

## *A Tale of Two Cindys*

(A True Story Happening Right Now in a Church Like Yours)

A few years ago, two women began attending the same local church at roughly the same time. Although these women didn't know each other, they shared striking similarities. Both came from abusive backgrounds, both were substance abusers, both were unmarried but living in sexual immorality, and both were in trouble financially. They even shared the same first name (for the sake of privacy I'm calling them Cindy and Cindy, but these are not their real names).

A friend of mine is a pastor at this church. He and his wife sacrificially poured their lives into both Cindys, sharing the gospel faithfully and repeatedly and offering as much practical and financial assistance as they were able. In time, both women professed faith in Jesus Christ, became members, and immersed themselves in church life.

All seemed well until Cindy number 1 began to miss church on occasion, for reasons that were less than compelling. After a time her non-attendance became a habit that was broken only when she had an urgent need, usually for financial or practical assistance. After a while she became involved once again in sexual immorality, although she tried to keep this hidden from the church. Eventually she began living with a married man, and, though confronted by pastors, she refused to repent. Now she has fallen away completely.

Cindy number 2, on the other hand, began growing in Christ from the outset. She loved His Word and she loved His people. She gave up the bottle and embraced the cross instead. Hers was not a short-lived experience like Cindy number 1. She has gladly put away her immoral lifestyle in exchange for the joy of holiness, and has been walking in consistent purity. Everywhere she goes she tells people about Jesus—including the hospital room where she frequently sits with her unconverted father who is dying. People who knew her before her conversion cannot help but wonder if she is really the same person. She has a quiet peace about her and her face shines with the love of Christ.

Why is there such a great difference between these two women *now* when *at first* they seemed to have so much in common?

Was Cindy number 1 not properly disciplined after her profession of faith? No, they both sat under the same teaching in the same church and were lovingly cared for and privately taught by the same Christian couple.

Was the church not as responsive to the needs of Cindy number 1 as Cindy number 2? If you were to ask my friend he would say no. If anything, he tells me, *more* time, energy, and loving care was poured into Cindy number 1.

Was Cindy number 1 not as sincere when she professed faith in Christ? No, both professions of faith seemed genuine and entirely credible at the time. Both women seemed determined to live for Christ.

Did Cindy number 1 lose her salvation? Was she justified by faith and then unjustified because she fell away into sin? No, God's Word assures us that all who are truly justified will also be glorified (cf. Rom. 8:30-39; John 10:27-28).

The sobering fact is, although both Cindys professed faith in Christ, only one of them was truly converted. That's not just my opinion, it's what we *must* say if we are to be honest with others and faithful to Scripture. Biblically, we have no basis for calling a person a Christian if he or she bears no characteristics of a Christian. At the present time, Cindy number 1 bears none of the marks of a true believer. Instead, she consistently exhibits many of the characteristics of the ungodly and unbelieving. And as John said,

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. (1 John 3:10)

Cindy number 2 is not perfect—no Christian ever will be in this life—but she is growing more and more Christ-like all the time. She is diligently pursuing holiness and she loves her brothers and sisters in the church so much that she longs to be with them regularly. This is the work of the Spirit of God in her, progressively completing what He has started. It is what He does in all who truly belong to Christ. Those who are truly God's children have been “predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29).

So what's the main point of this story? The point is, when God saves a person, He also changes that person, not superficially or at a merely emotional level that causes tears of sorrow and a sincere response to an invitation, but deeply and comprehensively, in every area of life—and not temporarily, but permanently.

Jesus spoke of “those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy” (Luke 8:13). Both Cindys looked like this at first. From our limited perspective they both looked like true believers. But Jesus goes on in the same verse to describe what happens next to people like Cindy number 1. He says, “and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.”

Cindy number 2, on the other hand, is described in Luke 8:15 when Jesus says, “these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, *and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*” True saving faith is transforming faith, and as Jesus said, “it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (Matt. 10:22).

What would Jesus say about some of the professing Christians who are members of your church? Are they more like Cindy number 1, like the person described in Luke 8:13? Or are they more like Cindy number 2, like the person described in Luke 8:15? What about your own children who made early professions of faith but are now teenagers? Most importantly, what about you?