

PURE VICTORY

(I John 3:1-10)

By Jon Quinn

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The United States Treasury Department has the responsibility and authority not only to print our money, but also to track down and arrest counterfeiters. Agents must be trained to be able to tell the difference between a real and a counterfeit bill. How is this accomplished?

They spend hours examining real money! They get to know its design, size, thickness, color and texture. After becoming thoroughly familiar with the genuine article, it becomes easier to spot a forgery.

How does one tell the difference between someone who is genuine in his faith from someone who is pretending? Is it enough for a person simply to say he is real? Does it necessarily mean that a person is insincere if he claims to be a Christian but commits a sin?

The Scriptures address this very point. It tells us that there are counterfeit Christians; not everyone who claims to be is. But it also tells us that there are things to look for that will help the faithful man or woman of God to know the difference. This procedure is remarkably similar to the one used by the Treasury department;

a) First, get to know the characteristics of a true Christian. This can be learned by looking at the descriptions of Christians in the Bible.

b) Second, know the characteristics of someone who is not a true Christian. This, too, can be learned from the pages of Scripture.

c) Third, If you meet a person who fits the Biblical description of a Christian, then you know what you have. If he or she does not fit the Bible description, then you know what you have as well.

The apostle John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave instructions concerning this. He said, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this is the reason that the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He has appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who

sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." (I JOHN 3:1-10).

## PURITY AND HOPE

"And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (I JOHN 3:3). We believe that Jesus is coming again. We want to be in that number who, upon being newly clothed with immortality, rise to meet Jesus in the air, sharing His glorified state (vs 1,2; cf. I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18). This hope is a powerful motivator. A living hope such as this gives us strength and determination to overcome sin and live righteously. Years before, Paul had affirmed the concept of our hope helping to secure our salvation; "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for that which he sees? But if we hope for that which we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." and "Now may the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (ROMANS 8:24,25; 15:13).

One ramification of this is that though someone claims to be a Christian, if he is not trying to purify himself and live righteously then this hope which Christians have must be missing. Purity of life on the outside is one of the results of a living hope within.

## A MATTER OF PRACTICE

"Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous just as He is righteous; and the one who practices sin is of the devil..." (I JOHN 3:7,8a). First, it is vitally important to understand that the King James Version rendition of this passage obscures its meaning. It makes it appear that John is saying that the Christian never sins ever... for the rest of his life. That is not what John is saying at all! In fact, John had earlier said that if anyone says that he has no sins is a liar! (1:6-10).

The point here is that righteous people practice righteousness while lawless people practice unrighteousness. Sin is the exception in the life of the righteous. It is there, but not as a habitual thing. His manner of living is pure and righteous and his sins are lapses rather than typical behavior. What does the righteous person do when he "misses the mark?" He follows the Lord's instructions (see I JOHN 1:6-10 again).

This answers some of the questions asked at the beginning of the article. How do you tell the counterfeit from the genuine Christian? Look at their lifestyles as they compare with what the Bible says they ought to be. It isn't what we think looks good that determines righteousness, but what God's word says. Isn't that what Jesus said? "So then, you shall know them by their fruits." and "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (MATTHEW 7:20; JOHN 7:24).

## WHY JESUS APPEARED

""And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin... The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (I JOHN 3: 5,8). The practice of sin shows that our goals and priorities are the exact opposite of Jesus'. Jesus came to take away sins so His disciples certainly will not be busy practicing sin. Sin is the devil's work, and Jesus came to destroy the devil's works so how is it that a disciple of Jesus would be involved in habitually promoting what Jesus came to destroy? What does this say about:

- a) the greedy money begging evangelist
- b) the immoral evangelist
- c) the hypocritical church member
- d) the worldly church member
- e) the worldly non church-goer who  
claims to "at least" believe in God

## BORN OF GOD

"No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." (I JOHN 3:9). The one in whom God's seed dwells cannot live a life of the practice of sin. The seed is the word of God (LUKE 8:11). It is by the planting of this seed in our hearts that we are born again. This occurs when the seed bears fruit by bringing us to obey; "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God." (I PETER 1:22,23). James, the brother of the Lord, put it this way: "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." (JAMES 1:21,22).

If we truly believe that our Lord will one day appear and we'll be as He is; if our hope is truly fixed on Him; if we believe that He came to take away sins and destroy the works of the devil; if we

believe that in Jesus there is no sin; if we are born of God and His seed abides in us, then we shall continue to live our lives practicing the righteousness of the Lord and disdaining the practice of lawlessness. We are free in Christ, but we are not lawless (I CORINTHIANS 9:21; JAMES 1:25).

"And everyone who has this hope fixed upon Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."  
1 John 3:1

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