

Seven-Point Checklist to See If I've Really Repented or Am I Just Kidding Myself

The Christian life is the beginning of a brand new life, a whole new identity, a *new me*, in whom God will replace selfishness and addictions with *love* and *responsibility* for others, and *freedom* from bondages and slavery to sin. Obedience will become as natural, spontaneous, and joyful as rebellion and disobedience used to be. This is God's *promise*, the reward of *true faith* and the *gift* of the Holy Spirit through what Jesus Christ has done by His death and resurrection (Gal. 3:16-22).

But true faith in Christ *begins* with *true repentance*. The New Testament (Greek) word for repentance means "a change of mind." Before I repented I loved a sinful lifestyle; but when I saw the horror of my rebellion against God, I changed my *attitude* about sin from loving it to *hating* it, and came running to Christ, believing that His death and resurrection can transform me from darkness to Light (Mat. 3:1-10, 2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Transformation can be a lengthy process that *begins with faith* and *continues with patience* while God strengthens and develops my faith. Faith is seeing things from *God's view* instead of man's (Heb. 11:1). This requires *revelation* (understanding, insight) from the Holy Spirit as I continue to *seek Him* through His Word. Spiritual insight (revelation) gradually replaces my old, fleshly (carnal, selfish) way of thinking and the resulting bad behavior until more and more I find myself "walking after the Spirit" and not "after the flesh" (Rom. 8:4, Gal. 5:16).

Many so-called believers wonder why they are not changing, why sin and bondage still hang on, not understanding that their *lifestyle* shows they have not *truly repented!* Or, having once repented, slipped back into their old lifestyle like the seed that was sown on stony ground and because of *offenses* and *trials*, *gave up* before the seed had a chance to grow into a fruit-bearing plant (Mt. 13:20-21, John 15:1-6). Or like a dog that "returns to his own vomit" and a pig that "having washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:22).

So I've listed seven key areas which can help us check out our lifestyle to see if it indicates true repentance. If not, there's no use attempting to "grow in grace" through the revelation of the Holy Spirit until I humble myself and do what I must do before I can expect God to do what only *He* can do.

1. What do I put into my mind on a regular, daily basis?

The input I get from TV, movies, music, rap, internet, books, magazines, pictures, and video games *determines who I am*. All this input goes from the mind to the heart where it forms my character.

Some believe that what they listen to does not affect their behavior. If what I listened to or watched remained only in my *conscious* mind, that could be true. But the mind is the doorway to the heart, my *subconscious*. Everything in my mind goes into my heart, whether I want it to or not. And once there, it's beyond my *conscious* control and instead, *begins to control me*.

For it begins a slow process of incubation or fermentation, like chemicals reacting with each other. All my desires, resentments, emotional wounds, feelings of failure or anger, fears, envy or jealousy, and attitudes toward parents, authority figures (cops), political leaders, bad and good people—my whole emotional makeup *interacts* with the words and pictures that entered my mind and took root permanently in my heart.

If I listened to words that reflect God's love and forgiveness through Christ, His mercy and truth, they will bring inner healing, peace, strength, and wisdom to influence others for good.

However, if down in my heart are messages which *agree with* my fears, resentments, envy, and pride, it will eat away the foundation of my character like termites eating the framework of a house. Jesus compared it to a house built on sand which collapses in a flooding storm. Without realizing it, I will slowly take on the nature of what I feed my mind with, like planted seeds which some day will bear fruit in some form, whether in attitudes or acts. (Mt. 7:24-27, Gal. 6:7-9)

Behavior springs from our hearts, not our minds, which explains why we can't change by trying mentally. It takes a *transformed heart*, but it *begins* with the renewing of our minds, which sows its word-seeds into the heart. The word *transformed* in Romans 12:2 comes from the Greek word for *metamorphosis*. The best example is a caterpillar which has *died* in its cocoon. If it has eaten the right food during its lifetime, the DNA will cause it to *metamorphose* into a butterfly. (Same word in Mt. 17:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18.)

This is a picture God has given us of how we're *transformed* as we "feed" on Christ and His Word. The result is the *fruit of the Spirit*—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, and self-control (Mt. 4:4, Jn. 6:50f, Rom. 10:17, Gal. 5:22).

This is how grace works: "For sin shall not have dominion [control] over you, for you are not under law [will-power] but under grace [His power]." "So then it is not of him who wills [will-

power], nor of him who runs [self-effort], but of God who shows mercy." (Rom. 6:14; 9:16)

How could anything be easier? And it begins with falling in love with Jesus and His Word, and *staying* there—remaining, abiding, living in *Him*, a *lifestyle!* (John 15, Col. 3:1-6, 1 John 2:15-17, Heb. 12:1f, Pr. 4:23)

2. Who are my friends? Where do I fellowship?

It's easy to determine my future by the friends I hang with. My friends give me a picture of *where my heart* is, because fellowship is a *heart*-thing. It's not the same as the people I must work with at my job but don't *fellowship* with heart-to-heart. *The influence of my friends gradually makes me like them*.

"Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character" (1 Cor. 15:33 Amplified Bible).

Since this process takes place down in my heart, below my consciousness, it affects me without my knowing what's going on, as described in point one. My friends will either make me or break me. (Psalm 1, Proverbs 22:24-25, James 4:4)

3. What is my attitude toward sex and marriage?

Marriage is the single most important unit of relationship because it is designed for the highest level of intimacy and transparency. Intimacy is based on transparency, which is to be so open and honest about myself toward another person that I become completely vulnerable. Which means open to being hurt or rejected because of what I've shared of myself.

When we unconditionally "cover" (love, forgive, bear with, overlook faults) each other after exposing our darkest secrets, weaknesses, and failures, we provide each other with the highest degree of security and acceptance possible. Marriage is the covenant designed especially for this kind of unconditional commitment to each other.

Sex is more than physical pleasure; it is the physical act of *intimacy*. When it is used for pleasure only, outside of marriage, it begins to erode and eat away the heart of relationship, because it turns the beauty of intimacy into hypocrisy. Thus it builds a foundation for emotional pain, insecurity, and a vicious cycle of bad relationships and more emotional pain.

But even worse, since it violates one of the strongest and most frequent commands in the Bible, it transfers me from God's protection to Satan's, exposing me to a long list of bad things that can happen. This is why even sex for "love and commitment" outside of

marriage still exposes me to Satan's "care," because it is telling God His rules don't matter and that I can do just as well without them.

It is the mistake Adam made in the Garden, which led to the fall of man (Gen. 3). And when I do it with the "grace of God" in mind because "He knows I'm only human," I change "the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our . . . Lord" (Jude 4 NIV).

If I'm disobedient in this area, restoration begins with deep repentance leading to a change in behavior. In cases of a long term relationship ("common law marriage") but for some reason cannot make it legal through a marriage license, especially when there are children involved belonging to both the mother and father, it is important to seek wisdom from my pastor and take whatever steps he recommends, assuming He is a genuine man of God committed to God's Word.

(Job 31:1-4, 9-12, Prov. 2:16-19; 6:23-25; ch. 7; 22:14, Eccl. 7:26, 1 Cor. 6:9; 10:8, Gal. 5:19, Eph. 5:5, Heb. 13:4, Rev. 21:8)

4. What is my relationship with God's family, His Church?

My relationship to God is like a marriage. Whether I'm physically married or not, my "marriage" to God is developed through my relationship with His family. *There's no other way to test my private devotions and time with Him*, because when I'm alone I can easily adapt His Word to my own conclusions and advantages.

God's plan and purpose are through *people*; otherwise there's no point in creating us. To ignore His family or to give it half-hearted attention is to miss the entire point of being saved (Eph. 3:10). It is to make heaven an *escape* plan from suffering the way the Jews wanted to make Jesus King without following Him as His disciples, which means "taught ones." (John 6:15).

All the benefits of intimacy and transparency in marriage can be experienced through serious life-time commitment to His people, His Church, which means finding a local body of believers who meet regularly for worship, instruction, and fellowship.

My spiritual growth and maturity take place through interaction with these "brothers and sisters in Christ." And according to Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, it is *virtually impossible to mature spiritually without regular fellowship with them*.

Lack of serious commitment to and involvement with these believers tells me I'm not that serious about God and only want deliverance from my problems because of the bad

consequences. (Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 1:10, 22-23; 2:14-16, 21-22; 3:10, 17-19; 4:1-16; 5:30-33; 6:18)

5. What is my attitude and response to the correction process?

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:5b,6).

God uses many different sources to correct us: His first line of correction is His Word in our personal devotions, and through His family, the local church. When we take time to listen to God as we study His Word and then humble ourselves to receive instruction and correction through His family, we generally spare ourselves the second line of correction—from those outside His family—jail, “accidents,” some sicknesses (1 Cor. 11:29-32), enemies, and those who treat us hatefully (Prov. 16:7, 17:10-11; 19:19, 23).

To react with anger, disgust, or resentment toward those who try to correct us, even when it’s an enemy, family member, or someone who treats us like dirt, is to *despise the chastening of the Lord*. And to do that is to expose ourselves to even worse affliction and open ourselves to Satan all the more. But “the ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise” (Pr. 15:31; See also Ps. 32, 38, 51, Pr. 15:32-33, Jer. 48:11-12, Lam. 3:22-42, Mat. 11:28-30, Jam. 4:6-10, Heb. 12:5-11, Rev. 3:19)

6. Do I live with resentment, unforgiveness, and bitterness?

No matter how badly I have been hurt by someone, from sexual and physical abuse to abandonment and rejection by family or someone close to me, the only way to heal inside is to forgive. In many cases it is humanly impossible without a miracle from God. If I allow the wound to fester or to repress it into my subconscious and try to forget it, it will work secretly inside my body to produce all sorts of trouble, from physical disease to relationship stress and pain.

The Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book says “resentment destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease. . . . When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically.” (p. 64)

Resentment is unforgiveness, and Jesus said if we don’t forgive others, God will not forgive us (Mark 11:26). And if He doesn’t forgive us, His mercy and grace can’t reach us, leaving us in deep, deep trouble and at the “mercy” of Satan. (See Proverbs 24:17-18, Matthew 6:12-15; 18:21-35, Luke 6:37, Rom.

12:18-21, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Colossians 3:13, James 2:12-13)

7. Have I quit the bad habits I could stop if I really made up my mind (repented)?

God will not do supernaturally for me what He knows I can do through simple obedience to His Word. “For if we sin willfully after we received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:2-7)

To expect God to deliver me from addictions I can’t overcome without His power when I’m disobedient in areas I do have control over is the height of self-deception and hypocrisy. It is to “use [my] liberty as an opportunity for the flesh” instead of its true purpose, to “serve one another” in love (Gal. 5:13, 1 Cor. 8).

Another area is cussing and carrying on like a sinner while posing as a saint. Although some habits are hard to break, it could indicate an unchanged heart or failure to get serious with God. Plus we become a stumbling block to others around us. Jesus said it would be better for one to be drowned in the sea than for him to offend one of the “little ones” (baby Christians) around him. (Lu. 17:2). (also Isaiah 33:14, Malachi 2:8, Mat. 13:41; 23:13-15; 24:51, Mark 9:42-44,)

Some addictions are so deeply imbedded only God can bring deliverance. But for strength to overcome “where sin abound(s)” I need the grace “that much more abound(s)” (Rom. 5:20)

Romans 6 and 7 explain how this grace works: It is based on the “finished work of Christ” which *includes me* in His death and resurrection. But it becomes effective when I *yield my “members as instruments of righteousness unto God,” not sin!*. “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Rom. 6:13-14)

Romans 7 is the most incredible illumination of liberty through grace in the Bible. But the entire chapter is based on my *total hatred of sin* because “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (v.22). This love of God’s law and my constantly “yielding” or “presenting” myself to God in obedience to His law is one of the factors that enables me to really *understand* that I’m truly “united [planted] together in the likeness of His death” (6:5).

Because when I’ve seriously done this and the addiction or bondage still hangs on, then I experience an even deeper revelation of my “body of death” (7:24). an awesome sense of the power of God to deliver me. Now I can wait *expectantly* for Him, “being fully convinced that what He had promised He [is] also able to perform” (4:21).

This is how grace brings deliverance through our faith in Christ. But true faith must *know* I’m “as good as dead” (4:19) so I can *know* it now totally depends on grace (4:16). *As long as I’m “yielding” to sin in areas I know I could stop if I really hated it and wanted to stop, true faith is not possible* and I need to get serious enough with God and allow His law to reveal the “exceedingly sinful” condition of my heart (3:19-20; 7:13) so His Spirit might begin this awesome work of grace in me.

Some *could* quit tobacco or alcohol if they really came to hate the habit and understood the damage it did to the Body of Christ (not to mention their own bodies, God’s temple, 1 Cor. 3:17; 8:11-13). But they *love it* and justify themselves with various excuses. One of the main ones is, *I can quit any time*. If they *can* but *don’t*, how can they expect grace to work when they’re not *yielding* their members to God in areas they *do* have control over? The same may be true of gluttonous eating, which also leads to a slew of health problems. Or of marijuana and “casual” use of drugs.

When we *willfully* tamper with sin and *excuse ourselves*, we move away from God’s protection and power to deliver us. *Satan lures us by our careless “freedom” to indulge in smaller sins before he entraps us with the ones that captivate and finally destroy us.* (See Luke 12:47-48, Romans 7:22, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:17-5:14, James 4:17, 1 John 3:6,9; 5:18)

There is a way to *walk in the Spirit* so we can gain victory over the weakness of our flesh, but a *repentant lifestyle must* provide the foundation.

Paul told the believers in the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse that because they were walking obediently in faith and love, he would pray that they would receive *wisdom, understanding, and knowledge* so they’d grow stronger. God will not give us any more until we have been faithful with what He’s already given us, and will even remove what we have if we aren’t faithful with it! (Mat. 25:14-30, Lu. 19:11-27)

Romans 3 through 8 (along with Galatians 2 through 5) explain in detail what it means to walk in the Spirit.

Chapter 3 explains the purpose of God’s laws—to reveal the horrible condition of our hearts and show us how desperately we need God.

Chapter 4 shows us how to change from trying to *earn* God’s favor through hard work, to *expecting* it as an act of real faith that talks about things that don’t exist as though they do—because faith will make it a reality in Christ.

Chapter 5 gives us two different identities—the old one from our *natural* birth in Adam, and our new one through our *spiritual* birth in Christ.

Chapter 6 explains the meaning of our death in Christ’s death and our resurrection with Him to a life of obedience from the heart..

Chapter 7 covers the awful conflict that wars between the flesh and spirit and how God’s holy laws of righteousness produce the helplessness and “death” in us that enable us to resurrect—to *metamorphose* like a butterfly from its cocoon of death into our new identity in Christ.

Chapter 8 describes that resurrection life—walking in the Spirit and the powerful benefits of allowing Him to take control of our lives.

But until I am *willing* to walk in the light of the above 7 points, indicating a life of repentance, hatred of sin, and genuine love of God, all the rich and deep meaning of these chapters will mean nothing to me. It will be as though I’m blind to it. God says it’s the *blindness of my heart* because I’m not walking in the truth I already know (Mat. 13:12).

However, if I surrender myself to God in these areas, “the Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” for me (Malachi 4:2). Little by little (Ex. 23:30), through faith and *patience* (Heb. 6:12), the “law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus” will make “me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). And I’ll experience the resurrection power of His *amazing grace* to deliver me “from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Scriptures from NKJV
Victor Dodswright Dec. 2006
www.heartsup.org