

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Bible Study

Who's Image Is On YOU?

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I once watched an old 'cops and robbers' movie in which the "perp" frustrated detectives by never leaving fingerprints. Seems the bad guy had sanded his fingertips so smooth that they left no discernable prints.

I can readily attest to this! I work with my hands, and I frequently use sandpaper and sanding sponges (foam rubber coated in abrasive) to smooth things out. After a few days of sanding walls or woodwork, I have no fingerprints! I've even sanded until the skin was so thin on a few of my fingers that they bled....OUCH!



This metaphor brings me to ask; do we Christians have fingerprints? If we were accused of being a Christian in a court of law, would there be enough 'evidence' to convict us? Do we leave discernable traces of our faith, like fingerprints, wherever we go, or are we passing through life leaving no evidence of the Holy Spirit within us? Whose image is on us, and is that image clear to those around us?

CAUTION! Self-assessment is the most unreliable kind! If we ask ourselves the question and simply say; "Yeah, I'm OK.".....we are at risk of self-deception. Is there an OBJECTIVE way of knowing whether our faith is authentic, or if we are actually 'babes in our faith' or if we are simply enjoying the benefits of being in the club? Is there a way to know whether we are following the TRUE GOSPEL, or one that has been compromised, watered down, even perverted?

I'll give an example of what I mean. Over the years, I've gotten into conversations with Jewish folks in a variety of settings. I often ask them things like: Do you believe in God? They'll say they do. I then ask If they believe God answers prayer. They say He does. I then ask if they have ever asked God if Jesus is the Messiah. THEN, the truth comes out. The most common reply to that question is:

“Well...I’m not a PRACTICING Jew.” They are Jewish in name only, and do not understand, nor do they practice, their own identifying faith.

At least, they are honest about their hypocrisy! Are we Christians capable of being honest about our standing with Christ? Do we have clear, objective, observable characteristics which DEMONSTRATE that we are true Christians? Hey! Even Jesus applied a test:

John 6: 43 Then He said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.”

Then, in this passage, we see that many were not able to accept what Jesus had said:

John 6: 60 On hearing this, many of His disciples said “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

These people were standing face to face with the human image of God; Jesus. They knew who He was, and yet, could not accept what He told them. How much more difficult might it be for the Christian in this day to believe, have true faith, and follow Christ?

So, lest we fool ourselves by bumbling along in life just thinking that the outward things we do are what justify us before our God, let us use HIS word to evaluate ourselves. Let’s put our potentially faulty self-assessment aside and look at ourselves the way God looks at us; THROUGH His Son. Is the image of Jesus on YOU?

Please open the Book of First John. Written by the same author of Revelation, John wrote to Christian believers in a region – not just to one body, or church. His letter was circulated through several churches. Its purpose is to combat “Gnosticism,” a dangerous heresy that had crept into the congregations. The gist of Gnosticism is that the spirit is entirely good and all earthly matter is entirely evil (without God). Some of the ways this false teaching contradicted the Gospel

was that, if God had become flesh, He would be evil – a contradiction. Also, if man’s body is ‘matter’ and, therefore, entirely evil, it is of no consequence that he sin...especially once he is reborn in the spirit. “Salvation” is achieved through “gnosis” (the Greek word for education).

Two lessons here: A) it is incredibly easy for immature Christians to become drawn into a ‘Cult’ while thinking they are holding to the Gospel, and B) it is very easy for immature Christians to THINK they are growing spiritually through education.

John penned this letter our New Testament calls “1 John” to not only caution Christian believers about a “false Gospel”, but to give practical guidance on discerning authentic Christianity from those who have believed false teaching. This is important for believers today for two reasons; A) individual believers need to know whether they are believing in the true Gospel, and B) fellow believers and leaders must recognize those who need help and support in growing in the truth and grace of the Gospel.

Here are the main TESTS of the Christian faith as found in **1 John**:

Christians walk in the light:

1: 6 If we claim to have fellowship with Him (Jesus) yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

Light represents what is good, true and holy. Darkness represents what is false,



sinful and evil. A true follower of Christ intentionally “walks “ in the light. This means there is no guile, no lying, no gossip, no swindling, no unconfessed sin, etc. Such acts are replaced by prayer, Bible study, sharing the Gospel, supporting other Christians, etc. John goes on to explain: **1: 7 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, purifies us from all sin.**

Light and darkness cannot coexist. Either the light will fill the darkness, or the light must be snuffed out. It is impossible for a genuine Christian to be so, and intentionally walk in darkness. An example might be a doctor who claims to be a Christian, but performs abortions. Another might be a politician who claims Christ, but lies and takes bribes. Another might be a Christian who frequents porn

sites or prostitutes. These sins can be forgiven, and the true Christian turns from the darkness to the light.

Christians know when they sin.

They confess it, turn from it, and are forgiven:

1: 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him (Jesus) out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

Even the Apostle Paul confessed his struggle with having a Spiritual life while being trapped in a sinful body:

Romans 7: 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

The gnostic teaching separated flesh from spirit. By teaching that spirit has no fellowship with the flesh, sin was not connected to one's relationship with God. Gnostics denied that they were sinful because of this distinction. (By the way, have you ever tried to share Christ with a highly educated non-believer? It doesn't take long to find out that education (Gnosis) doesn't necessarily lead to truth!)

Jesus transformed himself from spirit to flesh and walked among us. The very fact that each of us has sin is WHY Jesus went to the cross, in the flesh; to pay our penalty for sin. When we are saved by this grace, we turn from our sinful ways. Remember the woman at the well? She had experienced seven husbands! Jesus forgave and told her to leave her life of sin. That is a mark of a true Christian; that we hate our sin and leave it. If we love Jesus, we will not make a mockery of His payment for our sin by repeating it. Yet, if we do sin, we see the remedy: **2: 2 He (Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.**

Christians obey Jesus' commands

2: 4 The man who says I know Him (Jesus) and does not do what He commands is a liar and the truth (Gospel) is not in him.

How can a child think he loves his mother and yet constantly disobey her? How can a man say he loves golf and not obey the rules of the game? How can a driver claim to be a 'good driver' yet disobey the traffic laws? How can we claim to be a follower of Christ and disobey His commands?

Psalm 119:9-11 "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

Christians demonstrate love one for another

2: 9 Anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates his brother, is still in the darkness.

In scripture, the words 'hate and love' are outward expressions of moral qualities, not just emotions. The opposite of love, it is 'selfishness.' If you love someone, you give to them. If you hate them you withhold from them. Jesus also told his disciples that a house divided against itself cannot stand. If there is division, hatred, resentment, suspicion, political maneuvering, disrespect, etc., within the fellowship of Christians (fellow believers), it must be addressed.

Remember the Aesop Fable of the cows in the field? When the wolf tried to get at a calf, the cows would circle around the baby and face outward. Confronted on every side with powerful horns and sharp hoofs, he had to develop a better strategy! So, he sneaked close to a lone cow and whispered a lie about another cow. Incensed, that cow told another, who told another, and soon there was such division within the herd that they would not stand next to one another the next time the wolf approached. He made off with an easy supper!

Some years ago, a Christian congregation had grown so divided that they literally took chainsaws and cut their chapel in half! Read carefully these words:

2: 10 Whoever loves his brother is in the light (truth), and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness (sin) and walks around in the darkness (sin); he does not know where he is going because the darkness (sin) has blinded him.

Remember John 1: 6 above!

Christians love the things of God, and not the things of this world

2: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Remember the definition; to love is to give to the object of one's love. It is to obey the object of one's love. Think of John 3: 16 and focus on the word "gave."

If a man loves his family, he will support them, bring them good things, protect them. If, however, he loves his job more, he may give his best to it, instead of his family. He may allow his family to go without his leadership, Christian teachings, fatherly discipline, etc. He may take every out-of-town trip and work late hours to demonstrate his devotion to his employer, rather than make his family his true priority.

A wife may be willing to sacrifice luxury, fine things, a beautiful house, etc., in order to spend time with her children. Or, she may leave her children in the hands of others to raise them while she pursues status, wealth, and fineries that she loves more.

These examples may sting, but they are nonetheless true conditions in our society, today. It's easy to let the pursuit of the next worldly 'thing' become an idol to which we are willing to worship by giving ourselves to it. Jesus said we cannot serve both God and the world.

How many of us are under a heavy load of debt because we haven't the discipline to save? How many of us desire the next new thing that we can actually do without; new phone or other device, new car, new appliance, etc.? How many parents pay exorbitant fees for college only to have their kid receive more education in hedonism and apostasy than work skills? The love of the things in this world yields a disappointing return.



It is ok for a Christian to have possessions and wealth, as long as they do not OWN the Christian. Money is a tool for our use. If the desire for the world's benefits eclipses our walk with Christ, we are worshipping an idol.

2: 16 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.

Christians demonstrate wisdom and discernment

4: 6 We (the Apostles) are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

John draws a sharp distinction between the Gnostics/false teachers (those who corrupt the Gospel) and those preaching the TRUE Gospel of Christ. The Apostles who were scattered out of Jerusalem after Jesus' crucifixion planted churches in many areas in which Jews and gentiles lived. There were many pagan religious practices and even many Jewish groups that had become corrupted. It was (and still IS!!) important for Christians to discern between true and false teachers. They needed to know who was a genuine believer among them and who was not.

Here's an illustration of discernment: How long does it take to figure out if someone you just met is, or is not, of the same political beliefs as you? It takes a smooth, slithery tongue to conceal one's position, these days.

When someone greets me with "How are you?" I answer; "Better than I deserve." It almost always gets a reaction that indicates whether I've just met a Christian. If they agree that we are better than we deserve to be, I know I've met a Christian.

Remember the "Ichthus?" It is the sign of the fish that early Christians used to identify one another. Because of the heavy prosecution of Christians, they would try to identify other Christians by scratching an arc on the ground as they talked with a new acquaintance. If the other person drew the other side of the arc, completing the "fish," they both knew they were talking with a fellow Christian.

John gave a clear example of how one can know a true Christian; that they "listen to" the preaching or teaching of the true Gospel. The truth is an offense to the inauthentic "Christian." They may refuse the truth of the Gospel, or endure it

impatiently until they can make an escape. A Christian loves God's word and spends time in it.

Over the years, I've known a number of folks who call themselves Christians, but hate a particular preacher, evangelist, or other well-known messenger of the Gospel. In asking what they "hate" about that person, the personal 'style' of the speaker might be brought up, first, but further discussion revealed that it was actually the plain, strong preaching of the truth that offended them! They might offer up, instead, a minister with a smoother, more gentile delivery, but who also preached a watered down, or even incorrect interpretation of the Word.

Christians want the truth! The truth may be hard to take. The truth may reveal one's sin. The truth may cause one to have to make radical changes. These things, the inauthentic Christian will not abide.

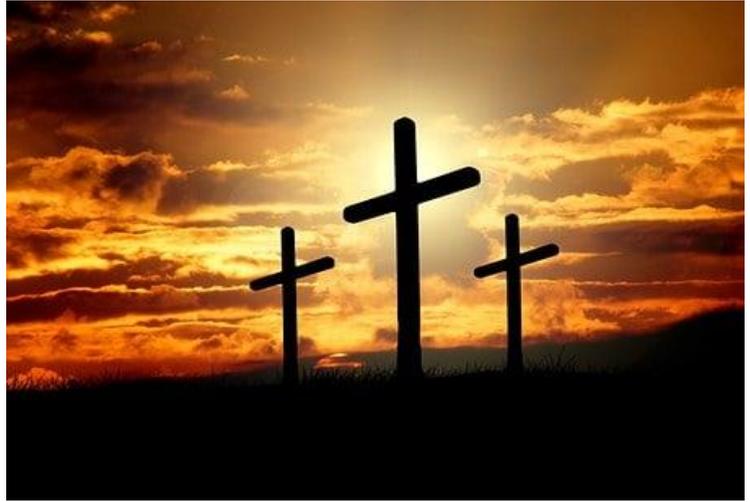
4: 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

I was looking at a website of a church and could not find their articles of faith. I wrote to the administrative office requesting it. The assistant Pastor sent a one-page statement that was straight from Martin Luther. It was certainly solid. I wrote back and thanked him for the information and told him it was gratifying to find another congregation being led by scriptural integrity and truth. He wholeheartedly agreed!

Later, I was perusing their site and came across a tab; "God is a woman." I opened the page to find layer upon layer of the most blasphemous assertions about the 'gender' identity of God. So, I wrote this Pastor back and inquired. He proceeded to 'preach' to me in an email that if one believed God to be an anatomical male, that they could not be saved. I asked if we, as Christian brothers could meet and look at the scriptures together to discern the biblical basis of that belief. He sternly told me that he would not meet with a layman on the matter, and that if the leaders of his church wanted him to believe anything else, they would tell him. He then closed with; "Do not write to me again."

Christians know who Jesus is, and what Jesus is

4: 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him, and he in God.



This really is the basis of it all. The true Christian believes in Jesus, as God's Son, as the Savior of all mankind, as the only way one may be cleansed of sin, and the only way one may receive eternal life. If Christians live according to this simple, yet profound understanding, we will grow and be fruitful in our Spirits...and our outward actions will follow.

Christians understand the cost of sin, and who paid that cost

If you worked very hard to achieve something: buying a home, building a business, raising a family, etc., you understand the cost of that success. You can readily identify another person who has achieved in a similar way. You know the cost and the reward...and the evidence of that success is all over those who have gone through it.

If we go back to the opening of this study; Who's image is on you? For the true believer, the road is narrow and it is lined with temptations and diversions. But the true follower of Christ will exhibit outward signs...evidences...of traveling that road with Jesus, and not self, in the lead. Yes, you will leave the fingerprints of a Christian who has persevered out of love for the one who gave His life for you!

Let us close with this:

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."