

# *The Litmus Test*

by

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*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” Romans 8:5-9 (ESV)*

**litmus test:** *something (such as an opinion about a political or moral issue) that is used to make a judgment about whether someone or something is acceptable*

Have you heard the term “litmus test” used lately? Probably not and because there are some of you who might not know what it means is why I’ve included the definition above. It is an assessment of someone or something as to whether they or it compare favorably to a standard. The scripture I have included is a litmus test of sorts for believers, as it cuts through ignorance, spiritual dullness and spiritual erosion to present clarity about godly living. The question I have to you is do you compare favorably with it? This is a big and serious question.

When I sit down to write these devotionals, I am faced with a decision with **why** I write them, **who** I write them to, and **what** I hope will come from it. I have my own litmus test to evaluate if I am on target. For instance, the **who** and **why** I write a devotional is **to encourage a believer to walk with Christ more closely**. Therefore, writing to my Journey Brothers and followers of Christ tells me that I’m on target with who and why I write the devotional. The “what” is another test. **What** I hope for is revelation, insight, and encouragement that will move a believer more closely to Christ as a result of the devotional. I never know if it will do this. I can only hope and pray that it does. I ask the Lord to both inspire and direct my thoughts. I ask that He allow the words He inspires to me to bore deeply into hearts, starting with my own, and that this writer not be heard, but rather the Holy Spirit who inspires His words to me will be the focus for a reader. I say clearly that I take my responsibility seriously. For this reason, I am more concerned with conveying truth and allowing the chips to fall as they may, for if the words are indeed inspired by the Lord, then it is essential that we hear and respond to them. The above “litmus test” is just a serious concern for followers of Christ, and I ask you to do a serious evaluation of yourself, for the truth may be staring you in the face.

In the scripture above, we see two competing natures that battle within God’s man. Without the Holy Spirit living in the man, there is only one nature. It is the nature of the flesh, which is opposed to the nature and holiness of God. Galatians 5:16-21 does a good job of making clear the litmus test of those people led by the flesh nature. So, if you have any question about how the flesh nature is described, read below:

***“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other ..... Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”***

Now I hear many guys tell me that they don't live in this “flesh place,” but rather dip into it every now and then. Honestly, I do as well, for the old flesh nature in me has to be yoked to Christ, and taking up Christ's yoke is an act of obedience on my part. That is why I say there are two natures living in God's man. I do not want to yield to the flesh nature, but sometimes I slip up, as all of us do. We find ourselves responding to something in “the flesh,” rather than in a godly fashion. But after processing what I believe and how I want to live before the Lord, I confess, repent and I am made clean by God's forgiveness. Then I start over, with a lesson learned. So slip-ups do happen, but we don't live in that nature, and this is my great concern if any of you do. I am concerned for any of you who are deceiving yourself in thinking that your “practice” of sin is the same as a slip up. Let me give you an example of the difference:

*A child has been washed and dressed with clean clothes. He makes his way out of the front door to go to school. Not knowing that it rained and that there is a slippery mud puddle in front of the step, he steps into it and falls. His clothes are soiled and he is a mess. His mother picks him up, cleans him and puts clean clothes on him, forgives him, and tells him to avoid it next time. The child goes out the same door and steps around the mud, for he learned his lesson. He slipped-up and is forgiven. But, what if he goes back to the same mud puddle and steps in it and slips again? Is it a slip or a practice of repeating and staying in a place where he shouldn't be? Where is his repentance? Where is his determination to honor his mother's hard work to keep him clean and prepare him for his day? What will she do about it? I know what my mother did. She made my life miserable and I learned my lesson the hard way.*

It is the same for God's man who practices sin, rather than slipping in it. The Apostle John makes clear in 1 John 2 that when we sin we have an *Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*. He knows we will slip up and He has made a provision for us. But John also makes it clear in 1 John 3:9-10 that the practice of sin is a different matter from a slip up. Look what he says:

*“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 the one who does not love his brother.”*

So we are back to the litmus test question, and this is your test. If you look at your life, where does it fall, for it is a serious matter to God, and I hope for you as well? It is a serious matter, for we can get to a point where we forget we are living in the mud, until our life becomes unraveled and we have to live with the consequences of it. Then it is either an indication that we do not really know God and we deceive ourselves, or we have grown cold and indifferent to our Father and His discipline is at hand. It is a serious matter and it is painful. Here is an example:

I know a man who said he was a believer and even ministered as a pastor during the time period I speak of. And yet for seven years this man carried on an adulterous affair with his secretary. He cheated on his wife, his church, his friends, and his cheating was out of sight for seven years. But it didn't stay that way, for he

also cheated on the God he said he served, and this is when it gets really serious. It is obvious that he did not slip in sin, but rather lived in and allowed his flesh nature to rule him during that time. The question many of his former friends have is how could he have done this and really have had the Spirit of the Living God living in him? I ask the same question? Where was the remorse? Where was the recognition of how God saw his condition? Even now his former friends ask where is his brokenness and repentance? They say he complains that the Church has not been there for him. They say that he is less concerned about what he has done wrong, but rather how others have not ministered to him. Maybe there is a problem there, but does he not see that the Church is an extension of Christ who he turned his back on? There are some major questions this man needs to answer, as he looks at the litmus test of the Romans 5, and the 1John 3 passages, and compares his life with them. But he is not alone in this. We all need to do an assessment of our life and ask, "Am I OK, or have I deceived myself?" We may very well find ourselves headed in the same direction of this man, and land where he did. I will tell you clearly that the man I speak of did not set out to have his life turn out as it did, and it could be the same with you if you continue to live in the "flesh" and allow it to guide you. I believe I know him well enough to say that he would tell you to guard your hearts, mind, and flesh, or else you will find yourself in a shipwreck of a life.

Take the litmus test, and see if you are OK. If you are not, then do something about it right now. It is a serious matter and it needs your immediate attention. Your life depends on it, for there are a lot of mud puddles ahead for you to avoid.