

Characteristics of True Christianity Part 2

Characteristics That Define Who We Are

Ken Birks, Pastor/Teacher

I. Introductory Remarks.

Someone once wrote:

- "Christianity made people who were things into real men and women, more, into sons and daughters of God;
- It gave those who had no respect, their self-respect; it gave those who had no life, life eternal;
- It told men that, even if they did not matter to other men, they still mattered intensely to God.
- It told men who, in the eyes of the world were worthless, that, in the eyes of God they were worth the death of his only Son.
- Christianity was, and still is, the most uplifting thing in the whole universe."

In this series of messages we are looking at the characteristics of true Christianity.

- We are discovering what it means to be a Christian,
- What a real Christian looks like,
- How a Christian acts and behaves
- And the purpose of a Christian.

We are using Peter as our example of one of Christ's followers whose life was transformed from a profane fisherman to a mature Christian, who had these defining characteristics operating and manifesting in his life. Peter wasn't perfect, yet we see him as one who was striving to walk in these Christ-like characteristics.

In the previous message we looked at the transforming characteristics and saw that our transformation begins with the new birth with the Divine seed of God being planted into our hearts to begin producing these new and dynamic characteristics in our lives.

As a result a new growth begins to come forth and we begin to put off the old man and put on the new man who is being created in the likeness of Jesus. Then we saw how this seed transforms our lives into one that radiates the glory of Christ.

In this message today I want to look at the characteristics that help to define our new relationship and who we are in the kingdom of God.

These are all characteristics that help to produce the kind of fruit that God desires to bring forth in our lives in varying degrees.

Matthew 13:23 *"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."*

II. Four Defining Characteristics.

1. We Are Sons Of God.

John 1:12 *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name:*

Romans 8:14-15 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

Our primary relationship that defines who we are is that of being one of God's own children. He is our daddy. We are all members of His family.

The spiritual family that God has placed us in now takes precedence over our natural family. Jesus shows this in His own example of His mother and brothers.

Matthew 12:46-50 *While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

Luke 14:26 *Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own family, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters – Yes, more than his own life – otherwise he cannot be my disciple. (Living Bible)*

In the natural, the person we are is often defined by who we are in relationship to our natural families. There are certain characteristics and mannerisms that are recognizable in the different family members. Our position in life is also often defined accordingly eg., poor, middle class, rich.

- In the kingdom family there are no class divisions. We are all part of the same family. We're all rich in God.
- The more we relate to our spiritual position rather than our natural position the more kingdom fruit we will bear in our lives.
- The Choice is yours. What's it going to be 30 - 60 - 100 fold?
- Which family has the greatest priority in your life? Is it your natural family or your spiritual family?

We see this characteristic in the life of Peter when he responded to Jesus on one occasion and said, *"See, we have left all and followed You."*

There was that period in Peter's life when he literally forsook his natural relationships to be near to Christ so that He could grow as one of God's sons.

Luke 18:28-29 *Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God.*

Obviously there is a healthy balance here that must be maintained, because Peter later wrote, "to dwell with our wives according to understanding", lest our prayers be hindered.

2. We Must Have Genuine Fellowship With God & One Another.

One of the most defining characteristics of a true Christian is the fellowship we have with God and with other members of the Father's family.

A scholar once asked his Rabbi, "Why did not the Lord furnish enough manna to Israel for a year all at one time?" The teacher said, "I will answer you with a parable. Once there was a king who had a son to whom he gave a yearly allowance, paying him the entire sum on the fixed date.

It soon happened that the day on which the allowance was due was the only day of the year when the father ever saw his son. So the king changed his plan and gave his son day by day that which was sufficient for the day; and then the son visited his father every morning. How he needed his father's unbroken love, companionship, wisdom and giving! Thus God dealt with Israel and deals with us."

Psalms 145:18 *The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.*

1 John 2:13-14 *I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

There's a story about a woman who, on the advice of her doctor, had gone to see a pastor to talk about joining the church. She had recently had a facelift and when her doctor dismissed her, he gave her this advice: "My dear, I have done an extraordinary job on your face, as you can see in the mirror. I have charged you a great deal of money and you were happy to pay it. But I want to give you some free advice. Find a group of people who love God and who will love you enough to help you deal with all the negative emotions inside of you. If you don't you'll be back in my office in a very short time with your face in far worse shape than before." (From "There's a lot more to health than not being sick" by Bruce Larson)

The greater our fellowship is with the Lord and one another, the more we are absorbed into the true character of Christ. The more time we spend with someone, the more we become like them. We see this in the life of Peter and the other disciples. They were continually with Christ and couldn't get enough of Him.

John 13:8-9 *Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"*

3. We Receive A New Education.

For many of us our secular education has helped to define the person who we are. As Christians we must realize we are now enrolled in a continuous education of the Holy Spirit and the word of God. The new education we receive in this realm will help to further define the person we are in God and His kingdom.

Acts 4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that*

they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

John 7:16-17 *Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*

4. There Is A Continuous Character Building Going On.

One of the most important characteristics of a Christian that really helps to define us is that there is a continuous character building going on in our lives. We continue to get stronger and stronger in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He is doing in our lives.

Sheldon Van Auken in his excellent book *Severe Mercy* has a piece that says, "The best argument for Christianity is Christians – their joy, their certainty, their completeness.

But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians – when they're self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration. When they're narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths."

Matthew 7:24 *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

The more we are submitted to Christ's Lordship in our lives the more of the fruit of the Spirit will be manifested in our lives.

Again, we see that this took place in Peter's life as he was the one that was noted for being a rock and also exhorted us in this area.

2 Peter 1:5-8 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

III. Concluding Remarks.

When we allow all four of these defining characteristics to define who we are as

Christians, we will bear the kind of fruit that brings glory to the Father and His Kingdom. Allow God to define these four characteristics in your life today.