

Characteristics of True Christianity Part 1

Characteristics That Define Our Transformation

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I. Introductory Remarks.

Luke 6:44-45 *"For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

In this message today I would like to begin a four-part series on the characteristics of true Christianity.

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?
2. What does a Christian look like?
3. How does a Christian act?
4. What is the purpose of a Christian?

These are some of the questions we will be looking at as we go through this series. My prayer is that we will come up with an accurate picture of what Jesus desires to see in us as true believers of Christ. As New Testament believers in Christ, we are to be like Him in all areas. It is actually His characteristics that are to be portrayed in our lives.

Philippians 2:5 *Let this mind (attitude - NASB) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*

Throughout this series we will be drawing from the life of Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, as an example of the transformation a Christian goes through and how Christ's characteristics are to be portrayed in our lives as believers.

Peter was a man with many facets to his character. I think most of us identify with Peter in some ways. He is a good illustration of the characteristics of true Christianity. We see in him a remarkable transformation that comes forth as a result of the grace of God being released into his life. He gives all of us hope.

Peter was naturally impulsive, tenderhearted, affectionate and gifted with spiritual insight; yet, sometimes slow to comprehend deeper truths.

1. He was courageous in his confession of Christ, yet guilty of a most cowardly denial.
2. He was self-sacrificing, yet inclined towards self-seeking.
3. He was a man of contradictions because of the same growth process we are all going through.
4. Peter wasn't perfect, yet we see him as one who strives to put on the characteristics of Christ.

It was Peter, who was given the keys to the kingdom. The fact that he was given the keys to the kingdom illustrates or portrays to us the very characteristics of the Christian life for us as fellow believers to draw from.

Matthew 16:19 *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

II. Translated Into The Kingdom of the Son.

One of the most important aspects of our Christianity is that of recognizing that there is a transformation that we are continually involved in as we grow and mature in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Our transformation begins when we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son, because the influences in our lives begin to change.

Colossians 1:13-14 *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

The person we are today is a result of all of our past influences – good and bad. We are often mesmerized by what transpires when one of America's so called heroes falls from glory. These are just more examples of how the kingdom of darkness is incapable of transforming our character.

The truth is; when we come to Christ and He translates us from the kingdom of darkness, we begin a journey of transformation into a new person with new

characteristics. All things become new with the old things passing away.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

III. Transformation Characteristics.

1. The Transformation Begins With The New Birth.

John 3:3 *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

In order for the new Christ like characteristics to begin to come forth in our lives, the seed must first be planted. This happens when we come to the place in our lives where we recognize our need for a Savior.

1. We find ourselves incapable of changing by ourselves.
2. We recognize our sinful condition and invite Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our lives - *Luke 5:8*.
3. We repent of our sins and as a result God sends the Holy Spirit to begin the regeneration process.
4. The Divine seed of God has entered our hearts and lives and now begins to grow and produce kingdom fruit and characteristics.

This happened to Peter and the other disciples following Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Even though they had been walking with Jesus for 3¹/₂ years they were not able to be born again and experience His transforming power in their lives until after the resurrection.

John 20:21-22 *Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

Up until this time Jesus had been teaching and training them, but the revelation of the kingdom and the transformation that goes with it did not take place.

Once they entered into this new kingdom realm the truths of the kingdom began to crystalize in their hearts and minds and the characteristics of the kingdom and true Christianity began to emerge in their lives.

For many of us, in our search for God, before we actually came to the place where we repented and asked Christ into our lives, we were on a search for truth, but nothing really settled in.

The seed didn't have a chance to take root. Peter and the other disciples never really understood what Jesus was saying until they were born again. Once they were truly born again the pieces began to fit together, just as it did for you and me. (See *1 Corinthians 2:11-14* for further study).

2. A Growth Begins to Take Place.

1 Peter 2:1-3 *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

There are three distinct things mentioned in this passage that will either enhance or hinder our growth in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- We must lay aside all malice, guile and evil speaking. These things prevent the seed from germinating and growing.
- We must humble ourselves with child-like faith. This is what fertilizes the soil of our hearts and causes the seed to germinate and begin to grow wonderfully.

Peter constantly exhibited this child like faith. eg. walking on water.

Matthew 18:3-4 *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

- We must desire the pure milk of the word with a hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Isaiah 28:9-11 *"Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people,*

Again, we find Peter a great example of one who had a hunger and thirst for God's

word. He always seemed to be the one who was asking Jesus questions and asking for further explanations of what He was teaching.

John 6:68 *Then Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

Matthew 15:15 *Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us."*

Matthew 18:21 *Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"*

Matthew 19:27 *Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"*

Luke 12:41 *Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"*

- Peter exemplified this characteristic of true Christianity by the change in his life from a reed to a rock.
- Peter was the one who was full of strange contradictions in his early walk with the Lord. At times he was presumptuous, timid and even cowardly, but we see him transformed into a mighty man of God who led the early church in its early days.
- In the end we find him as a rock standing firm in the faith and strengthening the saints just as Jesus prophesied he would.
- He went from being timid and cowardly to being courageous and immovable in the faith.

Peter's wonderful example of true Christian growth and transformation was a result of his continuing hunger and thirst for the word of God. In his final days he left us with this exhortation.

2 Peter 3:18 *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*

3. We Must Begin To Put On The New Man.

Isaiah 61:10 *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

We have to realize, when we come to Christ, our thoughts, emotions and habits have been shaped by the world and an ungodly environment. There is a renewing of our minds that must begin to take place.

Again, this takes place through the word of God. (See *Romans 12:1-2 6:11-14 for further study*). Therefore we are to begin putting off all of our old ways and begin putting on the new ways or the new nature.

Ephesians 4:17-18 *This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart;*

Ephesians 4:20-24 *But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.*

Colossians 3:8-10 *But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*

Peter was transformed from a profane fisherman to a man who walked in holiness and righteousness exhibiting the new man who was created according to Christ's image.

Luke 5:8 *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

4. We Are To Have A Radiant Life.

Matthew 5:16 *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Philippians 2:13-16 *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Peter's life was so transformed and radiant that by his very shadow people were healed.

Acts 5:15 *so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.*

IV. Summary & Concluding Remarks.

In concluding this message, we have seen that Christ really desires these transformation characteristics to be a part of our Christian experience. We have seen that transformation begins by being born again and that as a result of God's transforming grace being released into our lives we enter into a growth process when we humble ourselves and desire the pure milk of the word. We have also seen that our character begins to really change when we begin to put on the new man, who was created after Jesus Christ. And then as a result we begin to emanate the very life of Christ within us and we become radiant.