Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian, Part 4
Scripture: Philippians 3:3
Code: 50-30

May I invite you to take your Bible and turn to Philippians chapter 3 as we return again to this wonderful portion of Scripture, verses 1 through 3.

The Scripture says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision, for we are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh."

We come in our study now finally to verse 3, that great great definition of a Christian as one who worships in the Spirit of God, glories in Christ Jesus and puts no confidence in the flesh. We've been looking at this portion of Scripture from the vantage point of discerning the distinctive qualities of the true Christian. We have looked at some implicit qualities in verses 1 and 2, and finally now we come to the main point of the text, the explicit qualities in verse 3. These are the things that identify a Christian as a true Christian.

Paul says we are the true circumcision. Meaning that we have a circumcision that is inward. We have a cleansing that is inward, not just outward. The false circumcision has an outward mark, and you know well that the Jews thought that their outward external physical circumcision gave them special privilege with God. He says that is a false circumcision. That which is outward is meaningless. It is the circumcision that is inward that marks the true Christian. So we are the true circumcision, not cleansed on the outside by surgery but cleansed on the inside by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, the Apostle Paul here then is contrasting in verses 2 and 3 the false with the true. I pointed out last time that that is a rather common thing in Scripture. The New Testament is very concerned to compare the false believer with the true believer. Now you might think that that is something that occupies our church and this time and my ministry and not everyone's or every time or every ministry, but that's not the case. Throughout the history of the church since the New Testament it has been a major thrust to speak to the matter of who is a true Christian and who is not. And so I speak to you in continuity, I speak to you as one coming out of a long line of those who speak for God, pastor/teachers and spokesmen for the Word of God who must affirm to you the distinctions between a true and false believer. The false believer we have already considered in verse 2 and now we consider the true believer. But before we look specifically at the characteristics, let me share a little

bit of background.

A couple of months ago I had a privilege. I received a letter inviting me to write the foreword to a book. That in itself is not unusual, I receive letters like that all the time, people asking me to write a foreword to a book is not at all unusual. But what was very unusual about this request was that the book was written in 1661. Usually when I receive a manuscript, it comes from the author and the author asks if I would be willing to write a foreword. In this case, the author is long in the presence of the Lord over 300 years.

So to receive a book written in 1661 and be asked if I would write the foreword was a unique experience. And as I proceeded to read the book, peruse it, scan its great truths, I became very excited about it. It was written by one of the Puritans by the name of Matthew Mead, M-e-a-d. The title of it is, The Almost Christian Discovered, typically archaic Puritan language, The Almost Christian Discovered.

He wrote the book because he wanted to address a very significant problem. The problem he wanted to address was the fact that there were many people who thought they were saved and weren't. There were many people who claimed to be saved, and weren't. So he was addressing the problem 300 years ago that Paul was addressing nearly 2,000 years ago that we are now addressing today. Because as I told you last time, in the New Testament where the gospel is presented, it is often followed up by instruction as to how to tell a true respondent to the gospel from a false and deceived one.

I had occasion recently to receive the book with my foreword in it. And by the way, it is now available in the bookstore. And I reread it and I was fascinated as I went through the book, and I want to share just a couple of things with you that came out of it, more than a couple, a list. In fact, I want to distill a hundred and twenty pages into a brief few words.

Matthew Mead has a long section in the book of about 120 pages in which he addresses how far a person can go and still not be a true Christian...how far a person can advance toward heaven, toward Christ, toward God and still not truly be saved. And these are the things he suggests.

"A man may have much knowledge about Christ and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may have a great and eminent gift, yet be but almost a Christian." He means by that a speaking gift, a leadership gift.

"A man may have a high profession of religion. He may be much in external duties of goodness and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may go far in opposing his own sin and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may hate sin and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may make great vows and promises, strong purposes and resolutions against his sin and yet be but almost a Christian. A man

may maintain a strife and a combat against sin and yet be but almost a Christian.

"A man may be a member of the church and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may have great hopes of heaven and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may under visible changes, altered life and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may be very zealous in matters of religion and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may be much in prayers and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may even suffer for Christ's sake and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may outwardly obey the commandments and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may perform external worship yet be but almost a Christian. And a man may have faith and yet be but almost a Christian."

Amazing list, isn't it? In fact, if you were to kind of reverse the list and read it another way, it would sound like you were describing Christians, someone who has the knowledge of God and Christ, someone who has great and eminent and gifts, someone who professes true religion, who does duties of goodness, someone who opposes his sin, hates his sin, makes great vows and promises, strong purposes and resolutions against his sin, a man who strives in combat against sin, a man who is a member of a church who has hopes of heaven, whose life has had some visible changes, who is zealous in matters of religion, who praise, who may even suffer because of his association with Christ, who outwardly seems to obey the commandments and performs external worship and believes. You might say, "Well, that's got to be a Christian."

Matthew Mead is right in assessing, however, that you can have all of those things and be but only almost a Christian. These are not enough. These are not enough. Well what does it take? What is the evidence? What is the mark of the true Christian? Well, we go from the outside to the inside when we come to verse 3. And let me just share with you these three simple statements that identify the true Christian. They have nothing to do with his outward conduct, his outward profession, his outward goodness. They have nothing to do with his church membership. They have nothing to do with his religious duties. They have nothing to do with his external professions. They have nothing to do with the fact that he might not like sin in the world, he might not even like sin in his own life. They have to do with what is inside. They have to do with his character, with his nature, with something that no one sees, but eventually that everyone sees because it works its way out. And that's what I want to share with you.

I want you to understand it very very thoroughly so listen carefully. Number one, a true Christian is one who worships in or by the Spirit of God. That is to say his worship is supernatural, not natural. His worship is generated by the Spirit of God not by his own will, his own desires or by some ceremonies or some ritual or some liturgy or some structure or some code. He is a worshiper of God but his worship is that which is produced from the inside by the indwelling Holy Spirit. And thus it is transcendent worship, it reaches a plain beyond the external. The world frankly, folks, is filled with people who worship. But their worship is not prompted by the Spirit of God dwelling in them. It is prompted by culture, it is prompted by tradition, it is prompted by guilt, it is prompted by fear. It is

prompted by a desire to be accepted. It is prompted by self-righteousness. It is prompted by a desire to be a popular person. It can be prompted by a myriad of things. It is prompted by the desire to expiate sin, to remove guilt, to solve problems, to gain blessings. It could be prompted by many many things.

But the only true worship is that which is prompted by the Spirit of God indwelling. And the only people the Spirit of God indwells are Christians. Therefore they are the only ones who worship by the Spirit of God.

The first then quality that marks a true Christian is worship. There is deep within the true believer a longing to glorify God, a longing to worship God, to serve God. Now let me see if I can't dissect this term "worship" a little bit for you so you'll get an understanding of it.

The first quality then that marks a true believer is worship. We should not be surprised by that. That is our character. Go back with me to John chapter 4 and I would just put you in touch with a passage of Scripture that really does elucidate this point as well as any in Scripture. Jesus in John 4 is confronting a Samaritan woman. She has discovered by what He has said about her life that He knows everything about her and that that knowledge was not available to Him through normal means so He must be a man of God. He told her all about her dissolute life, all about her immorality, all the men she's lived with and so forth. And she understood that He was speaking on a supernatural level so in verse 19 she says, "I perceive that You're a prophet." He knows...she knows, that is, that He has got some supernatural source for His information.

Now that she knows He represents and speaks for God and that He's plugged in to the supernatural, she wants some information herself. So she wants to know about worship. She is a Samaritan. The Samaritans had set up worship on Mount Gerizim, they were half-breeds, half Jew, half Gentile. They had been rejected by the Jews who were very zealous of their racial purity,. And these intermarrying half-breeds were hated and despised by the Jews. Therefore they were not given access to the temple at Jerusalem, nor to the worship that was conducted there. So they had to develop their own system of worship which they did in Samaria on Mount Gerizim.

Since they also did not have the Scripture, they accepted only the Pentateuch, not the whole Old Testament, they were limited as to what they knew. So they had developed a highbred kind of independent worship on their own mountain according to their own rules.

She then says to Jesus, she knows He's a Jew and a prophet of God, verse 20, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain...Mount Gerizim...and You say that in Jerusalem, you Jews, you people, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." In other words, she's saying, "What place do you worship? You're a prophet of God. I've been confused by this. The Jews say it's Jerusalem. Our fathers say it's here. What is the right place to worship? Now that I'm being

confronted by this man of God, I want to deal with my life, I want to worship God, I want to make my life right, which mountain do I go to?"

In effect, verse 21, "Jesus says to her, Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father." He's simply saying the hour is very soon to come when you will see that it is not relevant which mountain you worship in. It is not an issue of where in the sense of geography. It is an issue of spirit. It's what's in you wherever you are, not where you are. And so what He is saying to her is that worship is a way of life, worship is a way of life in total. He's saying, "Lady, the time is going to come very soon when it will be eminently clear to everyone that worship is not in a place." And of course, it wasn't long until the destruction of Jerusalem ended worship there. And so, he is simply pointing out to her that worship is something on the inside, not at a place.

And the second thing He says about worship is in verse 22. He says, "You worship that which you do not know." He confronts the fact that Samaritan worship was ignorant. They only accepted the Pentateuch therefore they were limited as to their understanding of the Old Testament of God's revelation and therefore of God. So they had developed their own kind of highbred worship and it had a lot of paganism mixed into it. So He says to her two things...one, I want to make this clear, worship is not in a place, it's in spirit. Two, worship isn't done any way you desire to concoct it, it's done according to truth. So He says in verse 22, "We worship that which we know for salvation is from the Jews." In other words, God has brought revelation about salvation through the Jews. The writers of Scripture were Jews, to the Jews was given the Scripture, the oracles of God, as Paul says in Romans chapter 3 and chapter 9.

So, the Jews then had the truth in Scripture. The Samaritans didn't have that so they were worshiping in ignorance. The time was coming when no place would be THE place. And worship was to be in spirit and truth. Now that is the essence of worship. It isn't where you are. There are a lot of people who go to church to worship, go to temples to worship. We've got temples up and down this block, as you know. In the middle is a Jewish synagogue that is in a sense a substitute for the temple which no longer exists for Israel. On the other end you've got a Buddhist Temple where people go to worship. On this end is Grace Community Church where I'm sure there are some people who think they go there to worship. You don't go anywhere to worship, you worship as a way of life because worship is in what? Spirit, in spirit, in heart, it's internal. All we do here is collect all of you worshipers for corporate expression. You don't have to come here to worship. You can worship anywhere you are, I hope you do. Worship is in spirit. And worship is according to revelation, according to truth. What God has revealed in this book, not anyway you want to do it. It isn't being done right anywhere else on this block, by the way. Because it isn't being done according to the Word of God.

A lot of people who worship in ignorance, the world is filled with them, and who worship in a place, that's not true worship. So He says in verse 23, "An hour is coming and now is with My arrival, the Messiah, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth...now notice this...for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

Let me ask you a question. Why did God save you? To be...what?...a worshiper. That's what it says. You were saved to be a worshiper. God is Spirit, verse 24, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth. You see, God saved you to be a worshiper. So what is the truest thing about a Christian? A Christian is a...what?...a worshiper. That's exactly what Philippians 3:3 said. What is the true circumcision? Those who worship in the Spirit of God. And if you worship in the Spirit of God, how you going to worship? You're going to worship in spirit and in truth. You see, you were saved to be a true worshiper. So how can you tell a true worshiper? How can you tell a true Christian? They worship God from the inside according to the Word of God. The world is filled with people, now mark it again, who worship in a place according to a design that is not biblical, they're not true worshipers. They are the false circumcision, not the true. They are deceived.

Now let's take the word "worship" for just a moment, going back to Philippians 3...the word "worship" here is the word latreuo. We get the word "liturgy" from it. It means to minister, to serve, to worship. It's a big encompassing word. Let me give you what I think might be the best way to define it. It means to render respectful spiritual service. Some people think worship is just saying things that praise God, singing things that praise God, thinking things that praise God. That's worship but that's not all it is. Worship finally comes down to how you live. It does. It finally comes down to how you live. In Hebrews it says, "Do good and share." Why? "For with such spiritual sacrifice, such worship God is well pleased."

You see, every part of your life is worship. The word latreuomeans worship but it also means service. It isn't just ethereal, it isn't just cognitive, it's immensely pragmatic and practical. It does mean that you render from the heart homage, glory, honor, praise, adoration, respect to God. It does mean that you sing with all your heart to the Lord, as we've done this morning. It does mean that you pray and extol His virtues. But it doesn't end there. It also means that you serve Him. That's worship, too. In fact, the priest of the Old Testament when he led in worship led by doing deeds of sacrifice. So, this is what we've been saved to do...to worship God.

Now let me help you to understand maybe some of the ingredients, just a simple little way to look at it. It involves some components. If you want to look at your heart and say, "Do I worship God?" Here's a little list of things to expect to find. The heart of worship, first of all, loves God and loves Christ. Let's call that affection. There will be within you a great affection for Christ, a great love for God and Christ. You will feel that. You will express that. When songs of praise are song, your heart will be lifted up. When you read through the Word of God you will be so encouraged and you will feel such love for God and love for Christ, affection. You see, Romans 8:7 says that the unsaved person

hates God. The saved person loves God. Love...in fact, we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. But there's a love for God, there's affection for Christ.

There are people who fear God, who fear Christ. But the true Christian has a healthy sense of awe, but has an overwhelming sense of love for God and Christ. There's an affection there. It may not be all it ought to be, but it's there.

Secondly, there will be a delight in God and a delight in Christ. More than love there will not only be the emotion of affection but there will be the emotion of delight. This is joy...this is joy. In other words, your thoughts about God bring you joy. Your thoughts about Christ bring you delight. You love to think about Christ. You love to talk about Christ. You love to read about Christ. There's a delight in all of that. The contemplation of who God is, who Christ is, what God has done for you, what Christ has done for you, the contemplation of all of that brings you joy. There's a delight there.

Let me give you a third word to think about. There is a confidence there...there's a confidence there. We could even call it peace. The true Christian in worshiping is adoring with affection, is delighting with joy, and is also enjoying a confidence that brings peace. That's part of worship. In other words, there's a...there's a sense that I'm not concerned about my own prosperity, I'm not concerned about my own things, I...I am so at peace in my relationship to the eternal God and the eternal Christ that my confidence is all in Him. That's such a marvelous thing.

Now, where do you get love and where do you get joy and where do you get peace? Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." You see, it's the Holy Spirit that produces this. That's why he says we worship by the Spirit of God, or we worship in the Spirit of God, either word. It is the Spirit of God that comes to take residence in us that produces affection for Christ, delight in Christ and peace from Christ. And that's the character of our worship. There's a loving element, there's a rejoicing element, there's a peaceful element.

Have you ever noticed the music that we sing? Some of it is just rejoicing, isn't it? Some of it is just almost fun, and it should be, exhilarating, thrilling. Some of it is meditative and deep and loving and adoring. And some of it is calm and gentle and peaceful. See, all of those are simply ways in which the song writers have put these qualities of worship into musical expression. That's what the Spirit produces...love, joy, peace in Christ, in God.

Flowing out of that a couple of things come, one is devotion. Because of that there is an unusual devotion to God and Christ. We're talking inwardly now. In the heart there's a total devotion to God and Christ. We could say it this way, it is a love that knows no rival, it is a delight that knows no equal, it is a peace that knows no comparison. Nothing competes, nothing really can compete. The love and the joy and the peace that we feel toward Christ knows no equal...knows no competition, has no rival. That's the kind of worshiping heart we're talking about.

Matthew 4:10, Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." That's the characteristic of a true believer. We are the true worshipers whom the Father sought to worship Him.

So, how do you know you're a true Christian? Worship from the heart, not because you do external things, but because you love God, you love Christ, you delight in them. There's a sense of joy. You have a peace in that relationship that passes all understanding, a calm in the midst of the storm, and all of that causes you to be singularly devoted to Christ and God and you look nowhere else for what only they can provide, right? That's a worshiping heart. And believe me, only the Holy Spirit can produce that...only the Holy Spirit can produce that. The Holy Spirit is the divine initiator at work in the depths of the human heart. He transforms a person's life so as to promote worship. And only the Spirit can do that.

So we say again that true Christians are not known because they attend church, because they perform religious rituals, because they do certain good duties, Christians are known by what's in their heart. Now let me give you a corollary to that. Consequently you and I can't always know who is a real Christian, right? Because we look at somebody doing stuff on the outside, we can't see the heart. Man is stuck with the outward appearance but who sees the heart? God does.

Let me take it a step further. You're the only one who can really know your own heart. First Corinthians 2, "No man knows the spirit of the man but the man." That's why 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves." I can't examine you. You can fool me because you can do all the outward duties. You can be an almost Christian and I can't tell the difference. God knows it, don't you be deceived, you examine your heart. Do you worship God like this? Or is your worship simply something you do in a place and according to your own rules? Or do you worship in spirit and in truth, loving God, delighting in Him, enjoying the peace and confidence and assurance that comes because all your trust is in Him, being devoted to Him faithfully and having no rival? That's the essence of what forms true worship. And then out of that kind of relationship comes praise, and adoration, and service. And you live your life as an act of worship, you live your life as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, Romans 12. And that's the way you are to live your life, it is a living sacrifice...it is an act of worship.

Second quality in Philippians that marks a Christian and we'll just briefly look at the last two, it says a Christian also glories in Christ Jesus. What does this mean? Well, the word "glory" is a marvelous word, kauchaomai(?). The verb means to boast, only to boast with exultant joy, to boast in the sense that this is what I am most proud of. It is a word that Paul uses, I think, 35 times and all the other New Testament writers put together only use it twice...Paul loved it. It could be used in a bad way. In Galatians 6:13 he talked about those who boast in the flesh, but in the next verse Galatians 6:14 he talked about boasting in the cross. What does he mean? He means my joyful boast as a believer is

all in Christ Jesus. That is the character of a true believer. What are you saying by that? What I am saying by that is this, that the true Christian gives all the credit for all that he is to Christ...that's the bottom line.

You know how you can tell a false Christian? They talk credit, they believe that because of their religious duties they've earned favor with God, or if they do more good things than bad things, God will accept them. They believe that they have the ability to please God in some way and gain merit for themselves, gain approval for themselves. One of the most mind boggling errors that I've ever read about is the Catholic theology that says that by my deeds I can not only earn merit for myself, but if I earn more merit than I need to get into heaven, my extra merit goes into the treasury of merit to be applied to somebody else to get them out of purgatory. What that says is not only can I by merit earn my own salvation, but I can over earn it and apply what is left to someone else's salvation. There is no treasury of merit for the super achievers. And a true believer will never claim any merit and never claim any credit. The true believer will always boast only in Christ Jesus. That's why 1 Corinthians 1:31 Paul says, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord," and he says it again in 2 Corinthians 10:17. You see, those whose hearts have been circumcised find their only point of pride is in Christ. Paul says, "I am what I am by the grace of God." Christ is the focus, Christ is the all and all. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ." That's all...that's all I want to know, that's all I want you to know. He gets all the credit, He gets all the glory, He is all my pride, He is all my boast.

And Paul expands it down in verses 8 and 9, in fact he's going to expand all these things as we shall see in future weeks. He says, "I count all things to be loss..." what are you talking about? All the things that are true about me, all my good works, all my pedigree...he's just given his pedigree there. He said all of that is loss. He says, "I have suffered the loss of all things and I count them but manure in gaining Christ." Christ is everything, I'm nothing. That's a true Christian.

Now you may go to church and you may sing songs, but if you are feeling that you have done something to earn your salvation and you've stacked up merit with God, and you should get a little of the credit and you're glorying and boasting and exalting is not only in Christ, you're not a Christian. The true Christian puts all the credit where the credit must be put. See, that means they've come and committed everything to Christ...all my pride is Christ, all my joy is Christ, all my boast is Christ, all my life is Christ...right? People say, "Well do you mean that when you become a Christian you have to acknowledge Jesus as Lord?" Yes...you literally give Him your life, He becomes all your joy and all your delight and all boast.

Oh there are a lot of people who want Christ's grace, but not His government. There are a lot of people who want Christ to be priest who pays the penalty for their sin, but not prophet who tells them what they must do and certainly not king who has authority over them. A lot of people will take Christ as priest, paid the penalty for their sin. A lot of people want the benefits of the cross who don't want

to bow to the crown. A lot of people want heaven but not the narrow way. There are a lot of people who want the gift but won't want to take it in empty hands. A lot of people want the pearl but won't sell all. But for the true Christian, Christ is all...Christ is all...Christ is all.

He is our life, is He not? He's our Lord and Savior, He's our life. He's our pride, He's our boast. We glory in nothing but the cross of Christ. We are determined to know nothing but the cross of Christ. All the credit is His, all the glory is His. That's the true Christian.

One writer says, "Christians are the circumcision precisely because they take no pride in what they might do by themselves to earn God's favor, but only in what God in His favor has already done for them in Christ Jesus," end quote. That's right.

We have the attitude of the prodigal. We come to God and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Your sight and I am no more worthy to be called Your son." I'm not worthy of anything. All the glory is Yours...all boasting is in Christ. The true Christian is consumed with Christ. Paul says in Romans 15:17, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting...in Christ."

How about you? Is all your boast in Christ? All your pride in what He's done for you? All your rejoicing in Him? Is all your life in Him? Is He all and all to you? Do you live for Christ, breathe for Christ? That's a true Christian.

And lastly, the third thing he says about a true Christian is they have no confidence in the flesh. This goes along with the other two, doesn't it? If all the glory goes to God and all the boast is in Christ, then you certainly can't put any confidence in the flesh, what did it earn you? What did it get you? What did it gain you? All the flesh will do is destroy you. What do you mean flesh? Unredeemed humanness...my own ability apart from God. And I have no confidence in the flesh. That's different than the Jews. The Jews placed all their confidence in the flesh. They were descended from Abraham physically. They had a physical surgery called circumcision. They physically performed the ceremonies and they outwardly did the duties of the Mosaic Law and the traditions, it was all the flesh. And you know what? It got them nothing. Romans 3:19 and 20 says that, "No one...no one will be redeemed by the flesh." By the deeds of the flesh nobody gets justified. Man' unredeemed humanness has no ability, all it can do is sin, sin, sin, sin. And confidence in the flesh damns the soul. Reads Romans 3:19 to 20, that's what it says. It shuts out true salvation, it is the religion of human achievement, it is false, it is damning.

F.B. Meyer wrote, "All through the epistles the flesh stands for self, the self that seeks to justify itself, that endeavors to sanctify itself, that is always fussily endeavoring to win men for God but has never learned to be submerged beneath the mighty tide and current of God's Spirit. If your religious life is one of self-effort and self-complacency, you must stand back. It is not for you to handle the priceless pearl, your eyes cannot detect its superlative beauty, excellence and worth, but let all humble souls

who have nothing in which to glory save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who put no confidence in themselves but wholly rest upon the unmerited grace of God, lift up their faces with exceeding great joy. These are the true children of Abraham," end quote.

What's the key word here? Humility...humility. True Christians are humble when they look at themselves. They see their flesh as sinful. What we're talking about is repentance, folks. God gives grace to the humble, James 4:6, James 4:10. God gives grace to the humble. That's part of a true Christian's character. We're humble about our own abilities. I can't earn heaven. I can't please God. I can't merit salvation. I am what I am by God's grace. So I turn from sinful self-effort to salvation by grace through faith. I forsake any goodness in my own flesh. I rely totally on Christ, totally on the Holy Spirit, I give all the glory to God. That's a true Christian. That's repentance which means turning from your sinful self.

Now listen to what I say as we draw this to a conclusion, very important. The almost Christian might feel a certain natural kind of conviction, might feel bad about sin, but I want you to understand the difference...there is a natural conviction that is chiefly related to scandalous sins. The unsaved person, the almost Christian, the religious-but-not-saved person will feel bad about scandalous sin not because he or she feels bad about the sin but they feel bad about its consequence. So we can say it this way, they feel bad about what their sin produces, they do not feel bad about the evil in them that produces the sin. That's the difference. Natural conviction feels bad about the scandal. Natural conviction is repulsed by child abuse, by rape, by mutilation, by cruelty, by mass murder, that scandalizes even the natural man. And he feels convicted that that is wrong mostly because it impinges upon someone else...not because in its root it is evil. So he doesn't like the evil that sin produces, but he never recognizes the evil that produces sin. He doesn't understand the wickedness of nature. You see, natural conviction is chiefly related to the obvious sins, but true spiritual repentance touches the deep secret undiscerned sins of hypocrisy, pride, envy, hardness of heart, rejection of Christ. That's the difference, the ones that don't scandalize anybody because people don't even know about them.

Natural conviction deals with my conduct. Spiritual repentance deals with my condition. Natural conviction deals with the symptoms. Spiritual repentance deals with the disease. Very important. Natural conviction makes a person shy away from God because they feel fearful. Spiritual repentance makes a person run to God for forgiveness. Very different...very different. Spiritual repentance means putting no confidence in the flesh. You know there's nothing in you that's good, it's rotten to the core. But you see, a person with natural, just feeling bad about the scandalous things their sin produces, feeling badly about what happens on the outside, feeling bad about their conduct, doesn't ever deal with the wretchedness of their condition and doesn't see in the flesh the inability to ever produce anything good.

So what you have here marking a true Christian is nothing more than one who sees the filth and the wickedness of the flesh and turns in repentance from that to God.

What marks a true Christian? Worship in Spirit and in truth, giving all the credit to Jesus Christ who is their only pride and joy, and repentance which turns totally from the wretchedness of the sinful condition to accept the salvation that only comes through God's grace. That's the true circumcision.

Certainly it's my prayer that that is you, that you truly know the salvation God sent His Son to bring. Let's pray together.

Our Father, again we've been reminded today of the majesty of Your Word. O my, how potently it speaks, how it penetrates our hearts, how it opens our understanding to the things that are the way they are and why. Minister to every heart, may the true circumcision rejoice, may the false circumcision come to true faith, save them, Lord. Make them worshipers. Make them those whose only boast is Christ and who turn from the flesh to You, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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