

# Spirit-Filled or Self-Deceived?

## *Letting God Determine the Condition of a Man's Soul*

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*"Don't let your current profession rest on past passions."- Calvin*

After spending nearly twenty years as a self-deceived, professing believer, the doctrine of assurance (how one can have confidence that his faith in Christ is real) has become near and dear to my heart. In fact, it was a study just like the one below that the Lord used to shine His marvelous light into my dark heart, causing rebirth. Truly, outside of a study like this on the doctrine of assurance, I was one who would have been shocked with penetrating clarity at the judgment, when I said "Lord! Lord!", standing with unwavering confidence that I was going to heaven, only to hear from Jesus, to paraphrase, "You may claim you know me but I have never known you. Depart from me, you who live as if My Law doesn't matter" (Matt 7:21–24). What a tragic day that would have been!

Since the Lord saved me in 2007, I have always loved how the Scriptures give us clear categories to "know" where a person stands with Christ (1 John 3:10; 5:13). A simple and yet comprehensive way to approach this discussion of assurance—how a person knows whether he is Spirit-filled or self-deceived—is to bring it back to one fundamental question: what in a person's life can be produced *only* by the Spirit of God and cannot be achieved by mere human effort? Said another, more personal, way—when I take an inventory of my life, what can the natural man produce that has a resemblance of being "Christian" without the Spirit? And by contrast, what can I point to in my life that could be produced only if I have the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in my life?

Some may say, "*Why do a study like this?*" Well ...

### **Two Reasons a Study Like This Is So Important**

#### **1. You Will Be Able To Ground Your Own Assurance of Salvation in Clear Biblical Categories**

- The Result: This will give you great confidence when the evil one tempts you to despair (Rev 12:10).
- The Result: It will encourage your faith when your own flesh is failing you and you are questioning where you stand (1 John 4:13–21).
- The Result: This will protect you from being one of the many who, on the last day, say "Lord! Lord!" but find out after it's too late they were self-deceived (Matt 7:21–24).
- The Result: You will obey Paul's command to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:5 when he says "test yourselves ... examine yourselves!"
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## **2. You Will Be Able To Help Others Ground Their Assurance of Salvation in Clear Biblical Categories**

- The Result: You can help other struggling Christians see that they can and should have assurance of their salvation (1 John 5:13).
- The Result: You can be God's instrument to help remove unbiblical assurance from professing Christians who may be self-deceived (2 Cor 5:7–18).
- The Result: You will never be guilty of granting false assurance to a professing Christian who is lost (Jer 6:14).

Now, it is true, that the natural man can keep up appearances that he is a “Christian” with a “form of godliness” while at the same time “den[ying] ... [the Spirit's] power” in his life (2 Tim 3:5–7).

Some examples include:

- Regular church attendance (Jude 1:4)
- Active service in the church (Isa 29:13)
- Regular Bible reading (Jas 1:22)
- Attentive sermon listening (Heb 3–4)
- Compassion for hurting people (Luke 23:28)
- Visible morality (Luke 18:1–10)
- Bold profession they know Christ (Titus 1:16)
- Teaching others the Scriptures (1 Tim 1:7)
- Initial and passionate response to the gospel message (Matt 13:20–21)
- Desire to not go to hell (John 3:1–21)
- Accurate hermeneutics (1 Cor 2:6–17)
- Confession of sin (Matt 27:3)
- Battles with the flesh (Rom 7:13–25; Phil 3:1–7)

... plus a number of other areas I will reflect upon below that the natural man can produce without the Spirit. Now, many of these areas will also show up in a Spirit-filled person's life as the marks of a heart that has been transformed by grace. They are just not the ultimate ways God tells us to look to as a basis to know whether a person is truly born again.

This is why a discussion on this matter needs to be pushed back to what can be produced only by the supernatural work of the Spirit of God in a person's life. Because then, and only then, we are obeying Jesus and looking at Spirit-produced fruit in order to know who is truly a believer (Matt 7:13–23). In turn, when we approach this topic from God's perspective, it will protect us from all man-centered assumptions and conclusions about how one can know where a person truly stands with his Creator. If we don't let the Word of God define what a Christian truly is, we will be left to human reasoning, mere speculation, confident assertions, and emotional experiences, which all point to us leaning on our own understanding and being wise in our own eyes, rather than letting the voice of God determine spiritual matters (Prov 3:5–8).

**The Bible typically reflects this concept of Spirit-filled or self-deceived in a variety of ways:**

- Spirit-filled Man vs. Natural Man (1 Cor 1:18–2:14; John 14–16)
- True Worship vs. False Worship (Isa 66:1–5)
- Light vs. Darkness (Eph 5:6–14)
- Children of God vs. Children of Satan (John 8; 1 John 3:10)
- Wheat vs. Tares (Matt 13:23–30)
- Sheep vs. Goats (Matt 25:31–46)
- Fruitful vs. Fruitless (Ps 1; Matt 7:15–20)
- Broad Way vs. Narrow Way (Matt 7:13–21)
- Kingdom Citizens vs. Earthly Citizens (Matt 5; John 17:16; Phil 3:17–21)
- Earthly vs. Heavenly (Jas 3:13–18)
- Belief vs. Unbelief (John 8:30–45; 12:37–44)

Some may say, “What if a person is absolutely confident they ‘know the Lord’—is a study like this still important?” The Bible teaches all over that a person's own confidence about his standing before God, if it has no fruit to affirm it's real, holds absolutely zero eternal weight. In fact, that Bible says the opposite: if a person has a bold profession with great confidence about their spiritual condition, and yet their conduct does not match their profession by way of spiritual fruit, then they are not Spirit-filled but rather self-deceived! Notice:

*Mark 7:6*

- *And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.’”*

*Titus 1:16*

- *<sup>16</sup>They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.*

## Matthew 7:21–24

- <sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.
  - <sup>22</sup>“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?’
  - <sup>23</sup>“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’
  - <sup>24</sup>“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Lastly, my goal in this is not to remove assurance from the *humble and striving*, but to strengthen and encourage them. Sometimes it is those who *should be* worried the least about whether there are Spirit-filled or self-deceived end up most worried because they are so sensitive to the Word of God and their ongoing battle with sin. My prayer is that this study encourages the *troubled who are striving* to greater usefulness to Christ and confidence in their standing with God. But to the seemingly *self-deceived and stubborn*—while only God knows the heart—I pray this study will result in removing assurance from them, leading to repentance unto either salvation or renewed usefulness to Christ.

This will be the outline for this study:

### ***Six Relationships That Will Change If a Person Is Spirit-Filled and Not Self-Deceived***

- 1. Relationship with Christ and the Gospel***
- 2. Relationship with the Word and Obedience***
- 3. Relationship with Sin and Temptation***
- 4. Relationship with the World and Worldliness***
- 5. Relationship with God’s People and the Church***
- 6. Relationship with God’s Glory and Worship***

Why use the idea of *relationship* some may ask?

I say *relationship* because in each of these six areas everyone has a relationship with them prior to their conversion. The problem was that the relationships were fundamentally broken and flawed, ranging from hostility and oppression, to indifference and neglect. Nevertheless, the relationship was there, just broken, damaged, hostile, or nonexistent.

- With Christ and the gospel—It was one of hostility, or passivity. Either way, our relationship to Him was as Judge, not Master!
- With the Word and obedience—It was one of indifference or stubbornness, resulting in a relationship of either passive or aggressive rejection!
- With sin and temptation—It was one of slavery and bondage, resulting in a love for sin, and a yielding to satisfy our cravings.

- With the world and worldliness—It was one of friendship and common values, resulting in a commitment to what the world loves and worships.
- With God's people and the church—It was one who was an outsider, even if an attender, resulting in friction, discomfort, and even aggressive hostility toward God's people.

As you can see, every person, even without Christ, had a relationship with these six areas; it was just fundamentally flawed and broken prior to the Spirit indwelling one's life. And even when a believer sins in these six areas, sadly, sometimes we end up looking like the natural man, as we suppress the Spirit's work in our lives (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19), resulting in a lack of assurance before God (1 John 5:18–24).

Each grouping below will come with a set of contrasting ideas:

- What the natural man can produce in a certain area, set right beside
- What only the Spirit can produce in that same area

### ***Six Relationships That Will Change If a Person Is Spirit-Filled and Not Self-Deceived***

#### **1. Relationship with Christ and the Gospel Will Change**

- **Half Gospel vs. Whole Gospel**
  - a. The natural man can and will often accept the good news of the gospel while failing to believe the bad news, resulting in no true repentance and faith (Prov 28:13; John 6).
  - b. Only the Spirit can make a man hear the bad news as good news and actually change through repentance and faith in the gospel (Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; John 9:39–40; 16:8; Acts 20:21; 16:8; Rom 10:1–13).
- **Fire Insurance vs. Love for Christ**
  - a. The natural man does not want to go to hell and suffer, so he'll take Christ as long as he can keep his sin (John 3:1–15).
  - b. Only the Spirit can produce a love for Christ that sees Him as more precious than anything in a person's life (John 6:68; Rom 5:5; 1 Peter 2:4–8).
- **Loving the Idea of Christ vs. Loving the Requirements of Christ**
  - a. The natural man will love the idea of Christ for His benefits, but will chafe at His requirements (Mark 8:34–38; Luke 9:24–27; 12–14; John 3–6; 8; 12).
  - b. Only the Spirit can produce in a person a love for Christ that results in loving His requirements (Luke 9:24, 27; 14; John 12:48).

#### **2. Relationship with The Word and Obedience**

- **Reading the Word vs. Loving the Word**

- a. The natural man can read the Bible and even have large portions memorized (Luke 11:52; John 5:39–40).
  - b. Only the Spirit can produce an unquenchable love for the Word (John 10:16; 1 Pet 1:3, 22–23; 2:1–3).
- **Hearing the Word vs. Profiting from the Word**
    - a. The natural man can listen to sermons and study the Bible all day long (Heb 3:11–4:1).
    - b. Only the Spirit can soften a man’s heart, resulting in a person profiting from the Word through humble faith (Heb 4:1–3).
- **Assurance from Self vs. Assurance from God**
    - a. The natural man can be completely convinced he knows God—and still be lost (Matt 7:21–24; 23; 2 Tim 3–4; Titus 1:16).
    - b. Only the Spirit can produce fruit in a person’s life—fruit that shows God knows them (Ps 1; Matt 5:2–12; 7:24; John 14:15–23; Gal 5:22–24; 1 John 2:1–3; 3:3–10).
- **Looking the Part vs. Being Transformed**
    - a. The natural man can “keep up appearances” as if he has godliness in his life (2 Tim 3–4; Titus 1:16).
    - b. Only the Spirit can produce power that demonstrates a transformed life (Rom 6; 8; Eph 4; 2 Tim 3–4).
- **Interpretation vs. Illumination**
    - The natural man can interpret passages of Scripture with some accuracy (Mark 12:28–34; 1 Cor 2:6–16).
    - Only the Spirit can cause illumination and give insights on the Scripture’s significance, resulting in personal implications/illumination (Ps 119:18; 1 Cor 2:6–16).
- **Burdened by Commands vs. Loving Commands**
    - a. The natural man can hear commandments and work to obey, but the commandments end up becoming a burden (Luke 10:25–37; 1 John 5:3).
    - b. Only the Spirit can make the heart love the commandments and not see them as a burden, but a grace gift (Psalm 119; Prov 2–4; Matt 11:3; 1 John 5:3).
- **Heeding warnings vs. remaining indifferent**
    - a. The natural man will hear the warnings from Scripture and remain unaffected and even chaff under their clarity (Prov 1:20–33; 1 Cor 10:1–13; Heb 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:14–29).
    - b. Only the Spirit can cause a softening in the heart that results in humble faith and new degrees of striving to obey (Prov 1; 20–33; 1 Cor 10:1–13; Hebrews 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:14–29).

### 3. Relationship with Sin and Temptation

#### ➤ **Morality vs. Mortification (Battle vs. Victory)**

- a. The natural man can battle sin and temptation for a while, but ends up remaining enslaved (Matt 23:27; Luke 8:4–21; Rom 7:13–25; Phil 3:17–21; 1 Tim 1:6–7, 18–20; 2 Tim 4:9–17).
- b. Only the Spirit can lead a man from battle to victory, by means of Spirit-filled mortification of sin (Rom 6:1–23; 8:13–14).

#### ➤ **Conviction vs. Repentance**

- a. The natural man can sense a deep conviction over sin and desire a cathartic relief in his conscience by external conformity (Matt 12:43–45; 23; 27:3–5; Acts 24:25; Heb 12:17).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce genuine repentance, resulting in real change in a person's heart (Ps 32:5; 51; Prov 28:13; 2 Cor 7:9–11; 2 Tim 3:24–26; 1 Pet 3:20; 1 John 1:8–10).

### 4. Relationship with the World and Worldliness

#### ➤ **Fear of Man vs. Fear of God**

- a. The natural man will profess Christ until fear of man or the cost of following is too great (Luke 8:13–14; 14; John 5:41–44; 6:60–71; 8:31–59; 10:12; 12:39–43).
- b. Only the Spirit can cause someone to stand firm, clinging to Christ, even when it becomes costly (John 6:60–71; Acts 6:8–7:59; Gal 1:10; 2 Cor 5:6–17; 2 Tim 1:12–16).

#### ➤ **Concern for Comfort vs. Concern for Souls**

- a. The natural man can fight for justice, oppose evil, weep for others and hate immorality because he enjoys doing good to others (Matt 19:16–22; 23:23; Luke 11:41–44; 23:28).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce a concern about the eternal fate of souls (Matt 28:18–20; 2 Cor 5:7–21).

#### ➤ **In the World vs. Of the World**

- a. The natural man can say he loves Jesus and still look like and love the world (1 Cor 2:12; 1 Tim 1; Jas 3:13–18; 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17).
- b. Only the Spirit can help someone to be in the world yet hate and separate from all that offends God, resulting in them not becoming “of the world” (Ps 15:4; John 10; 16; 17:14–18; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1; 1 John 5:5).

### 5. Relationship with God's People and the Church

#### ➤ **Church Involvement vs. A Love for God's People**

- a. The natural man can be busy in ministry activity and have regular church attendance (Matt 25:1–10; 2 Tim 3–4).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce love for the church where you spend your self for Christ’s bride at a personal cost to self (Matt 25:41-46) Acts 5:1–16; 1 Pet 1:22–24; 1 John 2:9ff; 3:9–14; 4:7ff).

➤ **Coddling Sin vs. Confronting Sin**

- a. The natural man can dislike the sin he sees in others and how it affects them, but will not have the courage to confront and expose for the sake of another soul (Eph 5:1–13).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce in a person boldness to confront sin in love and for the sake of others’ souls (1 Sam 15:1–15; 2 Sam 12:1–13; Prov 27:6; Matt 18:15; Gal 6:1–4; Eph 4:15; Heb 3:12–15).

## 6. Relationship with God’s Glory and Worship

➤ **Self-Glory vs. God’s Glory**

- a. The natural man does not like consequences and will make lots of good moral choices to save face (1 Sam 15; Mark 10:17–27; 2 Cor 7:10).
- b. Only the Spirit produces a devotion to God’s glory and the worthiness of Christ to drive a life of worship to God (Ps 105:3; 115:1; Prov 3:7; Isa 43:7; 48:10ff; Jer 9:23–24; Rom 12:1–3; 1 Cor 10:31).

➤ **Hypocrisy vs. Humility**

- a. The natural man can put on a mask as though he were humble, but in reality be full of hypocrisy (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce actual lowly-mindedness, brokenness, and humility, resulting in a devotion to God’s glory alone (Isa 66:1–5; Phil 2:3–11).

➤ **Prayer to God vs. Prayer to Self**

- a. The natural man will pray fervently to God with a heart of self-interest (Luke 17:1–10).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce prayer for the good of others and the glory of God (Luke 18:1; Eph 6:18ff; Phil 4:6ff; 1 Tim 2:1–4; Jas 5:16–18).

➤ **Trials Bring Unbelief vs. Trails Bring Enduring Faith**

- a. The natural man will worship God as long as life is going according to his plan, but when trails come they up bitter, full of unbelief, and angry at God (Num 14:1–45; Jas 1:1–16).
- b. Only the Spirit can produce in a person a joyful willingness to stay under the trial (even though it’s a fight), until God has produced a mature faith (Ps 119:67,71; Rom 5:1–8; Phil 4:1–14, Jas 1:1–16).