

How to Know if You Are a Born-Again Christian

“What a strange topic for an essay,” one might say. Agreed, yet after fifty years as a pastor, I find that it is not so easy to tell if someone is actually born-again. There is certainly no greater personal issue than this one. It is literally the difference between heaven and hell.

Here now is a list of changes in a person’s life, which taken together, or at least with several points in place, strongly suggest that the new birth has taken place.

1. Having an interest in the Bible

Maybe you picked up a Bible a time or two and read a page or two, but you did not get it at all. Using myself as an example, before I was converted, I could not even bear to hear the Bible read and even hated Christian movies like *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

After my conversion, I started reading and reading and just loved it, though it was not smooth sailing. To this day, the Bible is special to me, and I just love to read it and especially study it in depth. This is a definite sign of genuine conversion.

2. Wanting to read about Jesus

I knew the name of Jesus and had a few ideas of what that name represented, but I basically thought of Him as just another founder of a religion. Nothing more.

Then came that time when I was twenty-one, a moment when as far as I knew then or know now, something happened that changed everything for me. Jesus became the focus of my attention. I began reading the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—over and over. Though decades have passed, that intense desire to look within and be absorbed by the stories about Jesus has remained strong, and I still love preaching and teaching these wonderful Gospels.

It is abundantly clear that only born-again types love to read about Jesus. And why? Simply because we love Jesus. Once we get it that He died for us because He loves *us*, we in turn love Him. And, over the years the relationship, the love, the attachment only grows.

3. Not being afraid of churches

As kids, my friends and I had to pass by Holy Redeemer Catholic Church on Portland Blvd. in N.W. Portland, Oregon, on our way to Peninsula Park, and I could not even bear to look at it. I have no idea why, but in an unaccountable way, it scared me.

Again, this changed after I started believing in Jesus. With no fear of those places, I would walk right in and not even think of it. I felt safe in church buildings and still do.

This is not as big a deal as the first two evidences, but it was still a big one for me at the time.

4. Not being afraid of Christians

When I found out that a few kids I knew at Verdugo Hills High School in Sunland-Tujunga (part of the Los Angeles School District) were Christians, I stopped hanging out with them.

They were “good” folk, not cool kids, and I definitely did not want to be associated with them, because they were not part of my tough teenager set with duck tail haircuts.

That changed radically once I was saved several years later while in the Air Force. Here is the evidence: at midnight chow at the Travis Air Force Base Hospital, I sat with the sinners. We stole provisions out the back door, being the thieves and rogues that we were. On the other side of the dining hall sat Vern Hogue and Don Ethridge—definite Christians.

Just days after my saving experience, I was no longer welcome with the bunch I had previously called buddies. I don’t know how it worked exactly, but I was expelled and sent over to be with Vern and Don. How that happened, how the old bunch knew I was different, I cannot say. But that is how it went.

5. Wanting to learn about prayer

Prayer has never been my strong suit, but I did start praying. I even had a prayer list, and to this day I still have several of them. On the far left of a half-sheet of paper I would have one column with the date, then another with the request, another with the answer, and the last column was the date of the prayer.

I learned that Christianity was mostly a relationship with God, and this is what was happening to me. I was a guy who definitely would never have resorted, stooped is a better word, to prayer. No way. But there it was. Something dramatic had happened, and I never even realized how much of a change had occurred until much later on.

6. Desiring to talk with other Christians

Across the street from me in Suisun, California, where mostly low-class airmen lived, was an airman like me. His name was Charles Davenport, also a Christian; we even attended the same church, the First Baptist Church of Fairfield, and the pastor was Bob Lewis. Charles was from Lake Charles, Louisiana, and he was a fairly mature Christian. We talked and talked and talked.

In the 2nd Casualty Staging Flight at the hospital where I was stationed there were no other Christians. I worked from 5pm to 8am, and it was a lonely nighttime grind.

Toward the middle of my enlistment, two nurses came to our unit. They were twins, beautiful young women, and they were real Christians. After all was quiet on the unit, I would wander up the hall, pull up a chair, and talk Bible with these 2nd lieutenants. For about a year, I often had the pleasure of talking about Jesus with these nurses. Their maturity as believers was much needed at that time.

Who would have ever thought as much, but here it was, I was seeking out Christians to be with, when during all my previous years I had diligently avoided them.

Another sure sign—hanging out with those weird Christians!

7. Being able to admit your sin

At some point in our lives we begin to not only realize but reveal that we are not as pure as the wind-driven snow. This comes after some maturing, too.

Usually, we cannot handle the notion that we have flaws. Our conscience is not completely trustworthy and may either accuse or excuse us. Shame and guilt can crush us,

so we spend considerable amounts of mental and emotional energy insuring ourselves that we are not as bad as others.

The Christian, however, who comes to understand the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross, the shedding of His blood for us, and that His blood covers all our sin, soon grasps this and gains an assurance of being completely forgiven.

Gone! No guilt and no shame, though the old enemy tries to accuse us and tell us how bad we still are. But we know better.

Sure, we yet sin, and so we find out from the Scripture that we need to confess our sin on a daily basis, having renewed confidence that the weird tendencies of body and mind are being put away. No, this is not a license to sin but a paradoxical truth. Forgiven, and daily forgiven. Study 1 John 1:8-2:2 on this point.

8. Having concern and love for others

A shift in focus comes now, little by little. Instead of thinking only of ourselves, we have an interest in the needs of other people. Normally we are caught up in seeing to our own affairs, but a subtle and healthy change starts to settle in. Now that the only important issue is forever resolved for us, we can actually see to the concerns and cares of others.

This is where evangelism comes in. My experience has been that genuine Christians have a desire to see others come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is far and away the greatest need anyone has whether they know it or not.

For me, this was scary. I first got into personal evangelism when my pastor, Bob Lewis, handed out names of people with their addresses, in order for us to visit and share the Gospel with them. I did it though I was petrified, and on several occasions, I was indeed firmly rebuffed and told to go away. In a transition I still do not fully grasp, my concern, above all others, became to tell others about Jesus.

9. Not being afraid to talk about Jesus with others

Before becoming Christians, we would never ever tell others about Jesus. This is a clear and obvious fact.

But when we read in Scripture that we are called, encouraged, even commanded to tell the world about our Savior, after a time even timid people like me try doing it and suddenly find a meaning and purpose for living that nothing can match.

After all these years, after even being punched in the face and slandered and screamed at, I am still at it and loving it more all the time. I say, "Bring it on!"

Okay, I am a preacher, seminary trained, and so on, but all Christians get to do this. "Go!" Jesus said, and we go. We never retire, never get laid off, never fired, and are always urged on by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit—we keep boldly proclaiming Jesus and Him crucified.

How to Know you are *not* a Born-again Christian

This part is easy; none of the eight points above will apply to you.

Why am I so abrupt and seemingly uncaring by stating this?

Because it is time to face the truth about what is actually going on. This little essay is intended to wake you up. I hope you will see your true condition and not depend upon the big lies, which include the following:

Death is the end.

There is no heaven or hell.

All you have to do is be a good person.

Help others, be kind, and do good deeds.

All paths lead to God.

You will have other life times to become enlightened.

Who cares anyway; you want to be with your friends in hell.

Last word to you: Stop everything and ask that if God is real, He would reveal Himself to you. In a prayer, aloud or in your mind only, ask if Jesus is really the Savior who died for you on the cross.

When you get your answer, and you find out the core reality, get a Bible and start reading. Start with Matthew's Gospel. Find a Christian. Find a Bible preaching and teaching church. Start here, and the rest will unfold.

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