

# HOW CAN WE KNOW IF WE ARE GENUINE CHRISTIANS?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

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Every few years I check into a local medical clinic for a full physical check-up. Recently, the "every few years" was up so two weeks ago I arranged to have a physical check-up again. First, my doctor asked me several questions to bring my medical chart up to date. The first thing he asked me was "What do you want to tell me about your health?" After I finished my list he then began asking me a lot of questions I forgot to ask myself. He was interested in my sleeping and eating habits. He wanted to know if I had an exercise program, did I sense I was gaining weight or losing it, etc. Finally, he gave me an eye, heart, and ear check-up. Then he arranged for me to get an EKG, a blood test, a chest x-ray, a colon check, etc. He told me that after all the results came in he would write me a summary letter and then we can have a conference concerning the test results. I found it interesting that when I entered the clinic two weeks ago I had a feeling of confidence based on my own analysis that I was in good health. But since I talked with my doctor, I find myself doing a lot more thinking about my body and its various functions. I think I'm well, but then maybe what I think will not match up with the final results. I'll let you know.

As important as a yearly physical exam may be for our bodies, the scriptures encourage us to conduct a personal spiritual examination of our faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" (1 Cor.13:5). Then, when we have finished with our own analysis, we are encouraged to turn to the Lord and allow him to give us his analysis. Paul did this when the Corinthians sought to examine his faith and ministry. Here is what he wrote, "But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor.4:3,4). Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we who think we are Christians allow Jesus to conduct a spiritual checkup of our relationship with him. For, as all of us have witnessed in the recent past, many have called out to Jesus, "Lord, Lord did not we prophesy in your name and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?" may one day hear the King of kings and Lord of lords declare, "I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:22, 23; Ps. 6:8).

So let us join Jesus and his apostles and disciples in Luke 6:39-49 and ask the question, How can we know if we are genuine Christians?

## I. Get an eye check-up!

Luke 6:39-42

And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye," when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Our Lord is at the peak of his popularity when he begins teaching the apostles the principles which would enable them to function in his spiritual kingdom while living in the kingdom of darkness. Surrounded by a multitude who desire to be physically healed, his desire is to offer them spiritual wholeness as well. His message began, "Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3). To

receive the King and all the resources of his kingdom needed to cope with the reality of this world, we must first declare ourselves spiritually bankrupt before Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were in the crowd listening for evidence to charge him with a capital offense. He had been under their scrutiny from the time he healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda on a Sabbath and called on God as his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God (John 5:18). Both were capital crimes which could result in his execution by stoning. In Luke 5:27-38 our Lord instructs his followers on how they should respond when men hate them, curse them, and mistreat them for the sake of the Son of Man. Then, in Luke 6:39-49, our Lord shows them the difference between his and the Pharisees' teachings. It is the difference between good and evil, true and false, and life and death. Even as our Lord teaches, the shadow of the cross is falling across his path, for within 18 months he would lay down his life on a cruel Roman cross. The death of the innocent Lamb of God resulted in salvation for all who place their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, so that we might live the life that he intends for us.

Jesus speaks a parable, an illustration out of life that was familiar to the people from their daily experience. Parables open the eyes of those who want to understand great spiritual truth, but close the eyes of the heart of those who are hardened. Jesus' simple illustrations teach profound truth which should motivate his followers to righteousness. In this first of three parables our Lord addresses the false teachings of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy, using three illustrations to which his audience can easily relate.

The first example he uses is the blind man. "A blind man cannot guide a blind man can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?" The Pharisees and other leaders in the Jewish nation had a lofty opinion of themselves. The apostle Paul says they viewed themselves as "a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth..." (Rom. 2:19-21). When the disciples tell Jesus that the Pharisees are offended because he told them they were merely teachers of the precepts of men, our Lord responds by saying, "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind; and if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matt.15:13-19).

Recently, I read a local newspaper article that exemplifies Jesus' remark. Richard Dunbar, a homeless blind man, was arrested for trying to rob a bank in San Francisco. He was jailed until another blind man, William Douglas, called the police to offer his fellow blind man cigarettes, personal things, clothes and pocket money. Douglas came to the city and he and Dunbar were sheltered at the St. Vincent De Paul Society. The next day Douglas claimed he was robbed of at least \$25,000 worth of custom-made jewelry by a guide named Carl Mones who had offered to act as a guide to both blind men. The police are now pursuing the dishonest guide. As Jesus said, "I don't want you to be like the blind guides."

Secondly, our Lord says, "A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." Our Lord warns his apostles not to submit to the Pharisees who teach the traditions and precepts of men. He exhorts them to stand before the people to teach the true Spirit of the Law of God as recorded by Moses. Likewise, we are to choose our teachers carefully.

Finally, Jesus speaks of one-eyed judges. He says, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eyes? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly [with both eyes] to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." The speck of dust is a symbol of the smallest infringement of the traditions and precepts of men that religious people used to keep the nation in spiritual bondage. The Pharisees were so busy judging and then correcting the specks of dust in the eyes of the common Jew that they failed to see the telephone pole in their own eye. In their great pride, the Pharisees were not only blind guides, but their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing the true meaning of the law. If any sight remained at all, it was only in one eye because the other eye was filled with the log of pride and self-righteousness.

Our Lord calls the Pharisees hypocrites, men who are like actors on a stage wearing masks to play different characters while hiding their true identity. In pointing out the Pharisees' hypocrisy, Jesus exhorts his apostles to have a life and ministry marked by humility, an indication that both eyes are clear to teach the secrets of the kingdom of God.

Last week I had lunch with a graduate student who told me about his father's trip to Rumania last Easter to visit some family members. When he visited the local church service he was delighted to find the church filled with faithful men and women of the community. He had anticipated a message of hope based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but was dismayed when the priest spent most of his sermon admonishing the women for wearing lipstick because it gets all over the silver communion cup! That, basically, was this man's Easter message. Talk about the blind leading the blind! Talk about taking the speck out of a brother's eye! A tragic example.

How can we know if we are genuine Christians? We need to lay our lives before the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, and ask him to check our eyes so that we might be used of him in a way that brings life to his people. We need to see clearly with two eyes.

## **II. Get a heart check-up!**

Luke 6: 43-45

For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Jesus begins by saying there are two kinds of trees which symbolize a man's heart. In time we can expect good fruit from a good tree, while a bad tree will produce bad fruit. In the complementary passage in Matthew 7 the Lord warns his apostles about the Pharisees' character when he says, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruit" (7:15-20).

The nature of the tree determines the kind of fruit one can expect from it. The heart is used figuratively for the hidden character of a person's life. We can say we are an orange tree for a season, but at harvest time what is in the heart will finally reveal what kind of fruit we really are. David Gooding writes in his book, "According to Luke": "The fruit of a tree is an unfailing indication of the nature of the tree. Likewise, a man's actions, words and attitudes are an unfailing indication of the state of his heart."

The people came to the Pharisees hoping for good spiritual food, only to discover again that the food was bad. In time they realized that all the trees in the orchard were filled with bad fruit so they ended up a nation starving for good food in an orchard of bad trees. Our Lord pronounced the Pharisees as false prophets, bad trees, as well as thorn and briar bushes which in time could only offer the bad fruit of disappointment and spiritual death. The Pharisees and their false teaching could be discerned by their bad fruit and would eventually be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The Lord encourages his apostles to remain true prophets of God, men who make the word of God shine. When spiritually hungry people come to them they will be like good trees bearing good fruit to satisfy the spiritually hungry. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told the remaining 11 apostles, "I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in me, and I in him bears much fruit; for apart from me you can nothing. . . You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. ." (John 15: 5, 16).

Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, God says, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity come, but will live in the stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For He will be like a tree planted by the waters, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green,

and it will not be anxious in a year of drought, nor cease to yield fruit" (Jeremiah 17: 5-8). When we are rooted in Jesus Christ, our lives will yield the fruit of the Spirit which always brings life.

The Lord reminds his apostles that a man's heart is like a treasure chest: "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." What a man produces from this inner storehouse, whether good or bad, depends on what he carries in it. If what is in the heart is good, this overflow will be good; if the contents of the inner being are bad, what spills out through the mouth will also be bad. Whatever a person sets his heart on will sooner or later be revealed in his speech. Therefore, to discern who men are we must listen carefully to their speech. If we are to know who we are, we must listen carefully to our speech as well.

Jesus later says to his disciples ". . . everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated. But the things that proceed out of the mouth comes from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matt. 15:17-19). "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart, I test the mind, even to give each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

The cure for the heart problem is the good news from the great physician. David said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:23-24). When David sinned he turned to the Lord, his Great Physician, and said, "Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me to follow you" (Psalm 51:9-10). "With all my heart I have sought Thee. Do not let me wander from Thy Commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:10-11). Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" ( Matt 5: 8).

How can we know if we are genuine Christians? We must turn to the Great Physician and get an eye check-up and a heart check-up. Finally, to complete our spiritual examination we need an ear check-up.

### **III. Get an ear check-up!**

Luke 6: 46-49

And why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.

With the Pharisees still in mind our Lord teaches his followers how to evaluate the difference between the good and the bad, the true and the false, the wise and the foolish. The Pharisees were men who seemed to have wax in their ears. They heard the word of God, but they did not act upon what they heard. The Lord wants his followers not only to hear the word of God but to act on what they hear by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was surrounded by people who called him "Lord," but to call Jesus "Lord" is not the test of genuine Christianity. The test comes when a person hears God's word as recorded in scripture with his inner ear and acts upon it through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the proof that one is a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord uses the example of a house to represent a person's life. Each person is given life on earth with the choice of a building site. They can either choose to build their lives on a solid rock or on sand. Once their house is built, it is nearly impossible to tell its quality since they all look alike on the outside. In time, however, the houses are tested by the sudden floods, storms and winds of life which appear as trials, temptations, tragedies, illnesses and deaths. This will be the test of the house's stability.

The Lord distinguishes between the wise man and the foolish man who both build houses. During normal life they look the same outwardly. The wise man ". . . is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood arose, the river burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built" (Matt. 7:24). In the first story our Lord said that the wise man built his life on a solid rock. This took time, planning and effort to dig deeply to attach the building to the rock foundation. The Jewish audience understood what the rock symbolized in their history, for all the prophets spoke of it. Jehovah is the rock that gave birth to Israel (Deut. 32:18), the rock of salvation (Deut. 32:15), the rock of Israel (II Sam. 23:3), a rock of strength and refuge (Psalm 62:7), the everlasting rock (Isaiah 26:4). David says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Jesus said, "But who do you said that I am? And Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. . . .' And I say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not over power it."

David Gooding writes,

There is only one way to build a house secure against a storm and that is to dig deep and lay its foundations on the rock. But digging deep can be troublesome. It is all too easy to be content with a superficial knowledge of Christianity and a superficial, normal profession of faith without real obedience to Christ. But just as there is only one foundation, so only those who by personal contact with him build directly and squarely on the foundation of His Word, believed, applied and performed, will survive the storms here and hereafter.

The foolish man's house looks strong and secure like the wise man's, but when the storms come it tests the foundation. "The one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly is like a man who built a house upon the ground (sand) without any foundation; and the river burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." We certainly experienced that principle in our area during the recent earthquake. While Jesus was speaking of religious men like the Pharisees in the context of the passage, this spiritual principle is true for those who call Jesus "Lord" today. They are people who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

One familiar illustration of this principle is seen in the tragedy of Jim and Tammy Bakker. On August 30, I watched the televised story of Jim being carried out of the court room when he suffered a nervous breakdown during the proceedings. He was subsequently hospitalized several weeks for observation. His wife Tammy said on national television, "We have been under a lot of stress for the last 2 1/2 years, and the pressure finally broke my husband. We tried to remain strong but the strain was just too much." There was no word of the Rock, only sand theology. I grieved because I had witnessed for several years that the foundation of their faith was based on sand. We have a responsibility to continue praying for the Bakkers that they might come to build the rest of their lives on the true rock, Jesus Christ, a firm foundation regardless of the circumstances in this life.

If we are genuine Christians we will have a desire to submit to Jesus Christ as the Great Physician for a full spiritual check-up. Self-analysis is helpful to a point, but true spiritual health can only come from Jesus our Lord. First, we need to allow Dr. Jesus to check our spiritual eyes for pride and judgment. Secondly, we need to allow Dr. Jesus to check our spiritual hearts for impurities. Finally, we need to allow Dr. Jesus to check our spiritual ears for a build-up of wax that prevents us from acting on the truth we hear. After all the tests are in, our Great Physician will point out our weaknesses, and recommend we confess our inability to heal ourselves and turn to him for spiritual healing. If we trust him we can be confident that our eyes will be clear to see God's truth, our hearts will be pure to teach God's truth, and our ears will be open to hear and act upon God's truth. This spiritual exam is critical in determining our present relationship to him as well as our eternal destiny. I would encourage us all to submit to the Great Physician for a spiritual examination. The outcome is the difference between experiencing life or death, now as well as in eternity.

Luke 6:39-49  
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