

# 1

## The Wheat and the Tares

*When the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. . . . “Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”*  
(Matt. 13:26, 30)

IT WAS ANOTHER typical day at my church office. I had prepared spiritually and mentally for a day of counseling—prayer, reflection, and meditation on some of my favorite psalms with one of my favorite praise CDs playing in the background, and a review of the files of my counselees that I would be meeting. I thought I was ready to once again enter the dark caverns of human misery and confusion, praying that the Holy Spirit would use me to point them to the Light of the World, and allow Him to lead them to safety and a God-honoring life.

The ministry of restoring people who are caught in the web of sin—bearing their burdens and thus fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)—is a task that can often exhaust even the strongest of counselors. After all, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness,

against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The apostle Paul warned us that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations [false ideologies] and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Certainly anyone who has even casually wrestled with his or her own personal life issues, much less other people’s problems, will quickly concur that sin can so tenaciously grip our hearts that nothing less than the convicting hand and power of the Almighty can pry us from its grip.

But sometimes we encounter individuals who seem to be in a category all their own—a category beyond mere spiritual ignorance or even the remnants of indwelling sin patterns. People who seem to epitomize evil. Those who seem to never be able to stop the momentum of offending those they claim to love—especially God. People who never really change, who never grow into spiritual maturity. Regardless the counsel, regardless the consequence, they continue with a seemingly resolute determination to lead a life of flagrant disregard for the commandments of God. It’s as though they enjoy their sin and do it with impunity. What makes this even more treacherous is that more often than not, their true character is typically so well disguised with the veneer of religiosity and personal charisma that even their most intimate acquaintances have great difficulty in recognizing and confronting the insincerity and hypocrisy of who they really are.

I encountered such a person that afternoon. It was an eerie, demonic sort of experience, but one that is, tragically, becoming increasingly more common in our everyone-who-goes-to-church-is-a-Christian culture. The following true story illustrates the dilemma of religious externalism. This story has only been changed for confidentiality purposes without compromising the central concepts.

### **A Grip and Grin . . . Shuck and Jive: The Stuff of Religious Hypocrisy**

As soon as I saw Tom and Lisa in the waiting room, it was obvious that Lisa was mortally wounded. I’ve seen that glazed over, hollow look

in a person's eyes hundreds of times before. I call it the "concentration camp" look: trapped, hopeless, dying.

As I introduced myself, Tom immediately jumped to his feet, smiled gregariously, shook my hand firmly, and nervously initiated some small talk. I had to deliberately turn away from him to acknowledge Lisa, who remained seated. Had I not done so, no formal greeting or introduction would have taken place. And Lisa wouldn't have noticed it. Years of being ignored had left her numb.

Tom had a deep tan, a lot of gaudy gold jewelry, permed hair, and flashy GQ-type clothes. He had what would commonly be called the "midlife crisis" look. It was obvious that he loved attention and got lots of it.

Lisa rose to her feet as I moved toward her. She mechanically stretched forth a trembling hand. Her handshake seemed to be an extension of her inner self—ice-cold and lifeless. Her appearance was that of one who was professionally groomed, right down to her long, painted acrylic fingernails. Though she was modestly dressed with an understated elegance, her natural beauty was overpowered by a thick veneer of makeup, an attempt at disguising the deep wrinkles of many years of relational pain.

We entered my office and, as I expected, Tom and Lisa chose seats as far apart from one another as possible. You could have cut the tension with a knife.

Tom was a well-known evangelist and author; Lisa was the typical "ministry widow" who stayed at home to raise their three children. I soon discovered that they had been married for eighteen years. Although none of their married life had been rich and rewarding, the last eight years had been especially miserable due to Lisa's suspicions that Tom was having an adulterous affair—or affairs. She described the strange phone calls from other men and women, Tom's extensive travel without accountability, his secret collection of pornographic videos, and his repulsion when it came to anything romantic with her.

As she related her story, I was struck with the incongruence between her plastic smile and her tears. Deep lines around her mouth and eyes betrayed years of trying to project an image that everything was "fine . . . just fine!" when in reality, she was miserable inside.

Her tears quickly degenerated into heart-wrenching sobs as she finally told me that her worst nightmares had proven to be true. Tom had recently admitted to years of illicit relationships with women, and occasionally even with men. He had lovers scattered literally all over the world.

As I listened to her story, I watched Tom closely. He nodded his head in agreement with her tragic tale but showed no emotion whatsoever. Certainly no remorse. Occasionally he would look at her, then the floor, but mostly he looked at me. It was as though he were studying my reactions to his wife's allegations. He had a disconcerting smirk on his face. A look of haughty pride. An arrogance that seemed to permeate the room like a poisonous gas. He said nothing.

I distinctly remember that old familiar feeling deep inside me as once again I was immersed in the cesspool of human iniquity. A choking, agonizing feeling combined with an almost overwhelming urge to throw up my hands in frustration and run out of the room. But, as He had so many times before, the Holy Spirit constrained and comforted me as I silently cried out for strength, courage, and wisdom. I then asked them specifically about their expectations of me and of our meeting together.

Tom finally spoke for the first time. He calmly concurred that what Lisa had said was "absolutely true." His response showed no emotion, only a duplication of Lisa's plastic smile, but without the tears. He went on to say that the reason he had come to see me was to get some help for his "addictions" and, hopefully, "to rebuild" their marriage. It was apparent by the look on Lisa's face that she didn't agree, so I asked her what she hoped for.

Lisa's answer revealed both fear and guilt. She was afraid that the marriage was "dead—so dead that the corpse was rotting and burial was long overdue." Guilt, because she didn't "trust God enough to somehow miraculously heal the marriage—raise the dead, if you will." She admitted that she didn't really know why she was there, but she was quick to add her confusion over the simultaneous love and hatred she had for her husband. Her desires to "make it work" were often overshadowed by a stubborn unwillingness to even entertain the thought, especially if she had to ever "do anything sexual with him." She was not only

afraid she couldn't physically respond, but she was also horrified at the possibility of getting AIDS.

I then asked Tom why he wanted to rebuild the marriage now, after all these years. Before he had a chance to respond, Lisa very angrily answered for him. I suddenly saw a different side to her—a side I respected. There was at least some life left in her. “I'll tell you why he wants to rebuild the marriage,” she said. “I'll tell you exactly why.” She glared at her husband. “His precious bookings are beginning to suffer because word of his immorality is leaking out. No bookings, no money . . . and no more romantic rendezvous. And then there are the publishing contracts. Those guys are getting pretty nervous with all the rumors floating around. If the marriage falls apart, as if it hasn't already, he'll lose it all. And he's afraid I'm going to blow his cover and file for divorce. So he's here to use you just like he has me all these years.”

Maintaining a condescending smile, Tom coolly replied, “Oh, don't be silly. You know as well as I do that I've had problems with my addictions for years and I've always been too busy or stubborn”—said laughingly—“to deal with them. I've been to several counselors over the past few years, and they agree that I take after any number of men in my family, especially dear old Dad who had the same types of problems. And I've been doing a lot of reading lately.” He named three or four Christian pop psychology books, then went on to say, “I can't believe how accurate they were in describing me. It's as though they've been reading my mail for years! And the good news is that I'm beginning to recover!”

He then began to summarize what he had discovered through his previous counseling experiences. “Bottom line, I've been diagnosed as having a histrionic personality disorder”—a secular psychological diagnosis that has as its essential feature pervasive and excessive emotionality and attention-seeking behaviors, commonly characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior. Tragically, his diagnosis, indicative of all psychological diagnoses, had no authority and merely provided a sophisticated method to repackage sin. He went on to say, “I have an addictive personality. And I'm also an adult child of a family of closet alcoholics; I'm severely codependent, and my drug of

choice is, and always has been, sex—with a little alcohol thrown in on the side. But I can't get enough sex! I'm a classic case of sexual addiction! I've discovered that virtually everything I do is a result of my shame-based, addictive personality, especially my tendencies toward bisexuality.”

He then turned to Lisa, and with a sarcastic tone continued, “If Lisa would be honest with you—or maybe I should say, with herself—she would have to admit that she is also a shame-based codependent, highly addicted to everything but sex. Her drugs of choice are prescription drugs, fad diets, and shopping. She's also a churchaholic, addicted to women's Bible studies and seminars. And she absolutely cannot go one day without calling her mommy and daddy to bad-mouth her husband and get a little sympathy.”

The veins in Tom's face and neck bulged as he continued to spew forth the venom of years of pent-up hatred toward his wife—and anything else that assaulted his conscience. Lisa just sat there. No tears. No rebuttal. No comment. She just stared out the window as if she were trying to mentally escape. It was as though she had left her body to go somewhere else and all that remained was a well-groomed corpse with a heartbeat.

### **The Nature of True Saving Faith . . . Questioned**

My mind was flooded with thoughts as this scenario played on. It was obvious that Tom had swallowed—hook, line, and sinker—all the clever theories that had not only provided him with the necessary psycho-jargon to abdicate any personal responsibility but had also short-circuited any recognition of the heinousness of sin. He wore his labels like a badge of honor, labels that could only describe, albeit superficially, but never restore. Yet he honestly felt he was “in recovery.”

I couldn't help but notice the blatant absence of any reference to spiritual things in Tom's recap of his “diagnosis.” Yet there he sat: a highly visible “Christian” leader, a man who was supposedly a new creature in Christ . . . called according to His purpose . . . in the process of becoming conformed to the image of Christ . . . and supposedly a man who was called by God to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But how could this be true? My mind filled with Scripture that challenged all that this man claimed to be.

I thought about Christ's parable about the wheat and the tares, and how true believers can be identified by the fruit they bear and the commandments they keep. My thoughts especially focused upon our Lord's words in Matthew 7:22–23, where He warned:

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Could this man sitting across from me be a man who had what James called a faith without works . . . a dead faith that cannot save (James 2)? Why was there no mention of sin or repentance? Why was he not even remotely sensitive to his wife's pain—not to mention God's? Why was nothing said about prayer, about the Holy Spirit and His convicting and cleansing role? Why wasn't his heart so overwhelmed with his sinfulness that he would literally cry out for forgiveness and mercy, absolutely brokenhearted over offending and mocking the One he claimed to represent?

Didn't the man have a conscience? How, in the name of heaven, could he possibly stand before an audience and extol the transforming power of Christ? How could he talk about loving a Master he so routinely disobeyed? How could a man who claimed to be a new creature in Christ live such a consistent life of unbroken and blatant sinfulness? Most Christians I know couldn't live with themselves if they had been involved in even a fraction of this man's escapades. Guilt and shame would so assault their consciences that they would eventually throw themselves at the feet of God's mercy and beg for forgiveness and cleansing. Surely this man was more than a "carnal" Christian. Far more than a "backslider." This man was seriously sinful. Something far beyond hypocrisy!

Prior to this encounter, I had wrestled with these same issues concerning others I had worked with in the past who were similar to

Tom. I had to admit that people like him never really seemed to “get better.” At best, they would rearrange their circumstances or substitute their symptoms with another set of equally sinful, though maybe more “acceptable,” behaviors. Yet the insidious nature of their sinfulness would continue to enslave them with a treacherous bondage. Could it be that those people, and this man who sat before me, were not truly regenerate—even though they claimed to be? Was it naive to accept their testimony as the final word on a subject of such eternal significance?

### **Entering the Rage**

Hoping to somehow get at these issues, I calmly asked Tom to tell me about his spiritual convictions, beginning with his conversion experience. He very quickly informed me that their problems were “psychological, not spiritual,” and consequently, my line of questioning was “inappropriate.”

Trying to be compassionate and sensitive to his ignorance, while at the same time being forthright and decisive, I attempted to succinctly expose the false dichotomy between psychological and spiritual problems (discussed in chapter 3). After I concluded my brief spiel, I proceeded with my original line of questioning.

Tom squinted his eyes, and while shaking his head he answered, “So you want me to tell you about my conversion experience? I bet you’re one of those who thinks I’m not a Christian.” He sneered. “Well . . . quite frankly, I’m highly offended! But nevertheless I’ll answer your question.

“I asked Jesus into my heart when I was fifteen years old. But being saved has nothing to do with all this. I know I’m a Christian—just a Christian with loads of baggage from a dysfunctional background! Everything from my family to the self-righteous Christian community I have had to endure all these years.” He glared at Lisa. “Why don’t you ask her if she’s a Christian?”

Ignoring his question regarding Lisa, I decided to enter into his obvious rage by answering his original question regarding his conversion experience. So I said to him, “Tom, the reason I asked you about your conversion was because of two things. First is the noticeable absence of



any spiritual remorse in your summary. I've not heard you even mention the word *sin*. Second, I have a hard time harmonizing your lifestyle—not to mention your present attitude—with that of a new creation in Christ.”

His sinister smile now expanded into a silent, open-mouth laugh. As he shook his head in dismay, he reminded me of a professional basketball player arguing with the referee after he has just been called for a flagrant foul. He was utterly dumbfounded.

He then proceeded with an epic performance worthy of an Academy Award: “Oh, this is just great! I come to see you to get some psychological help, and I get a sermon! I suppose you think I need to re-ask Jesus into my heart and bingo, all my problems will disappear!”

He put his head in his hands and mumbled a string of curses too vulgar to repeat. Then he abruptly straightened up and glared at me in defiance, awaiting my response. His outright hostility triggered in me a strong, selfish desire to retreat in order to protect myself. Instead, I chose to stand my ground, knowing that my authority base was the Word of God, not mere human opinion. This man was attacking the Truth, not me.

### **Speaking the Truth in Love**

In the power of the Spirit of God, I tried to boldly speak the truth in love: “Tom, you’ve come to me to seek counsel because your life, Lisa’s life, and your marriage are all a colossal mess. But the counsel I offer must be God’s counsel, coming directly from His Word, because in and of myself I really have nothing to offer but my own personal opinion. And frankly, opinions are like noses—everybody has one. Therefore, based upon the principles clearly set forth in Scripture, and with a sincere desire to help restore you in the spirit of gentleness, I’m suggesting that you call sin *sin* and deal with it with all your might. I’m asking you to get serious about the wretched, vile, insidious nature of your depravity. I’m asking you to at least entertain the possibility that Satan has blinded your spiritual eyes. I’m asking you to fall on your face before a Holy God in absolute brokenness over your sin and experience the refreshing, cleansing waters of forgiveness. The fact that you are so offended

by such a request convinces me even further of the appropriateness of questioning the nature of your faith. Quite honestly, your faith is dead. Sin is your master, and you refuse to admit it!”

Tom stood up in a fury. Fearing a physical altercation, I stood as well. He then proceeded to curse me with an eruption of rage I have seldom experienced in my life. I still vividly remember the spray of his saliva on my face and the violence in his eyes. I'll never forget his concluding comment: “I've spent the last three years trying to get over my feelings of guilt. I've paid counselors thousands of dollars to help me deal with my shame. And now, thanks to you, in less than thirty minutes it's all coming back!”

With that, he stormed from my office. I followed him to the outside entrance and as he opened the door I quietly said to him, “Tom, if you ever want to deal with your life, let me know. I'll do everything I can. Meanwhile I'll be praying for you. That's a promise!” Without a word or a backward glance, he walked away.

### **Reflections of Sadness**

I remember standing there at the door and watching him drive away. A deep sadness filled my heart as I reflected on what had just happened. I silently prayed that the Holy Spirit would bring great conviction to Tom's heart. My contemplation was interrupted by Lisa's broken voice behind me.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

“Yes, I'm fine. Just a little unnerved and disappointed,” I replied. “How about you?”

Tears welled up in her eyes as she stared out the doorway where her husband had just departed. She softly replied, “Well, I don't know quite how to put this, but for the first time since I can't remember when, I feel there's hope. Hope for Tom, and hope for me. Not necessarily for the marriage . . . maybe someday, I don't know. But somehow that doesn't seem all that important right now. What's important is for Tom to give his heart to Christ. And you know, I think he knows that but is too proud to admit it.”

We went back into my office where she very calmly told me about the incredibly sad and shamelessly sinful activities of her husband. The heartbreaking nature of their marriage, the hypocrisy of his “ministry,” and the dreadful state of their children’s lives once again exposed the grotesque consequences of sin.

Tom and Lisa are now divorced. Lisa and the children are doing well. Tom has dropped out of sight, and no one really knows where he is. He surfaces only occasionally. Rumors indicate his lifestyle has remained unchanged. He has no contact whatsoever with his children. But for Lisa, “the corpse of my dead marriage has finally been buried.”

### **A Victim of Cheap-Grace Evangelism**

I was intrigued with the level of defiance in the heart of a man who claimed to be called by God as an evangelist. So I asked Lisa to let me view some of Tom’s evangelistic videos. Unfortunately what I witnessed has become common fare on so-called Christian television and radio. It could be best described as a “Christian carnival”—a religious version of professional wrestling. Tom was a performer, not a preacher, and he was obviously on stage for his own glory, not God’s. His “crusade” was indicative of so many church revivals and evangelistic crusades where perspiring preachers with quivering voices and rhythmic gasps seduce naive congregations into superficial spiritual decisions. The mesmerizing crescendo and decrescendo of spiritual clichés and choreographed gestures shame the vulnerable into all sorts of things—everything from “salvation” and rededication of their lives to foreign missionary service.

Tragically many of these resolutions die with the emotions that bore them. But equally disastrous is the false assurance such actions perpetuate. Most have no sense of severity of guilt before God and stubbornly resist any plea to obey Christ. It’s as though making Jesus Lord of their life is optional. They merely want some “fire insurance” and a supernatural resource to make them healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Tom’s messages and methods were nothing more than a manifestation of his heart—a heart that had never been shattered and broken over personal sin, resulting in confession and repentance. A heart that had

never experienced the transforming power of forgiveness that energizes enduring change, validated by a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Like so many people today, Tom saw Christ as his personal blesser, not his personal Savior. In his mind, Christ existed for him; he did not exist for Christ. And that is exactly the heresy he so passionately preached.

### **The Supreme Importance of Examining Our Faith**

This whole scenario triggered in me a passionate desire to more fully understand the nature of true saving faith. I was becoming increasingly aware of the multitudes of people who name the name of Christ as their Lord and Savior, people who were supposedly called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), yet who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). People who have nothing in their lives to give evidence of such a transformation. People who are slaves to sin, whose god is their lusts. All this directs our attention to the Holy Spirit’s warning through the apostle Paul: “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5).

The Scriptures are very clear as to the litmus test of true saving faith. Finish filling in the following verses:

Matthew 7:16a: “You will know them \_\_\_\_\_.”

Romans 8:13–14: “For if you are living according to the flesh, \_\_\_\_\_; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, \_\_\_\_\_. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, \_\_\_\_\_.”

Ephesians 5:5–6: “For this you know with certainty, that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for \_\_\_\_\_.”

Titus 1:16: “They profess to know God, but \_\_\_\_\_, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.”

James 2:14, 17: “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, \_\_\_\_\_? Can that faith save him? . . . Even so \_\_\_\_\_.”

1 John 2:3–4: “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, \_\_\_\_\_. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ \_\_\_\_\_.”

1 John 3:9–10: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because \_\_\_\_\_ . By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: \_\_\_\_\_.”

1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Why Some People Never Change**

We all know people who are just like Tom. All the godly counsel in the world will never impact their lives until Christ transforms their hearts. This is why it’s a waste of time to admonish someone to become obedient to God’s Word if he or she doesn’t have the spiritual resources to do so. As we are informed by the Holy Spirit through the words of the apostle Paul: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; \_\_\_\_\_ and he cannot understand them, because \_\_\_\_\_” (1 Cor. 2:14).

In light of this, based on the Word of God, whenever an individual is seemingly a slave to sin, his or her faith should be examined. This is the necessary starting point. Evangelism must always precede exhortation.

### **A Great Man of God Expresses His Faith**

There can be no better illustration to contrast the heartbreaking story of this chapter than that of the testimony of a great man of God, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Although his words give evidence to God's transforming work of grace in his life, it was his life that validated their veracity.

In his sermon titled "Sovereignty and Salvation," he began with a penetrating description of his salvation experience:

Six years ago today, as near as possible at this very hour of the day, I was in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, but had not yet, by divine grace, been led to feel the bitterness of that bondage, and to cry out by reason of the soreness of its slavery. Seeking rest, and finding none, I stepped within the house of God, and sat there, afraid to look upward, lest I should be utterly cut off, and lest his fierce wrath should consume me. The minister rose in his pulpit, and, as I have done this morning, read this text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." I looked that moment: the grace of faith was vouchsafed to me in the self-same instant.<sup>1</sup>

Spurgeon also addressed the issue of assurance: how can we know with great certainty that we are truly in Christ? The following are excerpts regarding this crucial issue, taken from one of his sermons delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, England, sometime in the late 1800s. It is titled "The Priest Dispensed With." He wrote:

How do I know that I am a believer? Why, *by the very remarkable change* which I underwent when I believed; for when a man believes in Jesus Christ there is such a change wrought in him that he must be aware

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "Sovereignty and Salvation," *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 2 (London: Passmore and Sons, 1857), 49.

of it. As in the case of the blind man when his eyes were opened he said, One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see . . .

Brethren, we have further evidence that we believe, for *our affections are so altered*. The believer can say that the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he hated he now loves; that which gave him pleasure now causes him pain, and things which were irksome and unpleasant have now become delightful to him. Especially is there a great change in us with respect to God. We said in our hearts, "No God." Not that we dared say, "There is no God;" but we wanted to get away from him; we would have been glad to hear that there was no God. How altered are our affections! Now our greatest joy is in God, the nearer we can approach to him the better, the very sound of his name is delicious music to us. . . .

We know, also, that *we believe because though very far from perfect we love holiness and strive after purity*. You that have believed in Jesus, do you not now pant after holiness? Do you not endeavor to do that which is right, and when you are conscious that you have failed does not conscience prick you? Have you not gone on your knees in bitterness of soul and said, "My God, help me and deliver me, for I delight in thy commandments; help me to keep thy statutes?" By this change of conduct we know that we have believed in Jesus Christ. . . .

We know that we have believed in Jesus Christ because *now we have communion with God*; we are in the habit of speaking with God in prayer, and hearing the Lord speak with us when we read his word. Some of us have spoken with our Lord Jesus so often that we have grown to be near and dear friends, and whatsoever we ask in prayer he grants us. Answered prayers are sweet testimonies to faith. . . .

We know that we have believed in the Lord Jesus because we have over and above all this a secret something, indescribable to others, but well-known by ourselves, which is called in Scripture *the witness of the Holy Spirit*: for it is written, "The Spirit himself also beareth witness with our spirit that we are born of God." Do you know what it means? If you do not I cannot tell you. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." There comes stealing over the soul sometimes a peace, a joy, a perfect rest, a heavenly deliciousness, a supreme content, in which, though no voice is heard, yet are we conscious that there is rushing through our souls, like a strain of heaven's own

music, the witness of the Spirit of God. We are sure of it, as sure as we are of our own being, and by that witness we know that we are indeed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Glory of God**

Although not every denomination uses it, we would all do well to remember the foundational statement of the Westminster Catechism because it simply yet profoundly answers the crucial question, “What is the chief end of man?”—To glorify God and enjoy Him forever! This, dear friends, is the foundation of all true religion. This should be the passion of our hearts. This should rule every thought and deed of every waking moment. This must be the basis of every Christian’s life.

But apart from the transformation that takes place in the human heart when we are born again, these words will be nothing more than religious platitudes. Devoid of power. Unable to save. As the Scriptures so clearly attest: “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The supernatural genius of the gospel is its simplicity. The power to transform is in its truth. This is why the apostle Paul could so confidently extol its virtues: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

Submitting to the gospel message gives birth to a transformation that gives us true meaning in life, and gives God the glory He deserves. Therefore, for the sake of all people everywhere who are searching for answers, the apostle Peter most effectively argues for the sufficiency of Christ and the centrality of the basics found in the gospel.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped

2. C. H. Spurgeon, “The Priest Dispensed With,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 21 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1991).



the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:2–11)

If these words are hollow to you, maybe it's because you have never experienced the transforming power of Christ. Maybe you have never truly been born again. This is why it is so important to be able to answer the question posed in the next chapter: what is a Christian?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What are some of the biblical reasons why counseling is difficult work?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some problems with the way Tom responded to Lisa's accusations?

3. What are some of the emotions that Lisa was feeling? What was she thinking?
  
4. What did the counselor think was Tom's problem? Why?
  
5. What are some reasons people like to have unbiblical labels for their sinful behavior?
  
6. What was Tom really saying about his behavior by describing the cause in the way he did?

7. What is the problem with the labels Tom used for his sin?
8. What reasons did Tom give for rejecting the counselor's counsel?
9. Summarize the counselor's response to Tom's vulgarity. Do you agree with the direction the counselor took? Why or why not?
10. What is meant by the phrase "cheap grace"?

11. Why do some people never change?
12. Why is it a waste of time to admonish someone who is not really a Christian to become obedient to God's Word?
13. According to Scripture, what is the litmus test of true saving faith?
14. What do works have to do with salvation?

15. Explain why Spurgeon was convinced that he was a believer.

**Personal Response**

1. Do you agree with the counselor's diagnosis of Tom's situation?  
Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Lisa felt there was hope after Tom's final outburst and exit?
3. How were Tom's messages and methods a manifestation of his heart?



8. Explain why evangelism must precede exhortation.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What do our affections have to do with our salvation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Prove from Scripture that a true believer loves holiness and strives after purity.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What is the chief end of man? Explain in your own words what the Westminster Catechism's answer means.

12. As you reflect on the five answers Spurgeon gave to the question, "How do I know I am a believer?" can you honestly say that those five things are true in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. What are the most important lessons you learned from this chapter?