

You can tell a lot about someone's theology by watching how they deal with a stop sign:

1. A postmodernist deconstructs the sign (i.e., he knocks it over with his car), thus ending forever the tyranny of the north-south traffic over the east-west traffic.
2. Similarly, a Marxist sees a stop sign as an instrument of class conflict. He concludes that the bourgeoisie use the north-south road and obstruct the progress of the workers on the east-west road.
3. A serious and educated Catholic believes that he cannot understand the stop sign apart from its interpretive community and their tradition. Observing that the interpretive community doesn't take it too seriously, he doesn't feel obligated to take it too seriously either.
4. An average Catholic (or Orthodox or Coptic or Anglican or Methodist or Presbyterian or whatever) doesn't bother to read the sign but he'll stop if the car in front of him does.
5. A Fundamentalist, taking the text very literally, stops at the stop sign and then waits for it to tell him to go.
6. A preacher might look up "STOP" in his lexicons of English and discover that it can mean either: 1) something which prevents motion, such as a plug for a drain, or a block of wood that prevents a door from closing; or 2) a location where a train or bus lets off passengers. The main point of his sermon the following Sunday on this text is: when you see a stop sign, it is a place where traffic is naturally clogged, so it is a good place to let off passengers from your car.
7. An Orthodox Jew does one of two things:
 1. Takes another route to work that doesn't have a stop sign so that he doesn't run the risk of disobeying the halachah (Jewish Law), or
 2. Stops at the stop sign, says "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who hast given us thy commandment to stop," waits 3 seconds according to his watch, and then proceeds.
8. Incidentally, the Talmud has the following comments on this passage: R[abbi] Meir says: He who does not stop shall not live long. R. Hillel says: Cursed is he who does not count to three before proceeding. R.

Simon ben Yudah says: Why three? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. R. ben Isaac says: Because of the three patriarchs. R. Yehuda says: Why bless the Lord at a stop sign? Because it says: "Be still, and know that I am God."

9. R. Hezekiel says: When Jephthah returned from defeating the Ammonites, the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that a donkey would run out of the house and overtake his daughter; but Jephthah did not stop at the stop sign, and the donkey did not have time to come out. For this reason he saw his daughter first and lost her. Thus he was judged for his transgression at the stop sign.
10. R. Gamaliel says: R. Hillel, when he was a baby, never spoke a word, though his parents tried to teach him by speaking and showing him the words on a scroll. One day his father was driving through town and did not stop at the sign. Young Hillel called out: "Stop, father!" In this way, he began reading and speaking at the same time. Thus it is written: "Out of the mouth of babes." R. ben Jacob says: Where did the stop sign come from? Out of the sky, for it is written: "Forever, O Lord, your word is fixed in the heavens." R. ben Nathan says: When were stop signs created? On the fourth day, for it is written: "let them serve as signs." But R. Yehoshua says: ... (continues for three more pages)
11. A Haredi [ultra-Orthodox "black hat" Jew] does the same thing as an Orthodox Jew, except that he waits 10 seconds instead of 3. He also replaces his brake lights with 1000 watt searchlights and connects his horn so that it is activated whenever he touches the brake pedal.

12. A Breslover Hasidic Jew sees the sign and makes hisboddidus (a form of spontaneous personal prayer) saying: “Robono Shel Olam [Master of the Universe] — here I am, traveling on the road in Your service, and I’m about to face who knows what danger at this intersection in my life. So please watch over me and help me to get through this stop sign safely.” Then, “looking neither to left nor right” as Rebbe Nachman advises, he joyfully accepts the challenge, remains focused on his goal — even if the car rolls backward for a moment — then he hits the gas pedal and forges bravely forward, overcoming all obstacles which the yetzer hara [evil inclination] might put in his path.
13. A Lubovitcher Hasidic Jew stops at the sign and reads it very carefully in the light of the Rebbe’s teachings. (In former times he would have used his cell phone to call Brooklyn and speak to the Rebbe personally for advice, but this is no longer possible, may the Rebbe rest in peace.) Next, he gets out of the car and sets up a roadside mitzvah mobile [outreach booth], taking this opportunity to ask other Jewish drivers who stop at the sign whether or not they have put on tefillin today [male ritual] or whether they light Shabbos candles [female ritual]. Having now settled there, he steadfastly refuses to give up a single inch of the land he occupies until Moschiach [the Jewish Messiah] comes.
14. A Reform Jew sees the stop sign, and coasts up to it while contemplating the question “Do I personally feel commanded to stop?” During this internal process he edges into the intersection and is hit from behind by a car driven by a secular Jew who ignored the sign completely.
15. A Conservative Jew reacts by calling his rabbi and asking him whether stopping at this sign is required by unanimous ruling of the Commission on Jewish Law or if there is a minority position. While waiting for the rabbi’s answer he is ticketed by a policeman for obstructing traffic.
16. A Reconstructionist Jew, seeing the stop sign, might say: First, this sign is part of our evolving civilization and therefore I must honor it and stop. On the other hand, since its origins are in the past, I must assert that “the past has a vote and not a veto,” and therefore I must study the issue carefully and decide if the argument “to stop” is spiritually, intellectually and culturally compelling enough to convince me to stop. If yes, I will vote with the past. If not, I will veto it. Finally, is there any way that I can re-value or transvalue the stop sign’s message for our own time?
17. The Renewal-Movement-Jew meditates on whether the STOP sign applies in all kabbalistic Four Worlds [Body-Emotion-Mind-Spirit] or only in some of them, and if so which ones? Must he stop feeling? thinking? being? driving? Since he has stopped to breathe and meditate on this question, he is quite safe while he does so, barukh HaShem. [Praise God.]
18. A scholar from the Jesus seminar concludes that the passage “STOP” undoubtedly was never uttered by Jesus himself, but belongs entirely to stage III of the Gospel tradition, when the church was first confronted by traffic in its parking lot.
19. A NT scholar notices that there is no stop sign on Mark Street but there is one on Matthew and Luke streets, and concludes that the ones on Luke and Matthew streets are both copied from a sign on a completely hypothetical street called “Q”.

There is an excellent 300 page discussion of speculations on the origin of these stop signs and the differences between the stop signs on Matthew and Luke street in the scholar’s commentary on the passage. There is an unfortunate omission in the commentary, however: the author apparently forgot to explain what the text means.

20. An OT scholar points out that there are a number of stylistic differences between the first and second half of the passage "STOP". For example, "ST" contains no enclosed areas and 5 line endings, whereas "OP" contains two enclosed areas and only one line termination. He concludes that the author for the second part is different from the author for the first part and probably lived hundreds of years later. Later scholars determine that the second half is itself actually written by two separate authors because of similar stylistic differences between the "O" and the "P".
21. Another prominent OT scholar notes in his commentary that the stop sign would fit better into the context three streets back. (Unfortunately, he neglected to explain why in his commentary.) Clearly it was moved to its present location by a later redactor. He thus exegetes the intersection as though the stop sign were not there.
22. Because of the difficulties in interpretation, another OT scholar amends the text, changing "T" to "H". "SHOP" is much easier to understand in context than "STOP" because of the multiplicity of stores in the area. The textual corruption probably occurred because "SHOP" is so similar to "STOP" on the sign several streets back that it is a natural mistake for a scribe to make. Thus the sign should be interpreted to announce the existence of a shopping area.
23. A feminist scholar notes that all commentary refers to "he" and concludes she is thus exempt, so she runs the sign and is killed.
24. A radical feminist, observing what happened to the first feminist, concludes this is a misogynist plot to get all feminists killed by inciting them to run stop signs. So she gets out of the car and stages a protest against the inherent sexism in all traffic signs.
25. An observant Orthodox Jewish woman concludes that she is not allowed to observe the mitzvah [commandment] of stopping because she is niddah [menstruant]. This is a dilemma, because the stop sign is located on the way to the mikvah [ritual purification pool]. She refers the dilemma to all the Rabbinical scholars, who shrug.
26. A feminist Jewish woman sees this as a sign from the Shekinah [feminine aspect of God] that translates roughly "enough already...."