence of the new birth is seen in a new pattern of behavior. Never let anyone tell you that the new birth is just a feeling. It changes the way you behave.

2. Repentance: Turning from sin

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

This is simply a statement of fact: “He cannot go on sinning.” And it is a mark of the new birth. Christians sin. We all fail in many ways. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

But if you belong to Christ, your conscience is activated, you hate your sins, you grieve your sins, you repent of them, you cannot stay in them. What grieves you most is the way your sin hurts Jesus Christ. If it doesn't bother you, you are not a believer. If you can be comfortable in sin, you are not born again.

3. Love: Loving God and other people

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Regeneration brings you into the life God is calling you to live—to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31). Becoming a Christian expands your soul, expanding your capacity to love, severing the root of selfishness that is so deeply ingrained.

Let's turn our focus to the remaining three marks.

4. Faith: Believing that Jesus is the Christ

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. (1 John 5:1)

The mark of a genuine Christian is not simply a general faith in God, but a specific faith in Jesus. Many people think that a general faith in God makes you a Christian. It does not. We believe that Jesus is “the Christ.” This is the distinct Christian confession. What does that mean?

“Christ” means “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, God anointed various people for tasks that reflected his particular work in the world of revealing himself, redeeming sinners, and reigning over his people: Prophets were anointed to speak the Word of God; priests were anointed to offer sacrifices to God; kings were anointed to rule the people of God.

The ministries of the prophet, the priest, and the king pointed forward to one person who would be *the* Anointed One. The whole of the Old Testament breathes with the anticipation of this coming Messiah:

the Christ, in whom God would make Himself fully known.

the Christ, through whom God would redeem sinners.

the Christ, by whom God would bring in his kingdom, and deliver his people from all their enemies.

And then Jesus comes:

He is the Word by which God has made himself known. He says, “If you have seen me you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). Who else could ever say a thing like that?

He is the priest who offers himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He says, “I have come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to give my life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

He is the king who reigns over all. He says, “You will see the Son of man coming on the clouds with all his holy angels” (Matt. 24:30-31). He’s coming again in peace and glory.

What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ?

Jesus is the Prophet whose word I believe. That is your position. That’s how you live your life. Jesus is the Word made flesh. He defines truth for me. I do not determine right and wrong from my own inclinations or opinions. Truth is no longer defined by what I think, but by what Jesus says.

Jesus is the Priest whose sacrifice I trust. When he died on the cross, Jesus became the sacrifice for my sins. I do not determine my standing before God from my own feelings, achievements, or failures. Peace with God is not accomplished by what I do, but by what Jesus has done.

Jesus is the King whose direction I obey. Jesus is the risen Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father. I belong to him. He purchased me with his blood. Life is no longer about pleasing me, but it has to be about fulfilling the purpose of the king I serve.

Jesus is the Christ! “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” The Christian knows that nobody else could possibly ever do for him what Jesus has done. He knows that Jesus is *the* Christ, the only One. Bishop Ryle describes the person who believes:

He may have his fears and doubts. He may sometimes tell you he feels as if he has no faith at all. But ask him whether he is willing to trust anything instead of Christ, and see what he will say. Ask him whether he will rest his hopes of eternal life on his own goodness, his own amendments, his prayers, his minister, his doings in church and out of church either in whole or in part, and see what he will reply. Ask him whether he will give up Christ, and place his confidence in any other way of salvation. Depend upon it he would say, that though he does feel weak and bad, he would not give up Christ for all the world.²

5. Power: Overcoming the world

Everyone born of God overcomes the world. (1 John 5:4)

If you are a Christian, you experience two things.

First, you know that you are in a struggle. Because your conscience is activated, you experience temptation all around you. Your awareness of sin is heightened. You often feel your own weakness.

Second, you know that have been given power. What is it to be a Christian? Christ lives in you. You’re not in the same position that you were in before you were converted.

I love the way Paul puts it: “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29). He’s saying, “This Christian life isn’t easy. I labor at it. It’s a struggle for me. But the reason I am able to engage in this struggle is that I have been given power. His energy! It works powerfully in me!”

Overcoming the world

What does John mean when he says, “Everyone born of God overcomes the world?” John tells us what he means by “the world”:

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

² J. C Ryle, Knots Untied, (Moscow: Charles Nolan Publishing, 2000), 151-152.

John says, “Everyone born of God overcomes the world.” This is what Christ enables you to overcome! The new birth puts you in a position where you are able to deal with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

This is an amazing promise! “Everyone born of God overcomes the world.” It does not say that you overcome the world instantly or completely. Throughout this life you will always find yourself in a battle with sin and temptation, especially with lust and pride, but your struggle will end in victory.

Where victory begins

Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world - even our faith. (1 John 5:4-5)

Victory begins when you recognize that Jesus Christ has given you power to overcome. I have met many people who say they are Christian who simply do not believe this. They insist that they are powerless. They say, “Pastor, you don’t understand. The temptation is too big for me.” It may be bigger than you, but it is not too big for Christ, and if you are born again, his Spirit lives in you.

The beginning of victory—over a temptation in which you have failed many times—is believing. There may be times when you say, “What a wretched man I am” (Rom. 7:24). But then you will also say, “Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ my Lord” (Rom. 7:25). The Christian is not left in despair.

Regeneration makes the Christian life possible. You can’t live the Christian life by turning over a new leaf. You can’t live this life by adopting new values. You live this life by becoming a new person.

That is what God offers in the Gospel. “The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel is not the advice of God. It’s not the instructions, the requirements, or the expectations of God. It is the power of God!! For the salvation of everyone who believes.

6. Security: Kept safe from the evil one

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. (1 John 5:18)

This is a marvelous promise! The “One who was born of God” is Jesus Christ. *He* keeps you safe, if indeed you are a child of God.

What does Christ keep us safe from?

That’s a huge question. If you’re confused about the answer, you’ll always have difficulty with the troubles of this world.

I will never forget speaking to a lady on the Sunday after September 11th 2001. She was quite distraught and said, “How can I tell my children that they are safe?” She asked a good question. What safety can you promise your kids in this world?

What does Christ keep us safe from? Christians get all the same cancers and experience all the same illnesses as others who are not Christians. We face the same dangers in a fallen world as everyone else. Jesus says to the disciples that...

“...there will be earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places and fearful events... They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons... You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death... But not a hair of your head will perish.” (Luke 21:11,12,16,18)

Try and put these two things together in your mind: “You will be put to death... but not a hair of your head will perish!” What does this mean? John tells us: “The one born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.”

Satan wants to harm you. “The devil is like a roaring lion prowling around looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). His objective is clear. Christ took you from his clutches, and Satan wants you back. He wants to lay hold of you and bring you back under his power.

But this cannot happen. It is impossible. Once Christ has laid hold of you, once you’ve been born again, you belong to him. He says, “I know my sheep. They follow me. I give them eternal life. No-one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Once you are in the hand of Christ, you are beyond Satan’s grasp.

Remember the words of Jesus to Peter just before his arrest and before Peter denied the Lord? “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.” Notice, by the way, that Satan has to ask. God allowed it, and Peter failed terribly and was shaken to the core. But listen to what Jesus says, “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31).

The enemy may hurt you, but he can never destroy you. That’s why, in the New Testament, Peter is an apostle, and we have two letters from him. He may tempt you, he may cause you to fall into sin—but if I can invent a new word here—he cannot “unregenerate” you. He can never own you again.

Where Confidence and Freedom Come From

Christ died to save you, and he lives to keep you. He intercedes for you at the right hand of the Father. He has purchased you with his own blood, and he will never let you go. There is a confidence that comes to a man or woman who knows this.

Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Philippians. He didn't know whether he was going to die or live. He tells them, "Whatever happens – live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). This is a man who is free!

He isn't worried about the next thing that is going to happen. He has confidence because his life is in the hands of a Savior who will never let him go and whose purpose can never be defeated. That's freedom.

The gifts of God in regeneration are awesome! Pursue genuine righteousness; ongoing repentance; deepening love, faith, power, and security. I can't think of anything greater in this life than to be born again by the Spirit of God.

Either this life *is* yours, or it *can be* yours. I want to invite you to come to Christ today. You can come and thank Him. And if you can't do that, you can come to Christ and ask Him.

If you find these prayers helpful, let them guide you to Christ today:

Thanking Christ:

Thank you that you are the Christ,
 You are the way the truth and the life.
 Thank you that your power lives in me;
 Power to overcome the world.
 Thank you that my life is in your hand
 and that you will never let me go.

Asking Christ:

Honesty is at the heart of every authentic relationship, and that's where you must begin with God. Come to him and tell him you don't have what it takes to live this Christian life. Tell him that you are a sinner and that sin's power is too strong for you to overcome.

Then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God who came so that you should know God, who died to redeem you for God, and who lives to bring you to God.

Put your trust in him. Ask him to be your Savior. Submit yourself to him as your Lord and Master. New life begins here.

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