

Marks of what is a man of God

Part 1

Speaker	Michael Johnson
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[00:00:00] Some while ago I was speaking to Ernie Brown and talking about parts of the scripture that people never speak about.

And he said, well, it's about time then we started speaking about the parts of scripture that are seldom, if ever, spoken about.

That seemed to be a pretty good guideline, really.

And these verses, which I've never heard anyone speak about before, were brought to my mind recently when I had a letter from someone.

I'll take up the thread of it later, but the question in the letter was, how do you demonstrate from scripture that there is no development of the truth?

That means that when the scriptures were put together, all the truth was out.

[00:01:08] And that the great challenge to every believer is to understand what the truth of scripture says, to make it your own in experience with God, and then to live your lives in the power of it.

I'll pick up that thread again, but it brought these verses to my mind. I think most people who try to serve the Lord in gospel preaching or ministry of the word find sometimes when you're asked to speak, verses come very quickly to your mind. And then, at other times, as Leslie Grant once said, your mind is like a battlefield littered with all sorts of pieces of things. But you look to the Lord for guidance and you depend upon him.

[00:02:01] When I read this years and years ago, I used to think it was a very isolated thing and really given to meet situations in the days when the apostles wrote. Over the years, I've come to the conclusion it's a far wider application. And what I hope to do very simply this evening, with the Lord's help, is to speak about the marks of what is of God in the context of the words.

What really indicates a true work of the spirit of God? What does scripture say are the true marks of the work of the spirit of God? Then I would like to apply it to a contemporary issue, which isn't too close to us, but at least it underlines the principles again. And then to apply it to something which is very close to all others.

[00:03:09] When John wrote these words, there was a great danger facing the Christian company.

I'm not really very well versed in ecclesiastical history, but I have a few books and look at them from time to time. In fact, recently in a package of books that I got, I got a book about the covenant. I've never read the accounts of the covenant as before. But really, if you get the opportunity, get it and read it, and you'll read about people who paid dearly for what they believed to be the truth of God.

It makes me understand a little why certainly further north in Scotland and over to the West, they've retained a much closer affinity to the scriptures generally than maybe our [00:04:02] part of the world.

But truth, getting hold of truth, is a very, very costly matter. In the early days, there were some people who came on the Christian scene called Gnostics. It's simply a word means the knowing ones.

And they would say something like this, oh yes, what Christ came to reveal and what he made known to the apostles was very good.

But they were just fishermen, and they had not been through schools of learning. They hadn't the polish of man's attainments. And in this epistle, John constantly goes back, I think about seven times, you have the words, from the beginning, and he goes back to what was seen in the Son of God. And when the word we is used in many places in this epistle, it definitely means the apostolic [00:05:05] company.

We did not see the Lord.

We did not hear his voice. We did not handle him. We did not gaze upon him as they actually did. They heard him, they saw him, they handled him, and they took a long look. It wasn't a glance. You can be deceived by a glance. You can see somebody in one situation once, and it might look marvelous. But look at the whole course of their lives, and it may be a lie that they live. It was not like that with the apostles. They saw him, they heard him, they handled him, and what they said is this, that eternal life which was with the Father was manifested. And so in John's epistle, you constantly get this harking back to what was there when Christ came from the beginning, I think about seven times in the epistle.

[00:06:04] There are two things in the verses that I read to you that I think we ought to refer to before we start looking at the marks of the true work of the Spirit of God. And the first is in verse four.

It's not very obvious in our authorized version to discern that in John's epistle, he uses two words for children.

If you look at chapter two, and it's talking about the stages of growth, verse 13, the apostle writes to the babes, little children, although it's the same in English, to verse four of chapter four, it's a completely different word.

I write unto you little children, I write unto you babes, because ye have known the [00:07:03] Father.

But the word which is used in verse four for little children is a child of a family, however old he is.

I remember the last time I saw my late mother on the Isle of Wight, I went down, and as I walked in

through the door, she had a piece of paper, and she said, here you are, son, these are the things that I want getting at the shop. And in her mind, I was as I had been as a boy that I did the shopping. And despite the fact that that was something like 45 years back, in my mother's eyes, I was still one of the family. That's what it means, actually. The word little children there is not small in the stage of growth. It's one who is a member of the family, and let's underline this, that what it's saying [00:08:01] is we are children in the family of God, and we're children in the family of God by new birth.

You know more a child of God after years on the path maturing than at the point where the Holy Spirit of God seals your faith in the Lord Jesus. And that means we partake of the life and the nature of God himself, partakers of the divine nature, and that means we're able to enter into and understand things that concern the family of God.

The second thing is in the same verse, marvelous statement, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

One of the remarkable things about Christianity, and it's a thing which ought to stir and challenge us all, all the time is the fact that when our faith in the Lord Jesus was sealed by [00:09:06] the Holy Spirit of God, from that moment he dwells within us.

If you look in John 14 where the Lord began to speak of a coming day, we're reading Zechariah at the moment, an oft repeated phrase in Zechariah, the prophet of Zechariah is, in that day, and in John 14, speaks of another day, the day in which we live, the Lord says, in that day you shall know that I am in my father, and ye in me, and I in you.

And it's in that very context that he speaks of the Holy Spirit of God, and he says, ye know him, for he is with you, and shall be in you. He was with them, with the apostolic company then. But such is the effect of redemption that the Holy Spirit of God dwells within us.

[00:10:10] The type in the Old Testament could never fill it out, but after the priests were washed, rather sprinkled with blood, oil was applied to them, they were anointed with oil.

The truth of that filled out in the New Testament is, the cleansing blood of Christ so thoroughly cleanses us in the sight of God to the extent that the Holy Spirit of God can take up his residence within us.

And any believer, somebody who's recently, this day, trusted the Lord, has the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within us.

Not dependent upon men, we're dependent upon the Lord Jesus, we're dependent upon the presence and the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God within us. [00:11:03] These are important things in the context of what we're now going to look at. There are at least three marks of that which is of the Spirit of God, that which is of the spirit of truth, to use the words in the section that we read. Verse six, hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. The first one that I'd like to refer to is in verse two, hereby know ye the spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.

What exactly does that mean?

It could never be said of any one of us that we came in the flesh because we did not have any pre-incarnate existence.

[00:12:02] What it means is this, that before he came, he existed, and the scripture is very clear about him.

I was having a discussion some months ago with someone about the Lord's sonship, and he said, give me one verse, and I said I'll give you a lot of verses, but I'll give you a verse from Hebrews chapter one.

I said this must be almost a unique example in the scriptures where you have God addressing God. You can't, I've looked at it many times, and you can't put it in other words than this. Unto the Son he saith, and the he there is the God right at the very beginning, God who at sundry times, unto the Son he saith, thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.

I said to this man, is that statement there referring to him as God or as man?

[00:13:09] He said, I don't know how to answer it. I said, well there's a very simple answer, it cannot other be than that he addresses him, the Son, as God, if sonship is in his Godhead, and it must be eternal, it cannot be changed. So in fact, when it says every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is speaking about what he was before he came.

And you know, it's this that gives the warmth and character to Christianity. In chapter one, he speaks of it as that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

It wasn't an ill-defined thing, what they saw and what they heard and what they gazed upon day by day was a life that was lived in communion with the Father. [00:14:04] It was the Son with the Father.

And that's what's involved in the words. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. Of course, it means that he was a man, body, soul, and spirit, sin apart, he was a man. He came down into this world as a man, spirit, soul, and body, that he might lay down his life for you and me and glorify God.

So really what it's saying, in essence, is one of the hallmarks of a work of the spirit of God is does it magnify Christ?

Does it make much of him?

Are the impressions that are left in your heart and mind of the greatness and glory of Christ?

And just to exemplify that, look at the way in which it is used in scripture. [00:15:03] It would be difficult, I think, even in our day to find an assembly which was so disorderly as the Corinthian assembly.

And yet, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, you get some of the most plain statements about Christian position that you get anywhere. And it is, in fact, a true ministry of Christ from the beginning to the end. And particularly in that epistle, if you read it through, amongst the many things that must be retained in your mind are the many references about the fact that Christ was crucified.

Chapter one, he uses the expression, the preaching of the cross, for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us it is the power of God. The word of the cross, the preaching that has at its heart the fact that Christ was [00:16:04] crucified.

Going to chapter two, he says, I determine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

When it comes even to the matter of the immorality that they tolerated in their midst, Paul uses in a very powerful way the same truth. He says, Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

And wherever you go in the epistles, whatever the problem was, the epistles that have difficulties, in one way or another, it's Christ that is spoken about, it's his glory which is underlined, and at the end of it, you're left in your mind with impressions about his personal greatness [00:17:02] and glory.

Just take simply the Colossian epistle, one of the three epistles that speak in a very special way about his personal glory, and at the end of that catalogue in chapter one, you get that marvellous statement, in whom all fullness was pleased to dwell. At last, there was a man on earth in whom all fullness was pleased to dwell. Everything that was fitting about him was such that all fullness was pleased to dwell. And now he's gone back to the glory. Chapter two says, in him dwelleth all the fullness, Godhead bodily. And as you might remember, when Willie Kerr spoke from this podium at the beginning of these series of Saturday evening meetings, he referred to the fact that some of the statements in chapter two deal with matters which are at issue today, matters like legality and [00:18:05] intellectualism, rationalism.

They all find their answer and counter-truth in what is said about Christ personally and his glory.

So what it's actually saying, the first mark of a true work of the spirit of God is this, is Christ prominent?

Is Christ glorified?

Is Christ made much of?

The second thing comes in verse five.

They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

If you go back about sort of 30 or 40 years ago, if you talk to people on time side and [00:19:05] said to them, what is worldliness?

You probably have got an answer something like that. Well, if you were a woman, they would have said, don't wear jewelry, don't wear makeup. If you're a man, they would say, don't drink, don't smoke, don't go to the pictures. I'm not wanting to suggest that those kind of things are not worldly, but really that's not the way in which scripture speaks of them. Outwardly, things arise because of what we are inwardly.

And you cannot do better than look at what it says in 2 Timothy 3 about the marks of Christian testimony in the last days.

And it speaks positively of what will mark Christian testimony. [00:20:02] It says men will be lovers of pleasure, lovers of money, lovers of themselves.

It's really what goes on within. What is my heart set upon?

What is it that really at the end of the day is the thing that motivates me? That's the kind of thing that is in mind when the scriptures speak of worldliness. See people years ago might have told the line and say, I don't do this or I don't do that. But it's a far deeper issue in the scriptures. It's what is found within. So when it uses these words in verse 5, they are of the world, therefore speak they of the world.

And the world here, it's asking questions like this. Is its origin in the world? Is its character worldly? Are the results of it the kind of thing that would be applauded in this world? [00:21:08] And the third thing is raised in verse 6.

We are of God.

He that knoweth God, heareth us. He that is not of God, heareth us not. He that knoweth God, heareth us.

And the issue here is a very simple one. Does it tie in exactly with the apostolic world? Is it consistent with what the scripture plainly teaches? There is no doubt in scripture that when it speaks, and I'm turning to a verse in Jude here, verse 17 of the epistle of Jude, but beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. [00:22:01] And in the New Testament, in the third chapter, second Peter, at the end of that chapter, it's worth looking at. It's the most remarkable thing. I think it's the only example, as far as I know, in the whole of the scripture where New Testament writing is authenticated as being inspired scripture.

We've got in the New Testament plain statements about holy men of God who wrote and who spoke as they were moved by the spirit of God. So the New Testament clearly authenticates the Old Testament, and we should have no difficulties with that, knowing the way in which it is so often quoted by him who gave it, the Lord Jesus, when he was here. But there is a remarkable thing at the end of the third chapter of the second epistle of Peter, where Peter authenticates Paul's writings as being inspired.

[00:23:06] New Testament writings actually spoken about as being inspired by a New Testament writer. Does it conform with the scriptures? And that's a key issue.

Does it actually tie in with the scriptures?

Every work which has the hallmark of God's spirit upon it, firstly, will glorify Christ. Secondly, it will not, in its origin, or in its character, or in its results, be worldly or appeal to the world. And thirdly, it will tie in consistently with what scripture says.

Now there may be other marks, but it seems to me those are the leading things which are spoken

about when it says, try the spirits.

It is an interesting thing, if you can easily check this out if you have a Young's Concordance. [00:24:07] There are quite a number of words in the New Testament for examining or proving or trying.

The word which is used here comes from a root which means to watch. And it's a very strong word.

It's used for what is external to us.

And a very familiar example of that is in Romans 12 verse 2 where it says, that ye may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.

And all of us who try to live our lives to please the Lord know that it needs daily exercise and waiting upon the Lord to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will. [00:25:05] But it's also used of what is subjective, what we think about ourselves. 1 Corinthians 11 where it uses the words in verse 28, let a man examine himself and so let him eat.

I was reading a magazine a couple of months ago where someone was talking about many of the things which are found in the charismatic movement. And they asked one particular man whose opinion is greatly valued and he said, I'll wait a little while and I'll watch and I'll see if the results of it are of a godly nature then I'll be prepared to pass my opinion upon it.

Seems to me that was a wise thing. I think that's what it means when it says here, try the spirits. [00:26:04] It's talking about something that we all are called upon to do. Now it's the application of these which I think can come very close to our own hearts and consciences.

Let's apply it to an issue which I don't think is very close to us. In fact some while ago I remember saying to somebody, what would you do if somebody started speaking with tongues in a meeting?

Well about six months ago I was at a funeral down towards the coast and I met a lady who I hadn't seen for a good number of years.

And going back about 15 years ago I knew she was in a meeting which was a very orderly little meeting. I had met a number of brothers from there at funerals, sad isn't it that funerals seem [00:27:01] to be the only place where saints seem to be united at the moment. But I had listened to these brothers and it was obvious they were men of a godly stamp who tried to keep things on an even keel and one by one they were being taken to glory. And I said to her, not having seen her for about 15 years, you know I've been thinking about you and I've been thinking about the fact that the Lord has been taking away some of your pillars.

She says you're obviously not up to date with my present location. I said why? She said oh I speak with tongues now. Oh I said that's interesting. Do you have foreigners in your meeting? No, she says, I speak with tongues and it lifts me up.

Apply what we've been saying to the matter of speaking with tongues. Does it magnify Christ? Does it make much of him?

Well I've read and I've spoken to a number who are involved in this and it's quite apparent [00:28:06] to

me that it does a lot for the utterers, the people who actually speak in tongues, so they say, are reckoned to be sort of first class Christians and the people who don't are looked down as sort of second class because they haven't got the experience.

Is it worldly in its source or in its character?

I spoke to somebody, I've never actually witnessed anybody speaking with tongues but I was speaking to someone who I've known for a long time who was where tongues were being spoken and he said the whole setting of it was like a theatrical performance, he said.

Low lights, organ music quietly playing, continuous chanting of choruses repetitively [00:29:08] with an atmosphere being worked up and then eventually a babble as a number of people broke out in tongues.

Seems to me that that kind of thing you would have to say really is worldly. That was brought home to me recently, I visited somebody who I've known for many years. When I was talking to him he said to me, have you had the Toronto experience? I said I don't know what you're talking about. He said oh you're not sort of up to date with what is going on, I said well what is it? He said well it's being slain in the spirit and I said well what happens? He said oh someone touches you and you collapse onto the ground. You might moan, you might laugh, you might writhe about, that is the Toronto experience. [00:30:03] I said that's funny actually, somebody I was talking to me recently said had I seen a performance on the television of a hypnotist, I said no.

He said he just touched them and the people went to sleep in a moment and they laid them down on the floor.

Doesn't seem to have the hallmark of what is heavenly or spiritual but rather what is worldly but when you put it plainly against the tests of scripture where does it stand? I said to the lady that I'd known, well I'm surprised that you speak in a Christian company. She says oh I've left all those kind of things behind and when I got home I looked quickly and wrote down some marks and I said to myself well if this ever happens in any of our meetings [00:31:03] because these are the kind of questions that the scripture would prompt us to act. Do they speak according to apostolic teaching and apostolic teaching says things like this.

What is said must be edifying, it must be upbuilding, that's 1 Corinthians 14.

It must be a known language, not gibberish, it must be a known language.

There must be an interpreter present.

It's not to be a whole babble with a huge number of people participating, it's to be done in an orderly manner and there are only to be 2 or 3.

You begin things and you would say that cannot be the spirit of truth, it's the spirit of error if it does not fulfill these things.

[00:32:05] But it comes a good deal closer to home than that, that's a thing which I've never experienced and I would think it's something which is external as far as we're concerned.

Let's ask questions like this.

What about the meeting to which you go?

Is Christ made much of?

Is he prominent?

Is he glorified by what is carried on?

I ran into somebody a few months ago and he was talking about a meeting, not on Tyneside, and he said there is nothing there for the glory of God.

I said to him that's a very sweeping statement to make and I said I haven't been there for [00:33:04] 2 or 3 years but certainly when I was there last I visited 1 or 2 sisters and when I listened in their own homes to their appreciation of the Lord and the way that they clung to what was precious to him, that does not quite tie in with what you say. It's a very sweeping statement to say there is nothing there for the glory of God. But what about your assembly? What about my assembly?

What is there for the glory of God?

Secondly, are we beginning to accept things which are worldly?

The kind of things that appeal to the world?

I've been writing to a young man who quite a number of years ago used to be in the meeting [00:34:03] and I come across him from time to time and the last time I met him I prefer not to touch on controversial things really.

But he said I left the meetings because you haven't got any elders and where I go now we've got 8 elders.

And I said well if you have 8 elders who fulfil the God-given and experimental qualifications that scripture speaks about in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus chapter 1 you should thank God heartily because there are not many of them about.

Oh he says I don't think they would fill all the qualifications which are spoken of there but you've got to have some kind of government haven't you? [00:35:03] Are there things like that, the kind of things that the world approves of, the way the world operates may not have the spiritual stature, the God-given and experimental qualifications.

Is it according to scripture?

Are we intent on making sure in everything that scripture is our guide?

But it comes even closer to that, let's ask some very searching questions. How much in your life and mine is Christ glorified?

To what degree is the grace of Christ seen in us day by day?

Not just when we're together, we are together maybe 8 hours in a week. What about the places where we live and the places where we move, where we work day by day? [00:36:05] I've never actually seen this in writing so I'm not sure whether it may not be apocryphal but there is a parallel one which certainly is not apocryphal.

When one of the teachers of the last century was asked or rather when his teaching was spoken about, someone said to him, what you teach is not practical.

And he said, well I don't want you to look at me because I'm not a very good exponent of what I teach.

But if you go to Barnstaple, you'll see a man there called Robert Cleaver Chapman.

He lives what I teach.

And in fact a little while later and I've seen this in writing, some people were talking [00:37:04] about Chapman and the same person overheard them and he said, don't criticize Chapman.

We talk about heavenly places, he lives in them.

And this I've also seen written and with the artlessness of a child, you can't get round the words.

After Chapman had gone to be with the Lord at a great age, I think he was about 99, some people were preaching in the open air in Barnstaple where he'd served the Lord for a long number of years.

And amongst the crowd listening to them were a couple of lads and one of them said to the other, he used to live in our street.

And the other lad said to him, don't be silly, he's talking about Jesus. [00:38:03] He said, he used to live in our street. The lad had seen in Chapman's life the grace of Christ. So we have to ask the question, if these are the marks of a true work of God's spirit, to what degree is it true of me, to what degree is the grace of Christ seen in me in my dealings day by day wherever I go?

Am I worldly?

Not just what people see outwardly, but the whole course and character of my life.

When I'm faced with difficult choices and day by day we're faced with decisions, what are the things that govern us?

My son recently was faced with a decision, changing his job.

[00:39:05] He was headhunted as they say today. And he talked to me about it and I said to him, Jonathan, all that glitters in this world is not gold.

And certainly long before you make any decision you ought to pray about it.

You can bring to bear all the kind of things that people do when they're faced with these kind of decisions, but without the hand of God it can be a disaster really.

That's where the issue of worldliness is raised. What goes on in our hearts? What is it that we live for? What is it that really motivates us day by day? Cecil Richardson many years ago from this platform made a statement which made a lot [00:40:02] of people sit up and it was afterwards when we were talking to him he explained what he meant and he said, only God can live without an object.

Only God is self-sufficient.

Afterwards when talking he said, every man has an object. Every man has an object. People cannot live without an object. And the issue which is raised there is really what is your object and mine? And then apply this matter of, do the scriptures govern us? Do we look to God for guidance from his word in the things that face us day by day? The small decisions of life is God's word always in our hearts and in our minds. If it is so and it ought to be then it's important that we know the scriptures. [00:41:01] We know what the scriptures say. We familiarize ourselves with them. They're written on our hearts.

I ran into a man recently I hadn't seen for a number of years and my memory of the meeting that he went to was a snowy haired man in the big market years ago and he must have been well into his seventies there and in talking to him he said, my desire is to keep the meeting on an even keel and to make sure that there is a lot there for the pleasure of God.

When I met this man, I hadn't seen him about 15 years, I met him at a wedding. He says to me, we've thrown off, you know, a lot of the shackles and I said, well I'm not really understanding what you say.

He says, well, you know, maybe things that you would think are important. [00:42:02] We no longer think are important and I said, well, such as. Well he says, we have women speaking in our meeting now. I said, oh, you've crossed out one Corinthians 14 34.

No he says, I take my stand, we take our stand firmly on Galatians 3.

That sounds very good, doesn't it? We take our stand on Galatians 3.

And I said, well, what verse in Galatians 3? He says, you know, the verse that says, in Christ Jesus there is, this is verse 28 of Galatians 3, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you're all one in Christ Jesus.

I said, I don't understand what you're saying. He says, well, in Christ Jesus there's neither male nor female. [00:43:03] I said, so you can, you, you cross out one Corinthians 14. Yes, that's right, he said. Well, I said, well, by the, the same token, we can cross out all the references to the servants, can we, in the epistles. That's a logical parallel conclusion, isn't it? We can cross them out.

How Satan pulls wool over our eyes.

Our safety is to keep close to the simple statements of scripture.

Just a couple of comments and I close.

If this is right, and, and you have to look at the scriptures prayerfully and ask yourself, is it right that these are the hallmarks of a true work of the spirit of God?

Then it's not theologians only who deal with these kind of issues. [00:44:03] It's not those who have a, an extremely good knowledge of the scriptures and can challenge error when it comes along. The principles touch every one of us in life, day by day.

And the questions that it asks, is Christ made much of in my life? Is he glorified by my life, day by day?

Am I marked by worldliness? Is the word of God the kind of thing that guides my feet? They're issues that face us day by day. And maybe God would challenge our hearts and minds about it. Now less you should think, this is a very negative thing. These words are in the, in a context, if you go towards the end of, of chapter 3, last verse of chapter 3, he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him and he in him, God dwelling in us.

[00:45:01] And I just read the phrase out of verse 7, beloved, let us love one another for love is of God.

It's in the context of what is positively of God being seen in our lives. And this, this matter, again, we might challenge one another with as we come to the conclusion of our meeting.

When the Lord Jesus was here, love was seen in all its brilliance, the kind of love that call forth from heaven, the Father's approval.

And in our Christian companies, this is what we should, what we should do. Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God.