



In the last few years, the debate over capital punishment has taken a new twist: Many who support capital punishment are calling for a moratorium on carrying out death sentences. The reason: the power of a new type of physical evidence—DNA.

Using DNA—an individual's genetic "cell-print"—to acquit or convict the accused is history's biggest breakthrough in forensic science. All over the world, many criminals given the death penalty have been found to be innocent on the basis of DNA analysis which wasn't available at the time of their conviction. Searching back through evidence files decades old, investigators are producing tiny shreds of evidence—a hair, a saliva sample, a bit of skin tissue—from which DNA can be extracted. In some cases, convictions are being upheld. But in an unsettling number, convictions have been overturned and prisoners set free.

DNA is perhaps the most powerful form of physical evidence available to crime scene investigators. Why? Because of its permanence. DNA is not a memory or an opinion, an odor or a color. It is hard, physical evidence which does not change over time. DNA as physical evidence identified the body of Nazi executioner Josef Mengele; the Child Recovery and Identification System uses DNA records to unite parents with missing children; and probate courts are using DNA evidence to settle conflicting claims regarding inheritances. DNA evidence—and as a rule, physical evidence of any kind—is almost impossible to refute.

What is physical evidence? In his standard text on the subject, *Criminalistics* author Richard Saferstein says physical evidence is "any and all objects that can establish that a crime has been committed or can provide a link between a crime and its victim or a crime and its perpetrator." In short, physical evidence is anything and everything that tells

investigators about a crime. The goal of the crime scene investigator is to build a bridge from the crime to the criminal, to connect a person with an act. And physical evidence provides the foundation stones for the bridge. Paul L. Kirk has said, "[Physical evidence] does not forget. It is not confused by the excitement of the moment. It is not absent [when] human witnesses are; it is factual evidence. Physical evidence cannot be wrong; it cannot perjure itself...only its interpretation can err."

Prosecutors and attorneys face a problem when trying to prove a crime: Even though physical evidence is best, juries almost always value eyewitness testimony. Because jurists value their own memories, they feel an eyewitness couldn't possibly be wrong. But memories are ever-changing and can be influenced by many things: feelings, opinions, experiences, moods, and prejudices, to name a few. But physical evidence does not lie or change.

As Christians, we can be guilty of letting personal mental impressions of our spiritual life take precedence over the physical evidence. We often think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. But evidence helps us think soberly about how we are doing in our Christian walk (Romans 12:3). For instance, if we spend two minutes in prayer, later in the day we are convinced it was ten. If we read a few verses of Scripture, we describe it as having studied a chapter. When we say we attend church every Sunday, over the course of a year it may be three weeks out of four. And instead of being 10 percent, over time our tirhe may average three or four percent.

**IN THE WORLD OF C.S.I.
—CHRISTIAN SCENE
INVESTIGATION—
THE EVIDENCE TELLS
THE TRUTH.**

Are these blatant lies and exaggerations? They could be, but more often they are just subtle tricks our memory plays on us. We are eyewitnesses to our own spiritual life and yet often fail to perceive it as it really is. What we need is some hard, physical evidence—the kind that tells the truth—to get an accurate picture of our spiritual life.

Physical evidence at a crime scene consists of things like firearms and gunshot residues, footprints, fingerprints, hair and fibers, toolmarks and other impressions, chemical traces, and blood and body tissues or fluids. But

what is the physical evidence at a Christian “scene?” I want to discuss four kinds of physical evidence which can easily be observed by anyone—including, hopefully, ourselves: who you are, what you do, where you go, and who you associate with. A Christian should leave physical trails behind which ultimately identify him as a follower of Christ.

1. WHO YOU ARE

By this I mean the overall picture you present to the world. When people first meet you, what do they think? By reading the four gospel accounts in the New Testament, we come away with the impression that Jesus was a different sort of person. Crowds followed Him everywhere. People listened attentively to His every word. Scholars were either amazed or silenced by the wisdom of His answers. Jesus wasn't different physically. He didn't look like a king (Isaiah 53:2). He was different spiritually. People may not stand amazed at us when they pass us on the street; but when they get to know us, what do they think? Many people have been won to Christ through the centuries because of coming in contact with a person about whom they said, “There's something different about that person, and I want what he has in my own life.”

2. WHAT YOU DO

One of the most compelling teachings of Jesus Christ is that people are known by the fruits of their life (Matthew 7:16–20; 12:33). Good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit. Similarly, fruit trees bear fruit, but thornbushes do not. If

**EVIDENCE ALWAYS TRUMPS PERSONAL
IMPRESSIONS WHEN IT COMES TO ESTABLISHING
A LASTING VERDICT.**

someone examines the Christian scene of our life, expecting to find the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), but instead finds only the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–21), the apostle Paul would go with the physical evidence. We can say we are a Christian “tree” all we want, but if there is no fruit of the Spirit (no evidence) present, then we stand condemned. Our behavior, words, attitudes, habits, and practices constitute a train of evidence about our spiritual life.

3. WHERE YOU GO

The sons of Korah, who made up the temple choir in Israel, are credited with these telling words: “*For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness*” (Psalm 84:10). When I meet Christians who consider going to church, or gathering with other believers for Bible study and fellowship, not as exciting as recreating with non-Christians, I wonder what that evidence reveals about their soul. Because our culture has made entertainment an idol, Christians justify their absence in the house of God by saying they're bored. Not only does that evidence reveal what our soul is most nourished by (entertainment instead of worship), it reveals a profound misunderstanding of the purpose of the body of Christ and each believer's place in it. When the church of Jesus Christ gathers together, not to be in

attendance is to leave physical evidence of a suspicious kind (Hebrews 10:24–25).

4. WHO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH

Darkness and light cannot coexist in the same space since darkness, by definition, is the absence of light. Jesus (John 3:19; 8:12) and the apostle John (1 John 1:5; 2:9) talked about the spiritual incompatibility of darkness and light, and Paul expanded on the differences between believers and unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14–18). When a professing Christian never seems to find himself “hanging out” with other Christians—for recreation, service, fellowship, study, or worship—that becomes evidence of his preferences. And, it makes us wonder why he chooses darkness over light.

Detective Tom Hill, a 30-year veteran of the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, police department, summarizes the point of this article: “You just can't argue with physical evidence—you can't.” That's a tough statement, but in the world of C.S.I.—Christian Scene Investigation—the evidence tells the truth.

Who are you? What do you do? Where do you go? And who are your friends? Take a fresh look at the physical evidence of your spiritual life. Remember, evidence always trumps personal impressions when it comes to establishing a lasting verdict.