

BIRTH MARKS OF THE TWICE-BORN

I Peter 1:23

“You have been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.”

I Peter 2:1-2

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Do you have a birth mark? A birthmark is a skin marking that is present at birth. Most newborns have birthmarks on their skin at birth or shortly after, ranging from hardly noticeable to large skin anomalies. They can occur anywhere on the skin. Most birth marks are permanent, a few types fade as a child grows.

While you may or may not have a physical birth mark, if you have been born-again by the Spirit of God, you will have spiritual birth marks. An absence of spiritual birth marks is noticeable in the life of one who claims to have been born again. The lack of the evidences of the divine nature in a life are very revealing, for after birth there should be growth.

A spiritual life grows. There are persons who have come to Christ in response to His call to "come unto me" (Matthew 11:28), but they have not responded to his call to "come after me" (Mark 1:17). These are those who have an immature and incomplete understanding of what comes after salvation. Their belief has not positively affected their behavior.

Experiencing salvation is but the beginning. What comes after salvation? Paul instructed the Philippians to: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13). He is not saying, "Manufacture your own salvation!" He is not saying, "Lift your selves out of the pit of sin by your own ingenuity, be saviors of yourselves." Rather, he is saying, "God has put His life into you and now you are to work out your new life in Christ in daily activities that are characteristic of a new creature in Christ. Birth is only the beginning—evidence of new life will follow a bona fide birth. There will be spiritual birth marks.

What's after salvation? There are many places in the Scriptures we could go to find an answer to this question, but in 1 Peter 2:1-2, there are four birth marks that distinguish those who have had two births from those who have had only one birth—those who have had a spiritual birth from those who have had only a physical birth. Let us see what they are:

BIRTH MARK #1—SPIRITUAL DENUNCIATION

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking...” (v.1)

Before we can rid our lives of the sins of the old nature, we must experience the truth in chapter 1:23 which states, “You have been born again, not of corruptible seed but

incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” There must be the new birth experienced before a new life can be exhibited.

When we are born again we simultaneously receive the precious gift of salvation and enter into a new relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are kin to Christ! Our lives therefore, will reflect that kinship both by how we do not live as well as by how we do live. Verse 1 contains five birth marks of the unsaved that should be denounced by the spiritually new-born. They are: “malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.”

A. “Malice” – which is defined as “a disposition to inflict injury; ill will, or hostility.” It is holding ill will or spite against someone.

B. “Deceit” or guile – which is defined as “the act of deceiving, fraud, cheating; that which tricks or deceives; tending to deceive.” Instead we are to be honest in all our relationships and dealings.

C. “Hypocrisy” – which is play acting. A hypocrite is one who pretends. Instead be genuine.

D. “Envy” – which is “discontent excited by seeing the superiority or prosperity of another person; desirous of the possessions or advantages of another; ill-will combined with jealousy.” Instead be content.

E. “Evil speaking” – which is defined as “defamation by oral utterance; to defame.” James writes, “Speak not evil of another, brethren” (4:11). Evil speaking is injurious to three persons: the one who is speaking evil, the one to whom evil is spoken and the one about whom the evil is spoken.

Now that we are new creations in Christ Jesus, the old should be discarded and the new should be demonstrated. The opposite of malice is love; of deceit is honesty; of hypocrisy is genuineness; of envy is contentment; of slander is praise.

To continue to have the traits of the ungodly in our lives is to live duplicitously and consequently, deny by our practices our profession of Christianity. James writes, “Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (James 3:11)

Peter is saying, regarding these sins left over from our previous unchristian life, “Denounce them, discard, shed, throw away, put off, abandon, get rid of, and no longer practice this life-style!

Peter continues in the same sentence saying, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby...” As long as there are such sins as Peter lists, sapping away our spiritual appetites, there will be no spiritual progress. Therefore, Birth Mark #1, as we begin chapter 2 is: “Spiritual Denunciation.”

BIRTH MARK #2—SPIRITUAL DESIRE

“...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word...”

Before we will desire the nourishment of the food of the Word of God there must be the abandonment of anything that would steal away our appetite for it. Many Christians are undernourished because their appetite is ruined by sin.

The word “desire” in the Greek language is “potheo” which means, “To yearn, to intensely crave, a longing for.” Before there will be an intense craving for the Word of God, there must be a once for all denunciation of sins. As long as the prodigal son was satisfied with the husks that the pigs ate, he had no appetite or desire for the food on his Father’s table back home.

Sin in the life destroys the appetite for the Bread of Life. The Christian who harbors malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, evil speaking and any other sin, has no appetite left for the pure Word of God. If the appetite for the impurities of the old life surpasses the appetite for the purities of the new life; if there is no “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6), one may well wonder if there has been a spiritual birth.

There are two thoughts that we must understand relating to desire:

A. Unholy Desires Must be Suppressed.

Every sin that a child of God commits is the result of unrestrained, uncontrolled desires. Scriptural examples of that statement abound:

1. Uncontrolled desire resulted in the downfall of the human race.

Genesis 3:6 records: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Adam and Eve could have said what was later recorded in Ecclesiastes 2:10: “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure.”

2.. Uncontrolled desire brings war.

James writes in James 4:1 as follows: “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires...?”

3. Uncontrolled desires are a mark of the unsaved.

Paul describes our pre-salvation status saying, “...we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind...” (Ephesians 2:3).

William Langland wrote, “All is not safe for the soul that the stomach calls for.” Therefore, our desires must be controlled. A person shows who they are at their very core by what they desire.

B. Holy Desires Must be Satisfied.

It is one thing to control our unholy, unhealthy desires, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, however, it is quite another matter to feed the holy desires. Our stomachs can desire healthy food but we will become malnourished if we do not eat! Likewise, when our souls desire the food of

the Word of God and they are denied its life-giving sustenance, we suffer spiritual malnutrition.

We have heard it said, “We are what we eat.” Not only does that apply to the physical but it also applies to the spiritual. John writes, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 1:2). How is your spiritual health? Is your soul prospering? What are you feeding your soul?

When we are ill and go to the doctor for a physical examination, we are usually asked about our diet. God, the Great Physician, is concerned about our spiritual diet. He Who designed our souls, also designed a diet for our souls!

The Bible is like a buffet with a variety of foods. It is milk, as our text says, “desire the pure milk of the Word”; it is meat, as Hebrews 5:12, KJV says; it is honey, as Psalm 119:103 says: “How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

We need all of the Word to have a well-balanced spiritual diet. Some Christians select only the “honey” portions of the Bible. It is meant to be bread for daily use, not just cake for special occasions! We need to cultivate a taste for all of the Word of God, although some portions may be bitter medicine, it will leave us better for having “eaten” it.

A balanced diet of God’s Word will:

1. **Convict us**—Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
2. **Cleanse us**—John 15:3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”
3. **Consecrate us**—John 17:17 “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”
4. **Correct us**—2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...”
5. **Confirm us**—John 8:31 “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”
6. **Comfort us**—Psalm 119:50 “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.”

The Word of God appropriated, does not leave you as it finds you, but always improves and makes you better. Can you say with Job, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food?” (Job 23:12) If not, discipline yourself to suppress unholy desires and to satisfy holy desires because God’s Word is “More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than

much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10) and “A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul” (Proverbs 13:19).

BIRTH MARK #3—SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

“...that you may grow thereby...”

Discernment is the ability to know what to denounce and what to desire, consequently, the result is development, i.e., growth. Denouncing sin and desiring Scripture are two absolute essentials if there is to be spiritual growth.

I once saw a baby that, I was told, was over 25 years old. This was a child in a Care Unit because it had not grown. It had the head of an adult, but the body of a 1 year old infant. It was a pathetic sight! I have seen many skinny, emaciated and scrawny infants among professing Christians who have attended churches for many years but never developed spiritually.

Spiritual growth is no accident and it is not automatic! Spiritual growth, like physical or mental growth, is a process requiring certain actions, such as eliminating that which is harmful to growth, desiring and appropriating that which is conducive to growth. Therefore, actively and consistently denouncing sin, desiring and appropriating the holy diet of God’s Word results in spiritual development. There are no short-cuts to spiritual maturity—it comes with growth.

What are some of the actions we can engage in that will result in spiritual growth? A few of the many are:

A. Examine Yourself! Examine yourself to make sure you are in the family of faith. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Corinthians 13:5) If you are not born-again, you cannot grow spiritually. So, right up front, you need to “...make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

B. Expose Yourself!—Yes, that’s what I said, expose yourself—to God’s Word every day.

Exposure to God’s Word will give us knowledge of ourselves.

““For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Exposure to God’s Word will give us knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “...search the Scriptures...these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

Exposure to God’s Word consistently, results in spiritual growth.

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16).

C. Express Yourself! Express yourself to God in prayer; pour out your heart to God in

A.C.T.S. What do I mean? A.C.T.S. is an acronym for: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

“He (Jesus) spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Prayer to God and the power of God go hand in hand. No prayer, no power. Get a prayer place and start every morning there with God. Pray everywhere and every time you think about it. “The devil trembles when he sees, the weakest saint upon his knees.”

D. Extend Yourself! Make every effort to be in church for corporate worship, fellowship and the teaching and preaching of the Word. Follow the example of the early band of believers in Jerusalem: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

E. Exercise Yourself! Exert yourself in the cultivation of a holy lifestyle. “Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things” (1 Timothy 4:7, 8). Put into practice the truths of God’s Word. Expend your energies in serving God and others. “By love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

One of the problems of some churches is spiritual gluttony. Believers who attend churches where there is a solid and balanced diet of the Word of God, served from the pulpit regularly, can become spiritual couch potatoes if they do not put into practice what they hear. Heads and notebooks are packed with truth that never gets transferred into shoe leather. Spiritual development, like physical development, requires exercise!

1 Timothy 4:7-9 in The Message is as follows: “Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. You can count on this. Take it to heart. This is why we’ve thrown ourselves into this venture so totally.”

BIRTH MARK #4—SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

“...if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Have you “tasted” that the Lord is gracious? If you have it is because you have spiritual discernment. It stands to reason, therefore, that if one does not perceive, by personal experience, that the Lord is gracious, that one has no spiritual discernment.

The word “discern” means, “To see; to understand; to detect; to discriminate; to see or understand the difference; to make distinction.” (Webster) Discernment is a discipline necessary in a world in which we are faced with sin and temptation. We make decisions moment-by-moment and day-by-day in which we use discernment to attempt to separate what is right from what is wrong and what is true from what is false so that we can bring glory and honor to God.

Spiritual discernment is a priceless jewel. One of the Holy Spirit imparted faculties of those who are children of God is discernment. It cannot be obtained from a textbook or learned in school. It is an aptitude which pertains to the new nature which we receive when we become

new creations in Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This is a matter of greatest importance, for the ability to make good decisions requires discernment. King Solomon prayed, "Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9).

This spiritual birth mark is one of the most telling of all the evidences that one is truly born again. Therefore, it is important that we explore the subject further under the following three headings: The Absence of Spiritual Discernment; The Acquisition of Spiritual Discernment and The Application of Spiritual Discernment.

A. The Absence of Spiritual Discernment.

The absence of spiritual discernment is readily recognized by more mature Christians. Below are some of the symptoms:

1. The absence of spiritual discernment is evidenced by ignorance.

God said of Nineveh, "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left..." (Jonah 4:11). Or, as The Message transliteration reads, "...this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong..."

It is generally thought that the reference is to 120,000 children who were under schooling age. The Berkley Bible translates Jonah 4:11 as follows: "...who had not reached the age of choice between good and evil."

Deuteronomy 1:39 addresses the same situation regarding those who would survive to go into the Promised Land: "Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it."

Those who "cannot discern between their right hand and their left"; "childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong" or, those who "have no knowledge of good and evil," have this in common: they are ignorant, whether infants or adults! Spiritual adolescence is the sad condition that exists in many churches today. Hosea records that God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

2. The absence of spiritual discernment is evidenced by instability.

Paul counseled the Ephesian believers that they "...should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Ephesians 4:14).

Non-discerning Christians are as unstable as water! They are "tossed to and fro"; are blown about "with every wind of doctrine"; are easily swayed by glittering personalities who use "trickery", "cunning craftiness" and "deceitful plotting" to lure the immature into following them. They fall prey to cults and false doctrine because they do not have spiritual discernment.

3. The absence of spiritual discernment is evidenced by insincerity.

What the non-discerning, immature person says on Sunday does not ring true in their lives throughout the week. They sing, “Stand up for Jesus” on Sunday and then “stand in the way with sinners” on Monday!” (Psalm (1:1) Their lives are characterized by pretense and hypocrisy.

There are many Christians who have been born into God’s family but have not grown to spiritual maturity. Their lifestyle is no different from their unsaved counterparts. We have seen babies crawling around on the floor and the parents must keep their eyes on them because they have no discernment. They will put anything into their mouths—bugs or bread—because they have no discernment!

B. The Acquisition of Discernment.

1. Discernment begins with the new birth.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:12-14).

2. Discernment increases with a knowledge of the Word of God.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). As we grow in knowledge of the Word of God we understand, perceive and comprehend what the will of God is and thereby have acquired discernment.

Ezekiel 44:23 sheds light upon the process of acquiring discernment. The priests were to teach God’s people: “And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.”

Spiritual discernment is a pursuit that must always engage the mind. We discern truth from error and right from wrong by using our minds to search Scripture, to recall Scripture, and to compare everything to Scripture. Without the Bible and its objective truths there can be no discernment.

3. Discernment develops with spiritual exercise.

“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” (Hebrews 5:14). Discernment is a spiritual sense which increases with use. Discernment is not only knowing what is right and wrong, what is God’s will and what violates God’s will, but it is choosing the good over the bad and the better over the good.

C. The Application of Discernment.

1. Discernment enables us to understand the Word of God.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

When we study God's Word, discernment is needed to interpret scripture correctly, to "compare spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

2. Discernment enables us to understand the will of God for our lives.

"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). To think biblically about life, we must be willing and able to make clear distinctions between God's ways and all other ways. We must be willing to think deeply about issues and to dedicate time and effort to learning what is right and what is wrong and make decisions based upon the principles in the Word of God.

3. Discernment enables us to understand the times in which we live.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the Sadducees because they did not discern the times in which they lived: "Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:1-3).

The absence of discernment is obvious in the church today. The acquisition of discernment has never been more necessary than in our increasingly wicked culture and the times in which we live cries out for the application of discernment.

A.W. Tozer commented about discernment as follows: "Among the gifts of the Spirit scarcely one is of greater practical usefulness than the gift of discernment. This gift should be highly valued and frankly sought as being almost indispensable in these critical times. This gift will enable us to distinguish the chaff from the wheat and to divide the manifestations of the flesh from the operations of the Spirit."

Conclusion

Our physical birth marks may not be showing, however, our spiritual birthmarks should be obvious! Spiritual birthmarks are evidences that you have been born again! If there has been a spiritual birth, there will be evidential attestations, proofs, demonstrations of the new life in Jesus Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Among the birth marks of the twice born are: denunciation of sin, desire for the Word of God, development as a new person in Christ and the possession spiritual discernment. True faith in Christ will be accompanied by signs of spiritual life. Those who are spiritually alive are different than those who are not, "For every tree is known by his own fruit" (Luke 6:44).

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