

## Defined by Love

We start off with a simple question: What is it that really defines the born-again believer? How do people around us know we belong to Christ? What do you and I think defines us as His?

Many may think that the mark of a true believer is one who spends a lot of time reading the Bible, praying, giving, attending all the services, faithfully serving those around us, witnessing, working miracles, healing the sick, and so on, you name it. Now there's nothing wrong with all those things. But Christ Himself takes a much broader view. To Him, the distinguishing mark of His followers, those in whom He lives, is not merely all these things we have been taught, and the things we do, but how our lives reflect Him and His love.

Just think of these statements to us from God's word:

Eph 4:32 ... *"**Be** kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."*

It doesn't say, "do" kind, it says, "be" kind, "be" tender-hearted, "be" forgiving.

1 Pet 1:15-16 ... *"but like the Holy One who called you, **be** holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall **be** holy, for I am holy.'"*

It doesn't say, "do" holy, it says, "be" holy. And that 'being' is an outflow or reflection of the Holy One who is in you. It's letting Christ who is in you, who is the Holy One, be seen through you.

1 Pet 3:8 ... *"To sum up, all of you **be** harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit."*

You see, it's all about "being" a reflection of Christ in you that really counts.

What Christ has called us to has more to do with '**being**' than 'doing.' Our 'doing', which is important, will be an outflow of our 'being', and not vice versa.

You and I cannot, through any amount of good works, make or produce love, or holiness, or peace, or kindness, or mercy or any of the attributes of God. For God alone is holy, God is love, He is Peace, He is kind, He is merciful. His attributes define Him. They together define who He is. But He has come to take up residence in you and I (the born-again believers), and so Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, Holiness, Mercy, and all of what Christ is, is now resident in you – in your spirit. He has come to live in you and impart to you His communicable attributes.

God is love (1 John 4:16); and Love at its highest was demonstrated when Jesus died on the cross for us. The **work of the cross**, this outpouring of His love, was the means by which we have been redeemed from sin, forgiven, our old sin nature put to death, so that we could be made new and live by His life and His Love. As Gal 2:20 states, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

Love is the power through which Christ dwells and works in us. Love is a Person, His name is Jesus, and He can transform us as we abide in Him. Christ, who is Love, gives me strength to live a holy, joyous, loving life, full of blessing to others.

So, going back to our original question, what does our Lord say about that which really defines us as His? Well John records Jesus' words on this matter, making it very clear.

John 13:35 ... "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

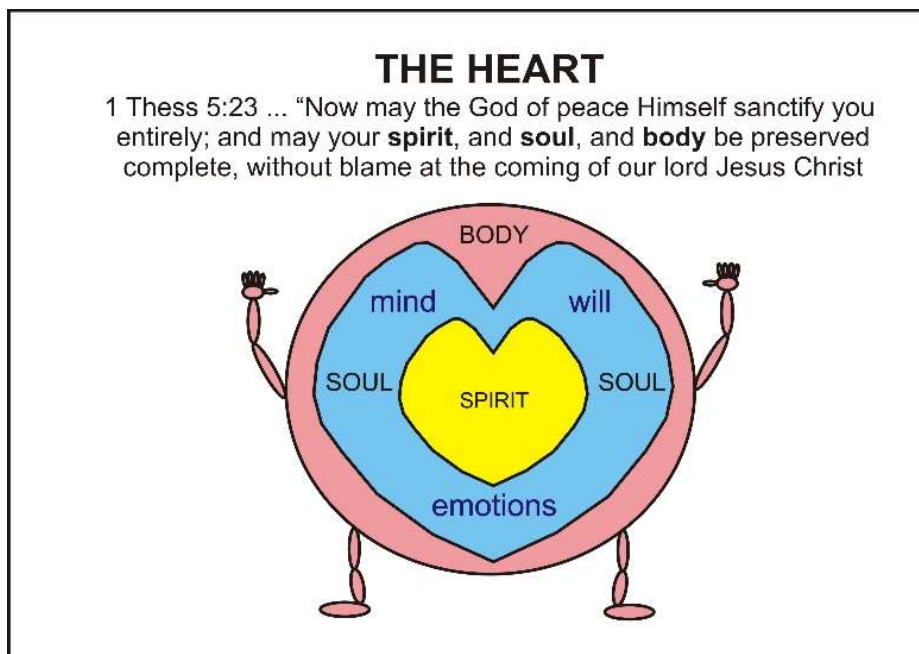
It's about embracing His love and reflecting it to others. It's letting Him who is love be seen in and through you.

1 John 4:7-8 ... "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**."

To love we must first be born of God, and secondly, we must know Him who is Love.

So, let us spend a few minutes looking at the process by which we come to know God and His love.

Some pictures will help our understanding.

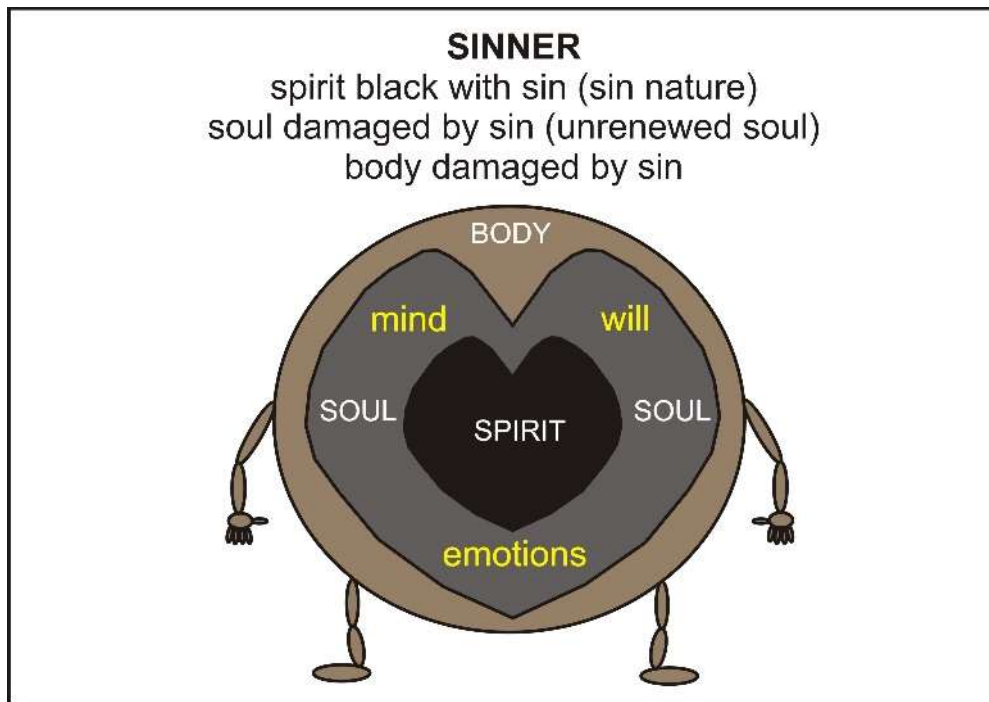


We are made up of spirit, soul (mind, will and emotion part) and body. The 'heart' is made up of spirit and soul (our invisible or spiritual parts). Our spirit and soul are housed in our body (the visible or tangible part).

A 'divided heart' is when our soul is not aligned with our spirit, and a 'united heart' is one in which soul and spirit are in harmony.

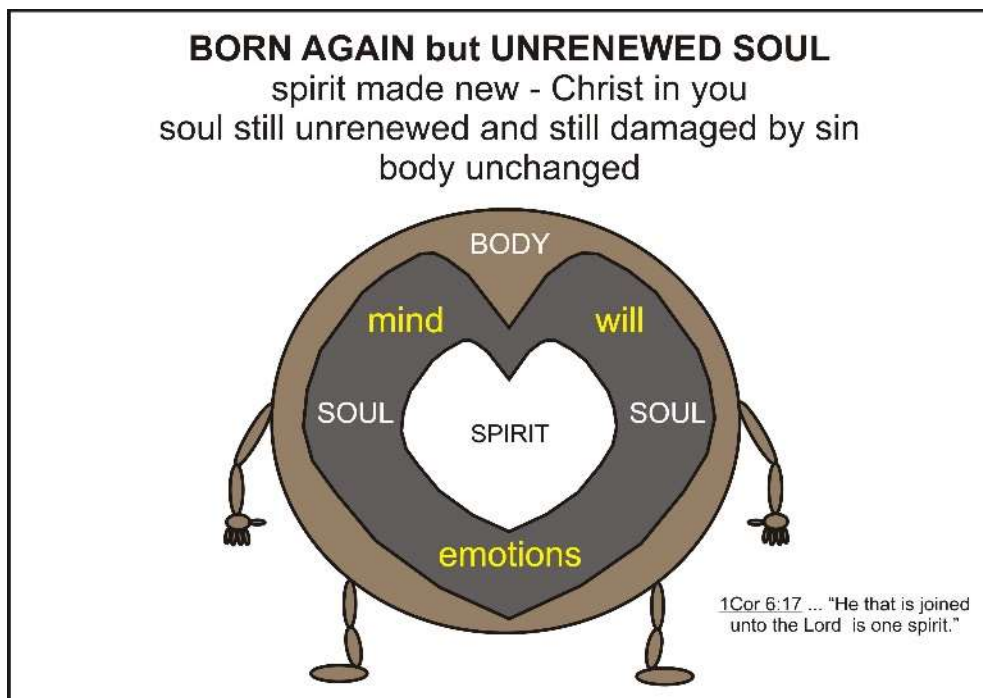
Our soul is our 'control' centre. It's the part of us where our thoughts, desires, feelings and eventual decisions occur.

Now with this in mind, let us look at the progression from being a sinner to becoming born again, renewed in soul, and eventually (when, at the end of our life on earth, we go to be with the Lord) gaining a glorified body.



We were all born with the sin nature and in need of being made new. The death and resurrection of Christ paid the price for us to be forgiven and to be born again, made new creatures.

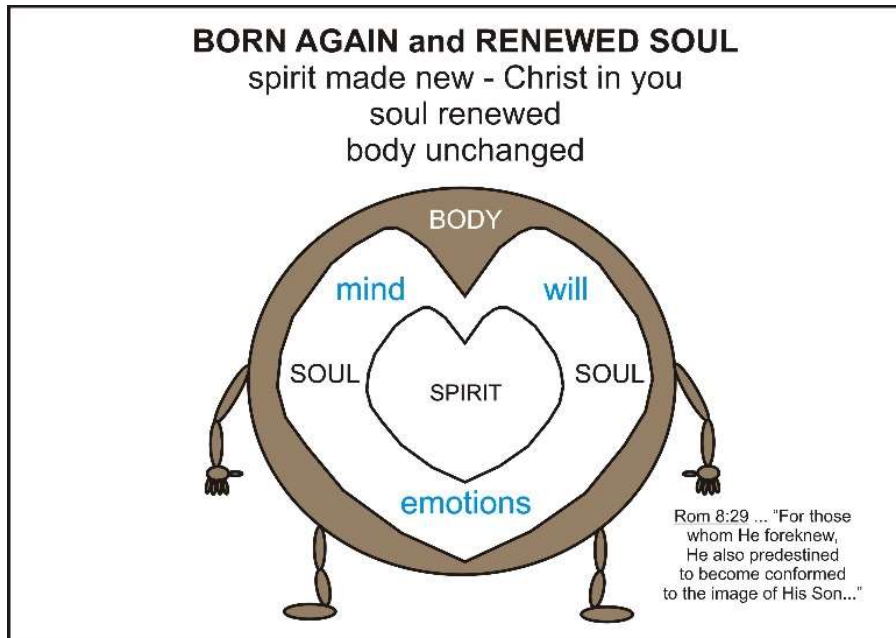
Rom 3:23 ... "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."



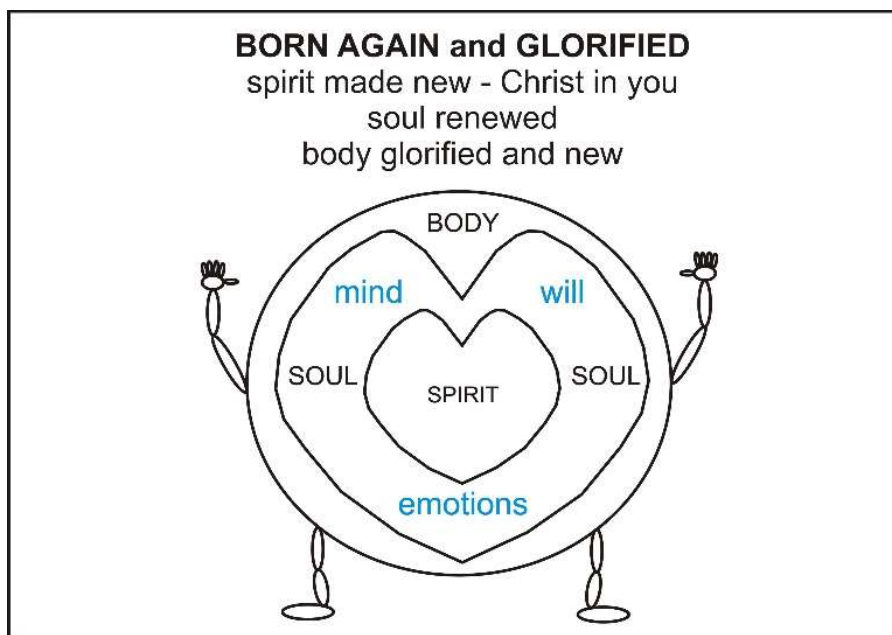
When we believe in Christ's work on the cross on our behalf and are born again, we enjoy an exchange in nature. The old sin nature is removed (dealt with on the cross) so that we may receive the new nature of Christ. 2 Cor 5:17 ... "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

But although we are made new in spirit our soul and body are relatively unchanged. Our body is on a pathway to eventual decay and death. However, God's plan is for us to become renewed in our soul. This is the transformation 'process' which Paul talks about. Rom 12:2 ... *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

We will discuss this 'process' further later on.



Then, when we pass away or when Jesus comes to take us up to be with Him at His second coming, we will leave this old mortal body and inherit a brand-new glorified body in which our spirit and soul will live for all eternity.

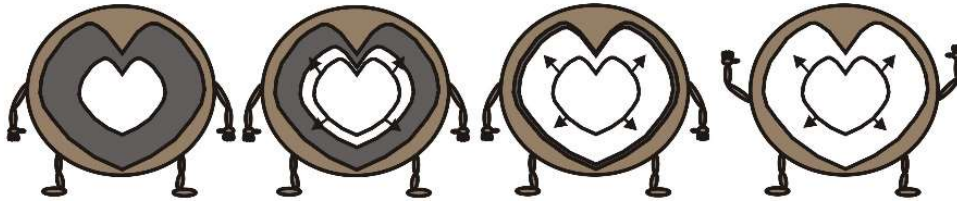


But as this 'glorified' state is something for the future, at Christ's coming, we need at this time to concentrate on the renewing of our soul process. So, we look at this now:

## The Process of Renewing of the Soul

Romans 5:5 ... "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given unto us."

John 14:26 ... "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things."



Romans 12:2 ... "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Romans 8:6 ... "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

Romans 13:14 ... "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

John 15:4 ... "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine."

This process of renewing of the mind takes place as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit and He teaches us Christ. It's a gradual, day by day process.

Ephesians 1:3-4 ... *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would **be** holy and blameless before Him."*

In Christ, who has come to take up residence in us, we have every spiritual blessing. Renewing of the mind has to do with 'putting on Christ', or learning to 'put on' to our minds, will and emotions all that Christ in us represents.

It's a bit like having a huge sum of money deposited into our bank account. This money can only benefit us if we know the pin number and account number and draw on it. So, the mind renewal process is about meditating on Christ and drawing on Him, and letting the Holy Spirit take that which is within your regenerated spirit and shed it abroad in your soul. From there your renewed soul can make the decision and actions that reveal Christ through your words and actions (body function).

Jesus said:

John 15:5 ... *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."*

The fruit we are to bear is Love. That's what John 13:35 is all about. It's the love of Christ seen in us and pouring out of us that defines us as true believers. And remember, we don't "do" fruit, we '**be**'ar fruit.

Fruit is the natural outcome of sap flowing from the vine stock, through the branches to its place

hanging off the branches. You have never heard a vine branch grunting or 'working' at trying to produce fruit. It just 'bears' the fruit that the sap flowing in and through it produces. In a similar way, Christ is the vine stock and His life flows in and through us to produce His fruit so long as we 'abide' in Him. This has to do with whether our mind is set on Him (united heart), which is fruitful, or whether our mind is set on our outer man (body or flesh, and things outside of us), – which constitutes a divided heart – which produces nothing but death.

Let's examine the fruit of love we are to bear.

1 Cor 13:4-8 ... *"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love never fails...**"*

Gal 5:22-23 ... *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; **against such things there is no law.**"*

Love never fails and there is no force that can successfully oppose it.

### Finally

We now understand the importance of the prayers that both Christ and Paul prayed:

Christ prayed:

John 17:26 ... *"I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

Paul prayed:

2 Thess 3:5 ... *"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ."*

and

Eph 3:16-19 ... *"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."*

And when that happens, people will know you belong to Christ!

Our final prayer is, Lord, transform me by the power of Your love and let my life shine as a beacon, inviting strangers and friends into the truth of Your love.

Amen.

Other verse upon which to meditate: 1 Thess 4:9; 2 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 1:14