

## The Sure Signs of Regeneration (4) Receiving and Remaining in the Truth

In 1876, Francis Galton invented the dog whistle. Galton had discovered that humans can hear sounds up to around 20 kHz. Above that, no sound registers in our brain. Dogs, on the other hand, can hear sounds up to around 45kHz. So the dog whistle begins at around 23kHz and goes up to around 50. When blown, a human only hears a quiet hissing sound. Dogs on the other hand, can hear the very strong and piercing whistle. Some animals far exceed the dog's range, including the cat, rodents, and dolphins.

On the other end of the scale some sounds made by elephants and some whales, are so low that a human cannot hear it. God has arranged His creation so that some sounds can only be heard by animals of a certain nature.

And so it is with our last sign of regeneration. The fourth and final sure sign has to do with God's Word, with God's truth. The truly regenerate have a relationship with the truth that is a sign of new life. Like a dog whistle which is at a frequency that dogs can hear but humans can't, so the truth has an effect on those with eternal life that unbelievers cannot hear or get.

*<sup>5</sup> They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. <sup>6</sup> We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:5-6)*

Now before we study this in detail you can already see that your spiritual family determines your spiritual receptivity. If you are born of the world, then you speak the world's doctrines, and you gain a favourable audience from the world. If you are born of God, then you hear and listen to the truth, the apostles' doctrine. We can summarise the fourth sure sign this way: a sure sign of being born from above is recognising God's truth and remaining in that truth.

But let us eliminate some signs that can mislead us into thinking this is true of us.

*First, it is no sure sign that you are born from above because you accept some Christian truth alongside non-Christian voices.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? <sup>20</sup> "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." <sup>21</sup> For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. (Acts 17:18-21)*

*<sup>32</sup> And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." (Acts 17:32)*

Here the Athenian philosophers were happy to play with ideas. Bouncing around perspectives, hearing some new take on philosophy and seeing if they could assimilate and harmonise it with the old. "Tell us something new," they say. When he does, some do believe, but others say "Very interesting! Come again some time and let's chat some more."

These Athenian philosophers' descendants are with us today. You meet them and even though they make no claim to be believers, they love what you have to say. They agree with everything. They appear fascinated and enthusiastic. They ask to hear more. And very often a Christian is just thrilled because this person was just so interested in the truth. And yes, he is, and many other 'truths' too – from Hinduism and Buddhism, and New Age, and Kaballah. He collects ideas like some people collect sea-shells. And he's especially proud of his idea mosaic, where he assimilates all these contradictory and paradoxical ideas in one. Accepting Christian truth alongside truths that contradict Christianity is no sure sign of regeneration. It is a sign of a mind unacquainted with the

law of non-contradiction, and pretending to evade the sharp edges of absolutes in God's universe.

*Second, it is no sure sign of regeneration that you are fascinated with Christian truth and even fluent in it.*

<sup>30</sup> "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' <sup>31</sup> "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. <sup>32</sup> "Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. <sup>33</sup> "And when this comes to pass-- surely it will come-- then they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezek. 33:30-33)

God tells Ezekiel – be under no illusions, my son. These people might be hanging on your every word. They might slap you on the back and tell you that your sermons are out of this world. They might appear to be fascinated with what you preach, and be deeply familiar with it. It's possible they are fluent in these ideas. But it is all on the level of entertainment for them, nothing more than a game they play, a performance they watch. They have no intention of allowing this truth to transform them. They simply enjoy the aesthetics of a good sermon, well-crafted ideas, imaginative language.

Loving Christian ideas, and being able to regurgitate those ideas in conversations, in public testimonies, in prayers, or even in sermons is no sure sign. Spend enough time in any group, and you will pick up the technical vocabulary, learn the tones and gestures, understand how to impress others. Nothing miraculous about this.

So many people are led astray because they hear a man fluent in Christianese, self-confident in his preaching and praying, and so they assume he must be Christian. If someone with that kind of command of the Christian vocabulary is not saved, then who is?

*Third, it is no sure sign of regeneration that you love the truth temporarily.*

<sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you (Col. 4:14)

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,<sup>24</sup> as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. (Phlm. 1:23-24)

Colossians and Philemon were written around 62 A.D, when Paul was in his first Roman imprisonment, which was more of a house arrest. He was able to see people, he wrote several letters, and here he is alongside, or supported by several people, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Luke, and Demas. He was later released, and had freedom for a few more years, before he was arrested and imprisoned again, under Nero.

But now turn to 2 Timothy.

<sup>9</sup> Be diligent to come to me quickly; <sup>10</sup> for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica-- (2 Tim. 4:9-10)

Second Timothy is universally recognised as Paul's last letter, written from his second Roman imprisonment, facing imminent execution. The date here is 66, just four years after the writing of Colossians and Philemon. And while others had departed for ministry reasons, Paul explicitly says that Demas had abandoned the whole mission to pursue the world. Demas at one point appeared to believe the truth and even teach it. But at some point, he stopped, and revealed the belief system that had always been in his heart: worldliness. It is no sure sign of regeneration that you once agreed with truth and then departed from it.

Assimilating Christian truth into a false system, being fluent and fascinated with truth, temporarily holding to it are no sure signs of regeneration.

So what are? I want you to read carefully with me in John 10, where Jesus distinguishes between believers in Israel and unbelievers. A man born blind has just believed in Christ, and now been cast out of the synagogue – which was the institutional sign of Israel. So Jesus now explains that from the sheepfold of Israel, Jesus is calling out a flock that is His. And notice carefully the relationship between His voice and the sheep.

**John 10:1** *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> "But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> "To him the doorkeeper opens, **and the sheep hear his voice**; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; **and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.***

<sup>14</sup> *"I am the good shepherd; and I know **My sheep, and am known by My own.** (Jn. 10:14)*

<sup>16</sup> *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, **and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.** (Jn. 10:16)*

<sup>26</sup> *"But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup> **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.** (Jn. 10:26-27)*

How can we summarise these words? **Truly regenerate people recognise God's voice in God's Word.**

Jesus explains that those who are internally of a new nature – His sheep – recognise His voice and follow Him. And this illustration comes from real life shepherding where sheep actually do develop a strong recognition for the voice and presence of their shepherd, and do not easily obey someone else.

And perhaps the most telling statement is verse 26: You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." Jesus could have said it in reverse: "You are not my sheep, because you do not believe." But He doesn't put it that ways, because He is emphasising something else. He says, "You don't believe because you are not My sheep." Here, nature explains belief. You aren't a sheep, that's why you don't hear My voice, and don't follow Me. You Pharisees don't hear My voice and My Father's voice in My words, because of your internal nature. This man born blind, heard my call, and My voice in My words, because he is one of Mine.

Jesus said it similarly two chapters earlier.

<sup>42</sup> *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me."<sup>43</sup> "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. <sup>44</sup> "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. <sup>45</sup> "But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup> "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup> "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (Jn. 8:42-47)*

The sure sign of being born from above is hearing God's voice in God's Word. On the day of your new birth, you came to a supernaturally new regard for the Scriptures. It went from being a religious book with some good thoughts, and truths, to being the Truth, to being God's voice. You see, you can show an unbeliever the marvel of the Bible: its historical accuracy, its literary beauty, its unparalleled wisdom. You can show him the marvel of 40 different authors on different

continents over 1500 years writing with uncanny harmony. You can show him the eerie and inexplicable phenomenon of prophecy given and fulfilled in the Bible. But he still won't see it as the Shepherd's voice.

It is on the day of a person's new birth, on the day that repentance and faith come, that the Word of God suddenly shines with a blinding brilliance: you know it is a book, but it is the Book of Books. It is words, but words from the mind of God to the mind of man. And suddenly, when God's Word is preached, and when it is accurately explained, and when you read it, you hear the Shepherd's voice. He is speaking to you.

By the way, this is also how Christians come to believe the 66 books of God's Word are the Bible, no less and no more. It is not that we study the topic out before we are saved. It is that when we are regenerated, we have a divine and supernatural light that affirms the Word of God given by the Spirit, recognised by the church, providentially collected and preserved is God's Word. Certainly we may want to study the topic after we are born again, but the acceptance of all 66 books is one of the implicit truths included in our faith given by God.

Now, of course, a lot of people, including the Pharisees who were being referenced here, have used the Bible. So there is more to this sure sign.

**Second, truly regenerate people discern false voices from God's true.**

**<sup>5</sup> "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (Jn. 10:1-5)**

<sup>7</sup> Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." <sup>8</sup> "All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, **but the sheep did not hear them.** (Jn. 10:7-8)

Jesus says, my people have known when the Shepherd is speaking to them, and when someone who is not the shepherd is speaking to them. By contrast, verse 5 says, sheep do not follow a stranger; they don't recognise his voice. The false teaching of the Pharisees is not something that Christ's sheep could follow. They sensed strangeness and unfamiliarity in it. Verse 8 – the sheep did not follow them.

When you are born again, on day one of your new birth, you know almost nothing. But you know the reality of what has happened to you, and you know when false teachers are trying to subvert the Gospel.

<sup>24</sup> So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." (Jn. 9:24-25)

True believers have an innate discernment between voices that is meant to be developed. Just as infant children can tell their mother from a stranger, and that sense of discernment grows with age, so it is with believers. John tells us this in 1 John 2.

<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. <sup>21</sup> I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ....

John goes on to identify one of the denials of the Gospel which no truly regenerate believer could believe – denying the Son.

*These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. <sup>27</sup> But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same*

*anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (1 Jn. 2:18-27)*

Now this Scripture has been badly misinterpreted. Firstly, the anointing here doesn't refer to anything more than the Holy Spirit's indwelling. Anointing always represented the Holy Spirit, so after the day of Pentecost, God's people all now enjoy the anointing of the Spirit living within us. That presence of the Spirit gives us an internal warning system against denials of the Gospel. We can sense the unfamiliarity of a Gospel-denier. When he says you know all things, and you do not need one to teach you, he is not saying, avoid church, stay at home, and feast upon your own omniscience. No, he means, the Spirit within alerts you when the fundamentals of the faith are being assailed.

A new Christian doesn't necessarily know the doctrine of the Trinity in a full way, but he knows that Jesus had to be God to save Him, and when he hears some denial of it, the indwelling Spirit tells him it is wrong. A new Christian may not fully have comprehended the importance of the virgin birth, or the substitutionary atonement, or the inspiration of Scripture, but when she hears these doctrines assailed, the anointing within says, "This is not the voice of the Shepherd."

Now I will hasten to add that discernment is a gracious gift that must be developed. And Hebrews 5:14 tells you how it is developed. <sup>14</sup> *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:14)*

This explains why young Christians may spend years under someone who is not a Gospel-denier, but is not particularly careful or skilled in interpreting God's Word. Some kinds of discernment come with time, growth and practice. And where the false teaching becomes more concentrated, eventually the sheep will find the voice of the Shepherd somewhere else.

But you don't know that some teachers were shallow or unbalanced, until you have matured enough to recognise it. That's the kind of discernment that grows with use.

But what Jesus teaches and John confirms is that all sheep, no matter what stage of growth they are at, can detect a voice which denies Christ, and they will flee.

The truly born again recognise God's voice in God's Word, and can discern false voices from the truth. But then there is a third aspect to this sure sign.

### **Truly regenerate people remain under God's truth.**

<sup>18</sup> *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*

John tells us that the mark of a false teacher is abandonment of the apostolic faith they once claimed to hold. They begin in the church, they gain recognition, they seem to affirm the truth. But then they depart, either claiming to not believe, or by denying something in the Gospel, or by teaching some gross distortion of the Gospel.

Once you are a sheep, you cannot transform into a goat. Once you have recognised His voice, you cannot at some point hear the voice of strangers. The mark of the regenerate is perseverance in the faith. John tells us this a few verses later in verse 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

John says, remain in the Gospel you heard at the beginning of your faith. If you remain in it, then you are remaining in God. Departure from the truth is not loss of salvation, it is apostasy. An apostate is an unregenerate person whose conscience has been seared by an exposure to truth which he never submitted to and embraced, so now he turns from it, and his latter end is worse than his beginning.

Life from above creates a life-long recognition of God's voice in God's Word, a life-long and growing discrimination between a true representation of God's voice and a false one. This is a completely different phenomenon from fascination with truth, temporary dabbling with truth, creating a patchwork mosaic of all kinds of truths. No, this is hearing God's voice in God's Word.

So allow me to ask you to do some serious introspection at the close of this series. Everyone throws around the words born-again, re-born Christian, but we have seen the Bible is very detailed on what someone born from above is like.

Nothing could be more important than making sure you are aware of the sure signs of life, and not mistaking the false flags as sure signs.

Do you right now, not in the past, but now confess and believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the God-Man, your prophet, priest, and king, so that you have an indispensable attachment to Him? You can no more abandon Him than stop breathing. Not intellectual assent. Not private inward self-confidence, but an embrace of Him that has been publicly verified, and continues to believe?

Do you experience God as Father, and therefore His people as your brothers and sisters, with the world as a foreign family? Not religious involvement, not church membership, not active ministry. Is there a deep family bond with God and His people that transcends your physical family, or your language group or ethnicity or citizenship.

Do you sense from within, an implanted nature that works in you to please God and to shun sin? Not visible morality. Not being nice. Not feeling conviction. An inward nature of another Person, whom you want to imitate, where sin breaks a sense of communion with Him, and obedience is the pleasure of pleasing Him.

Does God's Word have the quality of His voice, which you recognise when rightly divided, a truth in which you wish to remain? Not intellectual fascination. Not assimilating Christian ideas alongside worldly ones. Not a temporary sojourn in Christian doctrine. Hearing His voice in God's Word, cleaving to it.

If you do not see any of these, then remember the thief on the Cross. Once he realised that he was hopeless without Christ, once he realised who Christ is, he turned away from rejecting Jesus and simply said, "Lord, remember Me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus, you are the sinless Messiah, I am a sinner needing saving, please don't leave me behind in my sin. Don't destroy me. Have mercy on me, forgive Me, make me a citizen of your kingdom, a child of your Father."

What is stopping you? M.R de Haan once gave as a statistic: after the age of 35 only one person in 50,000 receives Christ; after 45 only one in 300,000; and after 75 only one in 700,000 is converted." In other words, every day you wait, you are less likely to be saved. Every day you postpone, the gate is getting narrower, your chances of being in Hell instead of heaven are growing, and every day you refuse Christ, you make it easier to refuse Him the next time, and harder to accept Him the next time. Why not today receive Him? - John 1:12.