

The Birthmarks of a Christian

By Mark Jarvinen

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (I John 5:1-5).

Most of us have some mark or blemish on our skin that we were born with. We call them birthmarks. In some cases, those close to us could identify us, even in our adulthood, by our unique birthmarks. By analogy, there are certain markings in the life of the Christian that identify him or her as one of God's children, as someone born into His forever family.

Today, I'd like to consider ***four birth marks of a Christian*** – four evidences that a person has been born of God. Let me hasten to add that we will not be talking about how to become a Christian, but rather, considering what a Christian looks like. Obviously, by identifying these characteristics in your own life, you will be assured that you are truly a child of God, destined for eternal life beyond the grave. This assurance provides confidence in the present and hope for the future, enabling you to walk in the victory made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ. Hopefully you'll leave here today with the assurance that comes through the Bible, the Word of God, that Jesus is your Savior.

**I. A CHRISTIAN BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST
(v. 1a).**

I John 5:1a says, ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,”*** The first of the four evidences of being born of God is the belief that Jesus is the Christ, i.e. God’s ***“Anointed One,”*** the chosen Savior of the world.

Let me clarify. Believing that Jesus is the Christ is not the same as an intellectual belief in a nameless higher power, or a cosmic force that is in charge of the universe. As high as 98% of Americans say they believe in God, but many have no real operating definition of whom this God really is. What many people actually mean when they say they believe in God is that upon looking around and considering the complexity, yet orderliness of the universe, such design presupposes a Designer, namely God. Furthermore, as intelligent beings who live in a cause and effect world, they conclude that the universe in which we live today is the culmination of a lengthy series of causes, and there had to have been a First Cause who got the ball rolling, namely God.

Belief in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world certainly includes the thought that He is the Designer and First Cause in the universe. As ***John 1:1-3*** states – ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”*** But belief in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world is so much more. Notice what ***v. 1a***

clearly specifies – ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”*** The word ***“Christ”*** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word, ***“Messiah,”*** or ***“Anointed One,”*** the one through whom God’s plan of salvation would be carried out. In other words, in order for a person to be ***“born of God,”*** he must not only believe that God exists, but that Jesus paid the penalty for his sin when he died on the cross, and broke the power of sin when He rose from the dead.

This is a belief to which the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, brings us. In ***Matthew 16:15-17***, Jesus asked His disciples, ***“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”***

Simon Peter answered, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

Jesus replied, ***“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”***

Who is Jesus to you? Have you embraced Him as your Savior from sin?

II. A CHRISTIAN LOVES OTHER CHRISTIANS AS FAMILY MEMBERS (vv. 1b-2).

Listen to John’s words in these verses:

“... and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.”

In a similar vein, Jesus said to his disciples in **John 13:34-35**-
“A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Thus the second birthmark of a Christian is his or her love for other Christians.

Now, neither Jesus nor John is limiting Christians to love only other Christians. What is being said, however, is that if you love the parent you will love the child also. In fact, you can love the parent by loving the child. As I look back on the years when my children were young, I can honestly say that when any of my children were treated special by any one in the congregation, it made me feel loved. People would come up to me and say, **“I’m praying for your kids,”** and I’d think to myself, **“Wow, how cool is that!”** It was more encouraging for me to hear that than to hear them say **“I’m praying for you.”** After all, if they were praying for my kids, in some sense they were praying for me. And so if you want to express love to God, love God’s children.

I don’t suppose my extended family is any different than yours. My Dad is 90 and healthy and all my siblings and I hope he’s with us longer. In fact, we recently celebrated his 90th in Winona, MN in mid-April. Over the years, my Dad has bequeathed various items to his children, which I’m happy to report has never been a subject of jealous rivalry, but rather of loving acceptance. My brother, my two sisters, and I have often heard my Dad say, **“I know my kids and I know they won’t fight.”** It has meant a lot to him that we four siblings are all believers and that we all get along. When the day of

my Dad's passing finally does come, I know we'll proceed with an eye toward what he valued most, a family that gets along. We'll be loving Dad by how we, his children, love each other on that day. It's the same way spiritually. Our love for God is demonstrated by the way we love one another in the family of God.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, Love other believers as members of God's family, and thirdly ...

III. CHRISTIANS OBEY GOD'S COMMANDS OUT OF LOVE FOR GOD (v. 3).

If I really love you, and if I really love God, then obedience to God's commands is not burdensome. True love is not trouble free, but neither is true love troublesome, because the one we love is worth the trouble.

When I was dating Martha and then got engaged to her, I had the feeling that there was nothing I wouldn't do for her, expecting little or nothing in return. Then we got married and what I had once been willing to do freely now became more of an expectation. She began to expect things from me just as I did from her. However, over almost 42 years of marriage, we've learned that love is more than behavior that tries to measure up to the expectations of the other. Love that becomes performance based, will surely become burdensome. On the other hand, when we step back and begin loving the other person without an expectation of a pay back wonderful things begin to happen. To love and sacrifice for another person, not out of a feeling

of duty or obligation, but out of a free choice, makes love less burdensome. Before long, feelings catch up with your actions and love is renewed. Love for God is a response to the love He has shown us, in which we love God because of who He is not just based upon a feeling or on what He's done for me lately.

Belief in Christ, love for other Christians, obedience to God's commands, and finally, the fourth birthmark is ...

IV. CHRISTIANS OVERCOME IN LIFE AND IN DEATH (vv. 4-5).

Verses 4-5 state:

"... for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

The true Christian overcomes the world – i.e. the world system that is anti-God. Overcoming the world means not caving in to every temptation that comes our way, and no longer being ruled by sin. It does not mean we will never stumble and fall, and certainly all Christians stand in need of daily forgiveness, but it means that because of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection in power three days later, establishing His victory over sin, death, and the powers of evil, we who know Christ by faith, have a basis for standing strong in the victory that Jesus won for us through his death and resurrection.

But having said this, it also occurs to me that no person overcomes adversity in life who hasn't looked death square in the eye

and said, ***“I’m not afraid of you.”*** All the riches, recognition, and relationships this life affords will end with our physical death. The key is to understand that death has lost its sting because of Christ’s death and resurrection. We who believe in Christ share in his victory – a victory in life, and a victory over death. As Paul writes in

1 Corinthians 15:54b-57 –

“Death has been swallowed up in victory. `Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ... thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Maybe you feel like anything but a winner in the Christian life. Talk of victory makes you feel vaguely guilty to downright uncomfortable. With that in mind ...

Watchman Nee, a 20th century Chinese church leader, tells about a new Christian who came in deep distress to see him. The new convert said, ***“No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply can’t seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.”***

Nee said, ***“Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. But out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess all the time, he throws food around, he soils his diapers, he’s a mess. But who is going to inherit my estate? Not my dog; but my son. My son is my heir.”***

The birthmarks of a Christian are not perfect behaviors, but the telltale signs that love for God and other Christians, obedience to His

commands, and a victory that overcomes the world, are operative in a person's life, made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. ***“This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).*** This is a secure status given to us by grace and laid hold of by faith in our resurrected Lord. ***A-men.***