

## **The Bible's Paternity Test (1) – Confession of Jesus Christ**

Since the discovery of DNA in 1953 it has brought about revolutionary changes. DNA is God's unique code which makes every individual his or her unique self. DNA can be used to positively identify if someone was at the scene of a crime. DNA can predict appearance – if you will have red hair, or your eye colour. DNA can be used to predict if people are likely to develop cancer, or cystic fibrosis.

But one of the greatest contributions of DNA has been to determine family identity. Sites like Ancestry.com offer you the chance to find out what parts of the world your ancestors came from, what mix of what tribe or ethnicity is in you. Because our DNA carries our ancestors' markers, it is a living family identity marker. When there has been a dispute over whether someone is the father of a child or not, DNA can answer the question without fault.

The Bible has a something like a DNA test. The Bible's DNA test is really the most important one you could ever do, for it tests if you have a family identity with God Himself. It tests if resident within you is the divine nature, the presence of God Himself. The Bible's DNA test is not concerned with what family you were born from, but whether you have been born a second time, and this time into God's family.

Scripture has different ways of talking about this event: in some places it calls it being born again, or born from above. Other places call it being born of God, born of the Spirit, and regeneration. But it all refers to the moment your spiritual DNA is radically altered by nothing short of a miracle.

But this is very different to the way a generation raised on the internet thinks. Modern people think: I create my identity. I am whoever I want to be. I am what I like, what I choose, and what I identify with. So if I choose Hinduism, I am a Hindu. If I choose atheism, I am an atheist. And if I choose Christianity, then I am a Christian. But that is not what we mean when we ask, are you a Christian? We are not asking whom do you affiliate with, whom do you identify with. Christian in the biblical sense is not merely a human who chose the religion of Christianity over against another religion, or secular atheism.

A Christian in the biblical sense is something that has happened to you, an action that was done upon you. You a miracle on two legs, a person who has experienced an act of new birth, new life. You are new, and just like blood tests reveal the presence of something new in your system, so biblical tests reveal whether this has happened to you.

Not everyone experiences that miracle in the same way. But when it has occurred, the Bible gives us several tests that taken together, are like an infallible DNA test for parentage.

Now I cannot think of anything more important than doing this test on ourselves. Jesus told us that when it comes to people and this new life, most people think they are fine, but are not. He said “<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.<sup>14</sup> "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7:13-14)

That broad way with many on it surely includes many people who are church-goers, many people who consider themselves to be Christians, many who are even involved in ministry. Because in the same chapter Jesus gave this frightening warning, saying ““Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.<sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you

who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:21-23)

And I think we are in particular peril. Few have been the generations on this Earth with such a love for self as ours. Not many peoples in history have been as convinced of their own righteousness, goodness, and sincerity as ours. Other generations began with the view that they were fallen and needed some forgiveness; ours begins with the view that we are good and God would be wrong to judge us. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. (Prov. 30:12)

Not only so, but when we are surrounded with unbelief and secular atheism, we might look at ourselves being on church on a Sunday and feel that we must be in God's family. After all, we're being so different to what most people do. This must mean that a miracle of change has taken place – we're doing something that only the small minority of people do.

But this would be an inconclusive sign. There are plenty of inconclusive signs which people use to assure themselves that they are Christians, when they aren't. An inconclusive sign is something which can be true of Christians, but can also be true of unbelievers. People with TB cough, but someone with a cough does not necessarily have TB. To diagnose TB infallibly, you need a blood test and a chest X-Ray. A child of mine might have blue eyes, but because a child has blue eyes doesn't mean they're my child.

To know if we are Christians we cannot look to those things which both believers and unbelievers could do. We need to find those things which are true of believers alone. Those marks which cannot be reproduced in unbelievers are the Bible's sure signs of having been born of the Spirit. They are the DNA markers of the divine nature present in a human being.

What we want to do in this series is chase down the Scriptures that identify the unique traits of someone born of God. Along the way, we want to eliminate those false flags, those ambiguous marks which could be true of believer or unbeliever.

Now let's be clear: these are not marks of *how* to be born into God's family. They are signs that you have been born into His family. Using primarily the writings of the apostle John, we'll uncover four sure signs of being born from above. Today we begin with the first. **We'll see the mark of being in God's family is true faith in the true Christ.**

**1 John 5:1** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

John here identifies one of the sure signs of being born of God. The person with God's life in him or her believes that Jesus is the Christ – the Messiah. To take that apart we'll see it comes in two parts, you must have true faith in the true Christ.

## **I. You Must Have True Faith**

What does believe mean? Let's begin by eliminating what it does not mean with two counterfeit forms of faith.

It is no sure sign of true faith if you have intellectual agreement that Jesus is Saviour. It is very possible to become attracted to the Christian system of thought and find it compelling. You might begin to enjoy the history of the Bible, its fascinating accounts. You might find the Christian explanation of reality quite elegant and perhaps the best explanation of all. But this does not mean

you have been born from above.

There is an intellectual coherence, an imaginative brilliance, a charming clarity which any honest unbeliever can appreciate. And all the more, when any unbeliever takes an honest look at the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Mahatma Gandhi said about Jesus, "A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act." Albert Einstein said, "I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrase-mongers, however artful..." "No man can read the gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life." These men, to the best of our knowledge, remained unbelievers till the day they died.

You can become intellectually convinced that there is truth to the Christian religion. You can become intellectually convinced that Jesus Himself is who He said He was. But this is no sure sign that you have been born from above.

The Bible tells us why in John 2: <sup>23</sup> Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, <sup>25</sup> and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. (Jn. 2:23-25)

Here were people who believed in Jesus, but the very next verse says, but Jesus did not believe in them. Why not? Because Jesus knew the nature of their belief: an intellectual, and possibly whimsical fascination with Him, a fickle liking for Him which He would later compare to seed that falls on shallow ground, to seed that falls among thorns. They were not regenerate, as Jesus would explain to Nicodemus in the very next few verses.

Mere head agreement is not what John means by confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. James tells us <sup>19</sup> *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-- and tremble! (Jas. 2:19)* The demons have impeccable orthodoxy. Their confessions in the Gospels are some of the clearest in all Scriptures as they loudly call out that Jesus is Son of the Most High God. They confess what the disciples haven't even fully grasped yet. But Jesus rebukes them, for what they are doing does not come from a regenerate spirit, filled with love. They simply agree with the truth that Jesus is God, Jesus is the chosen Messiah.

Here is a second counterfeit faith. It is no sure sign that you have true faith merely because you feel assured that you have believed. Many people feel that because they have a sense of assurance, a sense of inner confidence that they are in the right place, having done the right things, that this is by itself a sign of being saved.

But my self-confidence is a poor test of whether that confidence is well-founded. Millions of people around the globe have assurance that their religion is correct, that their cult has found the true path to Enlightenment, that there is no God and no life after death. And all these people are confident, assured, and at peace with their belief. They take their inner security as a sign that they are right. They have simply told themselves that they are broadly believing in the right direction, and they feel good about it.

I've heard people who are failing every biblical test for being a Christian turn around and say, I know my own love for God and no one can judge me. That's faith in my own faith, trust in my own trust. When you live like this, it's the ultimate cheat: you get to set the standard for yourself, and

then you get to be the judge of whether you've kept your own standard. How do I know if I'm a Christian? If I'm sincere in my faith. Am I sincere? Oh yes.

Nineteenth-century preacher Gardner Spring wrote: "If to be strongly persuaded that we are Christians would make us Christians, there would be no such thing as being deceived by false hopes and delusive presumption."

The Bible warns us that our hearts are above all deceitful, that we are capable of deceiving ourselves, that we are well able to suppress uncomfortable truths until we believe convenient lies.

I believe assurance of salvation is possible and indeed, probable for the true and obedient believer. But I am against teaching to be assured because you feel assured. Assurance is based on something other than assurance.

So it is no sure sign that you are born from above if you have intellectual agreement with Christianity and with Christ. It is no sure sign of eternal life that you feel assured that you are a Christian. Now a true Christian will have intellectual agreement, and a true Christian will have assurance, but unbelievers can have those things too. So these things are not sure markers of the miracle of regeneration.

So what kind of belief is evidence of the miracle of the new birth?

We have an account of someone whose belief Jesus said came by new birth.

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" <sup>14</sup> So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 16:13-17)

Peter confesses that Jesus the Man, Jesus of Nazareth is in fact the Messiah, and the Son of God. He is fully God, fully man, but the chosen Prophet, Priest and King. Revelation, Mediation and Dominion are centred in Him. Jesus immediately says to Peter, flesh and blood, meaning Peter's own brain, or another human teacher, or some tradition did not reveal this to him. God the Father revealed this to Peter. There was a moment of simultaneous believing and begetting, where Peter believed and God caused new life to spring up in Peter's heart.

So what is the difference between Peter's faith and dead faith, between Peter's confession and the confession of demons, between Peter's belief and mere intellectual assent?

Biblical faith contains intellectual agreement, but it goes far beyond that. True, living faith is not simply an act of knowing. Biblical faith is a God-given affection, a desire, where the will comes to Jesus Christ and lays hold of Him. Peter had done more than agree that Jesus is Messiah, which even Judas agreed with. Peter's faith was the kind where he came under an overwhelming conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is prophet, priest and king, and that he must transfer all his trust and devotion to this Jesus.

Peter's faith was an affection of loving trust, loving hope, loving submission. When Jesus asked the twelve if they wanted to join the many crowds who were leaving, Peter's answer captures the heart of real faith: <sup>68</sup> But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Jn. 6:68-

When you have living faith, more than intellectual assent, you have a deep sense that Christ and Christ alone is your hope. Once you have seen, you cannot un-see. Once you have leaned on Him, you cannot now walk independently.

This is why a truly born again person cannot be argued out of the faith. If you have been born again, no one can convince you otherwise. “To whom shall we go?”

So a true Christian could hear an overwhelming argument against Christianity, against God, against faith. But the response will be, but I know He is the Messiah. I love Him. I am leaning on Him as we speak. “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” My very life and identity are now so tied to Christ that there is no world, no reality, no life in which He is not my Messiah.

This is why Paul puts it this way in Romans 10: <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your **heart** that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Rom. 10:9-10)

There is the mental conviction that Jesus is Lord, but then there is the affective, volitional movement of the being towards Jesus, dying to the old life, rising with Him. To put it very simply, true faith does not merely depend on Christ like an instrument to be used. True faith loves Christ as the prophet, priest, and King.

and everyone who loves Him who begot also **loves** him who is begotten of Him.

<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.

You have that kind of faith. But that kind of faith must have the correct object.

## II. True Faith in the True Christ

**1 John 5:1** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, (1 Jn. 5:1)

Just as it is possible to have false faith, it is also possible to believe on a false Christ.

<sup>3</sup> But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! (2 Corinthians 11:3–4)

Another Jesus – some other Jesus, some other Christ. And make no mistake there are many, many out there. There is the Moslem Jesus, the Hindu Jesus, the New Age Jesus, the Oprah/Hollywood Jesus, the self-esteem Jesus, the Mormon Jesus, the Jehovah Witness Jesus, the Prosperity Gospel Jesus, the African traditional religion Jesus.

The person born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ, and Christ is the Greek word for Messiah. Messiah is Hebrew for Anointed One, the Chosen One of God. Captured in this idea is a lot of truth. In Israel, those anointed for service were prophets, priests, and kings.

The prophets spoke to the people for God. The priests mediated between the people and God.

And the kings ruled the people under God. Messiah would be the ultimate Prophet, revealing God as no one else could. Messiah would be the ultimate priest, the one mediator between God and Man.

And Messiah would be the ultimate King, the prince whom God sets on His holy hill of Zion and makes His enemies His footstool.

Now to do this, Messiah needed to be more than the best man ever born. Messiah would need, somehow, to be God. Only God could reveal God as the angel of Yahweh in Genesis could do. Only God could be a true go between, a true priest with equal sympathies for God and man, equally holy and equally tempted. Only God could be a true King, the one who receives submission and adoration, and rules perfectly and justly. Messiah would need to be a God-Man.

This is why John also enlarges who the true Christ is in two other places.

<sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 Jn. 4:2-3)

To confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh mean you believe He was fully God who was actually incarnate and became fully human. No one says this kind of thing about someone who is no more than a regular man. And you don't say this about an angel or about an abstract God who cannot be known.

Just a few verses after 1 John 5, John makes sure we understand that to believe in Jesus as the Messiah is to believe He is no mere man.

<sup>4</sup> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.<sup>5</sup> Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 Jn. 5:4-5)

This is why the old Nicene Creed went to such lengths to define exactly which Jesus we are talking And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead His kingdom will never end.

You cannot make yourself born again, but you can check if you are. Don't look to your intellectual satisfaction with Christianity, your enjoyment of sermons, your pleasure in Christian doctrine. Don't look to your sense of contentment in being around other Christians, your sense of confidence that you're fine.

Ask yourself this: if Jesus Christ was subtracted from your life, what would be left of you? If you can't imagine that, then that's a good sign. If you can think of no other hope, no other prophet, no other priest, no other king, that's a good sign. If right now, you are accepting Jesus as your Saviour from sin, the Lord and King of our life, the Word of God to you, then this is a good sign.

For your own soul's sake, do not trust in a memory. Do not trust in your trust. Do not trust in your own assurance. Look within, and if you find there an indispensable attachment to Jesus Christ, the God-man and Messiah, then thank God for begetting you.

If you do not find it there, then listen to what Paul said when the Philippian jailer asked him, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."