

What Is A Real Christian?

How many of you have ever been successfully conned?

ILLUS – A student in the US put his entire high school up for sale on eBay. He even promised to throw in the school's chess team if offers got past \$5. He got over a dozen bids, the highest at \$14,000, before he declared the auction a prank.

ILLUS – In China, parents of twin boys hoped to save money on their education, so they sent one twin to school on odd days and the other on evens. The teachers figured it out after six months.

ILLUS – During WW2, the Allies used to make wooden tanks or trucks to trick the enemy and draw their fire. Enemy planes flew overhead and they couldn't tell the difference so they'd waste their bombs. It worked for a while. At least till the Germans started dropping wooden bombs. The Germans also had a sense of humour.

Nobody likes to be conned, but sometimes, we even fool ourselves.

ILLUS – An American guy bought a new Jeep Grand Cherokee, so to celebrate, he and his four friends drank a lot of beer and went duck hunting. They got the hunting dog, guns, decoys, dynamite, more beer, and drove onto the frozen lake. First they had to blow a hole in the ice for the decoys, but it was too risky to plant the dynamite and run for it. They might slip over. So they decided to toss the dynamite. The Jeep owner felt he was the best thrower, so he walked out a few metres, lit the fuse, and threw it as hard as he could. Remember the hunting dog? He was born, bred and trained to retrieve. As soon as the stick left his master's hand, he tore off after it. Five men yelled frantically at the dog, but the dog ignored them, grabbed the stick, and headed back, tail wagging. His master got his gun and shot at the dog, but couldn't stop the dog with duck shot. Realising that his master is totally insane, the dog ran for cover – under the Jeep Cherokee. Moments later, there was an explosion, and the dog and the Jeep sank to the bottom of the lake.

People often get fooled, but do you know what the saddest thing of all is?

When people get fooled on eternal issues, because they're the things that really matter.

Today I want to answer two questions that no one should ever be fooled on.

First, how do you identify a real Christian?

I'm going to give you just two ways to tell.

1. A real Christian is characterised by love

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:3 ...Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

According to Jesus, when a person believes in Him to the point where they yield their life to Him, they are born again.

That's talking about a spiritual rebirth – into God's family.

How do you know when someone is part of a person's family?

There's a family likeness.

ILLUS – That's how you can tell that my children are my children – there's a family likeness. Intelligent, talented, amazingly good-looking ... Be nice, let me have my little moment.

But it's the same in God's family.

When a person is born again into God's family, God becomes their Father, and they begin to take on His characteristics.

That's why the Bible repeatedly tells us to be godly – like God.

And the primary characteristic of God is love, because God is love.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

The identifying feature of a believer in Jesus Christ is love.

This is important to understand, because Christians are often accused of all sorts of things.

Think of the Crusades, the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, the wars between so-called Christian nations, or the Inquisition.

But just because a person claims to be a Christian doesn't make them one.

Let me give you an illustration.

ILLUS – If I come to you and say, “Don't tell anyone, but I'm a giraffe.” I guarantee there's going to be a lot of things going through your head. You'll probably be tempted to say, “Don't tell anyone, but you're a psycho.” Because you know that a giraffe has certain features: A distinctive pattern, antlers, a long neck, no voice box, four really long legs. So you look at me and you immediately think: You can't possibly be a giraffe, because you don't match up to the list of characteristics that a giraffe has.

Just as you can tell if something is a giraffe or not, Jesus said that there's a way you can tell whether a person is a true Christian or not.

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

The primary characteristic of a disciple of Jesus is love.

Just because I claim to be a giraffe doesn't make me one.

Just because I claim to be a Christian doesn't make me one either.

But you've got to apply the test that Jesus Himself gave.

You can tell the disciples of Jesus by their love.

That doesn't mean they are perfect, but love is a major feature of their life, and it's constantly growing.

People who go about committing atrocities, hurting people, lying, deceiving, stealing, are not Christians, no matter what they claim.

Here's a description of love:

1 Cor 13:4-6 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; (5) does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; (6) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

That's a tall order, but love is also sacrificial.

ILLUS – A family was in a serious traffic accident. The youngest son, Mike, was seriously injured and needed blood. His big brother, Danny, was only 8-years-old, but had the same blood type. Danny's Dad explained carefully how important it was for Mike to have blood, and how great it would be if Danny could help out. There was silence for a while, then Danny said, “Yes, Daddy, I'll give my blood so Mike can get better.” They put the needle in his vein and drew the blood they needed. Once the needle was back out, Danny looked up at his Dad, and with tears running down his cheeks said, “Daddy, when do I die?” It was

only then that his Dad realised that Danny didn't know he was just giving some blood. He thought he was giving his life.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Love doesn't count the cost.

Jesus didn't count the cost when He went to the cross to pay the price for our sins.

2. A real Christian has insatiable desires

Now you're talking pastor, this sounds juicy, tell me more.

But before your imagination runs riot, a real Christian has an insatiable desire to please God.

They can't help themselves, because God planted that desire in their hearts when they gave their life to Him.

Even if they mess up, there is this continuing desire to please God.

ILLUS – Jenny was with a group of teenagers at a party. "Let's go to a night club" someone suggested. Jenny said, "No, my parents wouldn't like that." One of the other girls said, "Afraid your father will hurt you?" "No," she replied. "I'm not afraid my father will hurt me. I'm afraid I might hurt him."

That's the point, isn't it? I'm not afraid that my heavenly Father is going to punish me.

I just don't want to do things that displease Him.

Instead, I have an insatiable desire to please Him.

ILLUS – Sometimes when we're at a checkout they charge us the wrong amount. I say, "Excuse me, but that's not the right amount." I can see by the look on their face that they're ready to defend their integrity, so when I tell them that they've undercharged me, I'm not surprised that they look at me like I'm some rare and endangered species.

But I have to tell them.

It's not because I'm afraid of getting caught; it's because I have an insatiable desire to please God.

It's that desire that determines who I am when nobody's looking.

Because even if nobody else knows, God does.

A real Christian has an insatiable hunger to know God better.

They have an insatiable thirst for truth.

The second question I want to answer today is how do you become a Christian?

I would hate to leave you with the impression today that if you want to become a Christian, all you have to do is try to be more loving, be more sacrificial, try to be a good person, be honest at the checkout.

Because that's not what it's all about.

ILLUS – If a young guy came to me and said, "I want to be part of your family. So I'm going to try to be smarter, more talented and incredibly good-looking." (I'll just remind you that those were the family characteristics.)

Even if he could do all that, that wouldn't make him part of my family.

You can imitate Christian values, but that doesn't make you part of God's family.

We can never lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps and say, "Now I'm good enough to be part of God's family."

According to the Bible, we could never be good enough through our own efforts – there's only one way to be part of God's family.

John 14:6 Jesus said ... “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

A person has to come to God and say, “Lord, I have often broken many of Your commandments. There have been times when I have lied, been impatient, lustful, angry, and a whole bunch of other things that displease You. I have nothing to offer You except my life. I thank you that Jesus died to pay the price for my sins, and rose from the dead. I give my life to You now.”

If you pray that prayer sincerely, then God adopts you into His family, and begins to change your life from the inside out.