

# THE MARK OF A CHRISTIAN

Acts 2:1-21; Ephesians 1:11-16

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In my hand is a Federal Reserve Note for \$20. When I first saw a bill of its kind, I thought it was fake. It looked like play money. Look how big Andrew Jackson's face is, and how light the back is. It didn't look like money I had before. If my first \$20 bill like this hadn't come from a bank or a reputable business, I might have given it back and asked for a different one. With money it is important to tell the real thing from a fake. You know why, don't you? A fake is worthless. You can't buy anything with it. The government prints its money with special paper, inks and markings. It wants its money to be unique and not lose its worth because of fakes.

Authenticity is important not only with money. Many official documents bear special insignias. To create legal agreements, people, called notaries, mark documents with special seals when they are signed by the agreeing parties in their presence. Marriage licenses, court papers and letters from the President all bear marks to signal that they're authentic, not fake.

Did you know that Christians have a special mark as well? They have an insignia or seal that distinguishes them. What do you suppose it is? What is the mark of a Christian? Is it a baptismal or confirmation certificate? Is it church attendance? Is it what we confess about Christ? Is there a religious tattoo? Is it clean behavior? Not according to the Bible.

The word Christian means "anointed ones." The word Christ means "the Anointed One". Jesus embraced the title of the Anointed One, but what was he anointed with? What made Jesus "the Anointed One"? The week before his death Jesus was anointed with perfume, but he wasn't called Christ because of perfume. The mark of an anointed one is the anointing. It's the anointing that defines an anointed one, and Jesus was called the Christ of God because he was anointed with God's Spirit. Similarly, the mark of anointed ones or Christians is their anointing with God's Spirit.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. He writes:

***Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...*** (Ephesians 1:13-14, NIV)

The imprimatur of God, the insignia of God, the marking of God on a believer is the Holy Spirit. The authentic Christian has received the Holy Spirit as a deposit from God.

So if the difference between an authentic Christian and a fake Christian is the presence of the Holy Spirit, how do we identify the Holy Spirit?

When God pours his Holy Spirit on us, he pours love into our hearts. We feel loved by God, and we feel love for God. We desire to know and please God. We stop painting God into something palatable to us, and instead hunger to know God as he is. It's what the prophet Jeremiah talked about when he said that God was forming a new covenant where his laws would no longer be written on stone but on human hearts.

God gave us a new covenant with Christ because people didn't have the heart to follow the old one. Their hearts were prone to wander, prone to rebel and do their own thing. God's instructions for living became a law that condemned God's people. Instead of making the people wise, it made them guilty and deserving of judgment. When we receive the Spirit, there is a new impulse in our heart, and impulse to follow God. That impulse comes from God's Spirit residing in us. As Jeremiah put it, God writes his law in our hearts. We do what pleases God because the Spirit who gave the law now lives within us and influences our thinking and feelings.

When 120 of Jesus' followers received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they saw a vision of flames. Before the vision of fire disappeared, it was burning within them. They were not merely anointed with the Holy Spirit, they were drenched or baptized with the Spirit. The Spirit didn't just give them a little impulse to follow. It filled them with a flaming passion. The Spirit was not just a little burning pilot light, it was like a gas furnace roaring. As a result, they were heating up everything around them. They could not help but celebrate and serve.

The Bible is very clear. God wants to baptize all of Christ's followers with the Spirit so that the burner within us goes full blast. It makes sense that if God's a consuming fire, all those who possess His Spirit will also be consuming fires!

During the past year you confirmation students may have felt the burner kick in. Perhaps you experienced the roar a couple weeks ago in St. Paul. Maybe it was earlier in another setting. When you felt God's passion for you, and in turn felt passion for God, that was the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was dominating what you were thinking and feeling.

If you felt the fire roar, have you also seen it dim? Sometimes, Christians are hard to recognize and distinguish from anyone else. They carry within them a tiny, single tongue of flame. Offering little light and providing little heat, and accomplishing very little, they possess God's Spirit; but God's Spirit does not possess them. The problem is that they offer God's Spirit no fuel. That's the only reason a fire fails to roar. Fires require fuel. That is true physically and spiritually.

There are a number of ways to limit the fuel. With a stove just turn off the gas and all that remains is a pilot light. Dump water on a camp fire and you deny it oxygen. Only smoldering embers may remain. Either way, what remains doesn't give off much heat. It exercises little influence and offers little power. The embers or pilot lights are useful only if fuel eventually crosses their path.

If the flame within you has dimmed, if there is not much desire within you to follow God and not much evidence that you are close to God, what's hindering you? What's restricting your experience and response to God's love for you? Have you shut off the gas valve? Is your intake pipe clogged? What's the fire extinguisher? Are you submerged in water? Deep water? What needs to change? Indeed, what would cause your pilot light to erupt into a roaring fire?

First, **realize** that you'll only live as you were truly designed to live when the burners are roaring. **You were designed to be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit.** Your purpose in life can only be fulfilled with that power. Only when you are driven by love are you truly human. Anything less is inhuman.

Second, **recognize what you are doing that is grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit.** The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is a person that can be grieved and a fire that can be quenched. What are you doing that dishonors, offends or grieves the Holy Spirit. What are you doing that throws water on his fire? Are you welcoming him and fanning his flames or are you ignoring his voice and quenching his flames? Only your decisions can quench the Holy Spirit within you. Nobody else can do that. People can attack you. They can ridicule you. They can threaten you; but they can't quench the Spirit within you. Only you can do that. Only you determine your faith and attitude.

We quench the Holy Spirit when we ignore his presence. Are you constantly aware of his presence? We grieve the Spirit when we fail to forgive. Are you still angry with somebody? We limit the Spirit when we voluntarily become isolated from spiritual friends. Do you have spiritual partners that talk with you, pray with you, work with you and hold you accountable? Who do you bare your soul to? God puts believers together for a reason.

Christians are like coals. If you keep hot coals together, they feed off one another, get even hotter and warm the environment around them. If you isolate a coal, it will cool down. It will reflect its environment rather than change it. We are like those coals. We are meant to burn together and change things around us. There are no "Lone Ranger" Christians that walk in the Spirit's power. There are none. Besides, even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. We need to be around people who are filled with love for God.

Third, **reach out again to Christ.** Accept his vision of you. He calls you a saint. He calls you his ambassador. He calls you his family. Be his family. Be his partner. Accept forgiveness and enjoy being guilt-free. Celebrate his love constantly. Believe Christ's words and embrace your call. Get after it. You have a world to change, even as God changes you!

Here then is the challenge for all who confess Christ. Be authentic! Live as an anointed one! Hunger to fully know God's love and to fully experience God's vision for your life. Call to Christ for help, and surrender everything to him. Stick around people who are fired up. Worship with them, pray with them, discuss your life with them, work with them. Realize that you are not only a believer. You are an anointed one! Embrace your anointing. Welcome the Holy Spirit and the passion He gives you. He is your mark! He is God's authenticating stamp on you. He makes you authentic like authentic gold. He refines, purifies and makes you shine in this world. He is a very active mark. Commune with him.