

The Constituents of True Christianity

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 13:4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you. 5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

We want to let the Scriptures display before us what it means to have Christ in us and to be a true Christian. What are the constituents of a true Christian? The following quote has been very provoking to me and has caused me to share this message.

Halfhearted Christians obscure the glory of God, misinterpret piety, and cause men to receive false ideas as to what constitutes vital godliness. Others think that they, also, can be Christians and yet consult their own tastes and make provision for the flesh, if these falsehearted professors can do so. On many a professed Christian's banner the motto is written, "You can serve God and please self--you can serve God and mammon." They profess to be wise virgins, but not having the oil of grace in their vessels with their lamps, they shed forth no light to the glory of God and for the salvation of men. They seek to do what the world's Redeemer said was impossible to do; He has declared, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." {RC 65.2}

Those who profess to be Christians, but do not follow in the footsteps of Christ, make of none effect His words, and obscure the plan of salvation. {RC 65.3}

When I read that statement I thought, Oh, how real this is today. The glory of God is obscured; the plan of salvation is obscured. People no longer have a real crystal-clear understanding of the real meaning of Christianity. What is a real Christian today? Sister White says there are half-hearted Christians that combine godliness and Christ with their self-glorifying and indulgent life. And interestingly, these Christians may even profess to keep God's law; they actually engage in worship, in the study of the Bible, and enter it like Nicodemus did. This is the kind of Christianity that is rampant around us today:

Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. {DA 171.1}

Jesus laid bare what true Christianity is meant to be – *the foundation principles of truth.*

He said to Nicodemus, It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, {Ibid.}

Isn't it interesting? Christianity today in general is always searching to satisfy their curiosity.

You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission. {Ibid.}

Not through controversy and discussion is the soul enlightened. We must look and live. Nicodemus received the lesson, and carried it with him. He searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. {DA 175.2}

What is the purpose of our study? This is our meditation – what it is to be a true Christian.

He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. {Ibid.}

It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. {DA 173.2}

And because they don't comprehend, the water is muddied and obscured.

Its mystery exceeds human knowledge; yet he who passes from death to life realizes that it is a divine reality. The beginning of redemption we may know here through a personal experience. Its results reach through the eternal ages. {Ibid.}

A personal experience, an experience with God in His truth. This is what Apostle Paul addressed when he said, Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, whether Christ is in you, a living reality.

New Birth

As we examine ourselves in the word of God, we want to explore and be very honest with ourselves, especially because this subject has a lot to do with new birth and what the components of new birth are for us to be true Christians.

This new birth is an ongoing experience; the pioneers of Adventism saw new birth as commencing here on earth and being concluded when we are taken to heaven. So we are to examine ourselves in regards to what the Bible shows as to what constitutes the new birth, true conversion, which is something that continues every day. As it says, we are to be *always bearing in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in us.*

This subject of what constitutes true Christianity, true conversion, is what Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about; and He laid bare to him what it actually was.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, It's not discussion that you need; it is a new birth; it is the constituents of true Christianity that you need to understand, not by theory only.

In order to be saved, we must know by experience the meaning of true conversion. It is a fearful mistake for men and women to go on day by day, professing to be Christians, yet having no right to the name. {RH, July 7, 1904 par. 1}

The name "Christians" was originally given to the apostles because they reflected Christ and Christ was in them. They had the true right to that name.

In God's sight, profession is nothing, position is nothing. He asks, Is the life in harmony with my precepts? {Ibid.}

What does He ask? "Is the life in harmony with My precepts?" When we meditate on this principle we then realise, My whole life is to be examined by the precepts of God. Is what I am doing in harmony with the precepts of God?

There are many who suppose that they are converted, but who are not able to bear the test of character presented in the Word of God. Sad will it be, in the day when every man is rewarded according to his works, for those who can not bear this test. {RH, July 7, 1904 par. 2}

The works have to do with true Christianity. And this is where the constituents of true Christianity and true conversion, which have been muddied and obscured by half-hearted Christians, come into focus. Let us examine closely that we are not guilty of obscuring this.

What constitutes true conversion? Am I truly dead, crucified with Christ, with Christ rising within me? Jesus delineated the important demarcation of those who have been borne by the flesh and those who have been born by the Spirit. He said,

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

We have all been born of the flesh; but have we all been born of the Spirit? and are we continually being born?

John 3:6 ...and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Apostle Paul qualified this, saying that that which is born of the flesh, if it continues to live according to the flesh, the Spirit is not there.

Romans 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

Here lies the clear qualification of one versus the other. Because we have been born of the flesh, our flesh has desires and expectations that the apostle also speaks about in the following. We are examining honestly what exactly is our position as Christians; because we have all been born in the flesh, and how is that manifesting itself?

Ephesians 2:3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

This is the conflict – we have all been born with this desire of the flesh, and we have to receive a new mind, the mind of Christ, so that we will not fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind that we are born with, and by which we are naturally *the children of wrath, even as others*. This is what the apostle Paul expands. Where is my mind? Is it there to satisfy my flesh, the desires of my human, sinful nature? Or is it there to satisfy the Spirit?

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are [these];

He starts with the most crass ones, and then brings out the other ones which are often not noted:

Galatians 5:19 ...Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

And we say we've given them away.

Galatians 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft,

Yes, I've given them away.

Galatians 5:20 ...hatred,

Here comes another story. Is there hatred towards anyone in my life? This comes from the flesh. And now comes another important one:

Galatians 5:20 ...variance,

As the colloquial expression goes: Mary, Mary, quite contrary. Always at variance, always contrary. This is the flesh.

Galatians 5:20 ...emulations,

What is that? Competitiveness, one-upmanship – I can do it better than someone else. That's in the sports' world and also in our daily life. Emulation comes from the flesh. When I regard others as less than me – I am better than others; the others are fool – this is emulations.

Galatians 5:20 ...wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings,

And then come the others ones:

Galatians 5:21 ...murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:

These are the manifestations of the flesh that we have all been born in; and we want to examine ourselves from the Scriptures as to what constitutes true Christianity. Where is my flesh muddying the waters of my spirit? Even in the discussion of God's word, is there one-upmanship? Is there emulation? In our behaviour during our daily life, this is where the waters become muddied in so many experiences of the world of Christianity around us.

Jesus said, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* Don't be surprised at what I am saying, He said; you must be born again.

Born of the Spirit

For someone who is born of the flesh, what needs to be done to be born again this time of the Spirit?

Galatians 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

If we are Christ's we have crucified the affections of the flesh, the creature that has fallen with sinful flesh. And this is what the apostle said. At our baptism we have actually made a vow that this is what we would do, and there are many people who are baptized but who are not truly conscious of what they are doing or have done. What is the true nature of Christianity due to baptism?

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ... 6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

In these words we are exploring the true constituents of conversion, which is the beginning of the life of a true Christian. This is the first constituent. What is it? That we die in the beginning at baptism; and then, as apostle Paul also says, that we *die daily*. But this is the beginning – a decided, intelligent and deliberate position, realizing what I am doing as a Christian, dying with Jesus, not living to the flesh anymore. The old man is crucified with Christ. Let us pursue this in its amplification for our daily life.

Standards, Principles and Duties of the Christian Life

The standards of God's word, His will, are to be embraced. The half-hearted Christian is not comfortable with all of God's expectations. But as we study carefully what the precepts of God are, we discover that it's very hard; it's not easy. And this is one of the reasons why many people who have been sitting in these pews in the past are no longer with us. This is the reason. People walk away from something that is too difficult. As Sr. White says, under one pretext or another they walk out. There is a pretext – it's because this or that person hasn't done the right thing. But that shouldn't be the cause for us to walk away. There are underlying realities; and those underlying realities are that, to follow all the principles that have been delineated to us as God's will for us, right down the line, is too hard. We look for an easier way. And we are tempted many times to think, "Do I have to continue to be under this kind of ministry that is always showing me that there is something else wrong with me? If I could find an easier way, I would take it."

The reason why many find the Christian life so deplorably hard, why they are so fickle, so variable [sometimes with the flesh and sometimes with the Spirit], is that they try to attach themselves to Christ without first detaching themselves from these cherished idols. {5T 231.3}

And Sister White describes those cherished idols: *Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness--sin in all its forms*. We are to first detach ourselves from these cherished idols of pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness. Sin in all its forms must be detached from. Unless we do this, we will keep on having this undercurrent of "This is too hard; I'm really looking for an easier way out." And there are many

people who have been with us and have gone out, and then said, “Now I feel so much freer, so much happier here”, in an easier way.

Because professed Christians are not dead to the world. It is easy living after we are dead. {1T 131.2}

It is easy living when initially we die and we continue to know that it is death to the flesh. Then it's *easy living*. Then God's provision and God's will are not a burden to us. Oh yes, there is a conflict; the flesh is with us; but in my mind I am spiritually minded, I love to do what the Lord's will is. Here is the first constituent of genuine conversion and genuine Christianity, which, sadly, we are told is rare today in our time. It was rare already in Sister. White's time; but now it's even rarer still. How much the people are entering into the discussion of ministries, and the discussion of the various doctrines, theorising on doctrine and truth; but death of the flesh and its affections and desires is not something which is really addressed.

I find this really interesting. People love the excitement of when I preach subjects that are controversial, when I present truths that really explain it in contrast to what the other ministries sometimes don't hold. There is excitement there, discussion, and theorising. But what are we really doing in regards to our flesh, our affections and desires? This is rare today.

A Rare Experience

The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. {6BC 1075.7}

As we saw before, half-hearted Christians obscure the understanding of true salvation, of the glory of God.

They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ. {Ibid.}

This is what we are meeting; this is the source of church difficulties and the source of people not sure whether they ever want to pursue this path that has been forged by the original Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, and which this ministry is concentrating on. This is why I don't often spend a lot of time on all the details of the doctrines, because I have shared them already, but we want to get down to the living experience, and this is what I feel is very important. So the initial step is dying with Jesus totally.

"When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" We must cherish a living, active faith. The permanence of our faith is the condition of our union. {5T 231.2}

When we have died with Jesus, if we really have, then the ongoing permanence of that living faith is *the condition of our union*, the condition of whether Christ is truly in me.

A union with Christ by living faith is enduring; every other union must perish. {5T 231.3}

If I am doing something in my life that is not in harmony with Christ in His word, and in all that God has given in His precepts and counsels, then I am in need of cutting this away. If I discover something new that is not in harmony with God's will, because I haven't searched it out myself and then someone draws my attention to it, then I realise, "I am really bound to that habit; I'm depending on that, my flesh is depending on it; my affections are depending on it; it's so hard! How is it possible to change?" This will happen to us time and time again. But I love the way A. T. Jones expressed it. In essence he said, Give to the Lord everything; everything you know, and everything you don't know; so that when the point of truth comes home to you, you can say, Oh well, I gave that up long ago. So it drops out of my life quickly, because I have died with Jesus once and I am dying with Him again and again and again. The initial union with Christ must be maintained and endure through all of life's experiences.

The Ongoing Path

Jesus gave an illustration of a person who has truly died to self and who has a new heart. The new heart has got rid of all the selfishness and the fleshly ways and thoughts and feelings; it is clean of all that. But He tells us plainly that a danger exists there; because we must continue in this path of true Christianity.

Luke 11:23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

This is the false Christianity again.

Luke 11:24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. 25 And when he cometh, he findeth [it] swept and garnished.

The heart has been purified.

Luke 11:26 Then goeth he, and taketh [to him] seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last [state] of that man is worse than the first.

This is serious. What we have done in the beginning that constitutes true conversion must continue to be done, lest the last part of our life is worse than the beginning. So the first constituent of a Christian must be followed by the second. What is it? Jesus said, You must be born of the Spirit; you must be born again.

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection:

My flesh, my self, must be crucified daily, so that the life of Jesus may continue to be manifested in me. To rise to a new life and to stay in that new life; is this a reality? Am I consciously doing this, or am I drifting back into that old way? Am I born of the Spirit?

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The marginal reading is very important, Except a man be born *from above*. Not according to the flesh, but *from above*. And the Spirit that is now to rule in my life is differentiated from the flesh, as we read in Romans 8:5. If we are born according to the flesh, it is the flesh versus the Spirit. The two are totally different. What we are doing here is examining ourselves in the light of these scriptures.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. 16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more.

This is a serious statement. In the first steps, the atonement of Jesus was very clear to us, we saw that He died with our sinful flesh; but now, as we move on, we are not to live after the flesh; we don't look to Jesus according to the flesh, we look to Jesus according to the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

It is an ongoing reconciliation, constantly focusing in the heart and mind upon what God's will is, so that, as He shows us the things that mar our life, we drop them, cut them off, even if it is like drawing the lifeblood out of your heart. This is what Sister. White said it will seem like. But we gave it up; we gave our hearts to Jesus; we saw what He did with our sinful self; and we drop it. This is the new life.

The true Christian who does not obscure this reality is the one who has this kind of activity, as had the first faithful Adventists in Sister White's time:

These souls brought forth fruit meet for repentance. They believed and were baptized, and rose to walk in newness of life--new creatures in Christ Jesus; not to fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God to follow in His steps, to reflect His character, and to purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now loved, and the things they once loved they hated. The proud and self-assertive became meek and lowly of heart. The vain and supercilious became serious and unobtrusive. {GC 461.2}

This is a different thing. *Vain and supercilious* is all this kind of activity that makes a big show of its glory, etc.

The profane became reverent, the drunken sober, and the profligate pure. The vain fashions of the world were laid aside. Christians sought not the "outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but . . . the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." 1 Peter 3:3, 4. {Ibid.}

Revivals brought deep heart-searching and humility. They were characterized by solemn, earnest appeals to the sinner, by yearning compassion for the purchase of the blood of Christ. {GC 462.1}

This was what it used to be. Today it's all an excitement; it's all something different. It has been made obscure.

Self-Examination

Is this our focus, like it was among those in the past? Do we hate the things we once loved? “The proud and self-assertive became *meek and lowly of heart*. The vain and supercilious became *serious and unobtrusive*.” We need to meditate on these words. Are they what I am engaging in? “The profane became reverent, the drunken sober, and the profligate pure. The vain fashions of the world were laid aside.” At home, are these the realities? Am I like that in the home, in the church, in the world? Is this contrast really there? This is the self-examination. Is Christ in me?

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ... 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

This is the continual constituent of a true Christian. And having examined this, we want to let the Spirit of Prophecy expand this for us now. When we examine ourselves in the mirror, we look for the blotches, for the things we have to remove.

Many a one who looks at himself in the divine mirror, and is convinced that his life is not what it ought to be, fails to make the needed change. He goes his way, and forgets his defects. He may profess to be a follower of Christ, but what does this avail if his character has undergone no change, if the Holy Spirit has not wrought upon his heart? The work done has been superficial. Self is retained in his life. He is not a partaker of the divine nature. He may talk of God and pray to God, but his life reveals that he is working against God. {RH, July 7, 1904 par. 5}

Why? Because he is not doing what God is saying in every respect.

Let us not forget that in his conversion and sanctification, man must cooperate with God. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," the Word declares; "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Man can not transform himself by the exercise of his will. He possesses no power by which this change may be effected. The renewing energy must come from God. The change can be made only by the Holy Spirit. He who would be saved, high or low, rich or poor, must submit to the working of this power. {RH, July 7, 1904 par. 6}

This is the reason why today there are so few – because under one pretext or another they can't tolerate this anymore. True Christianity is wholeheartedness

for God; and whatever He says, even if it means crucifying me, that is to be put into effect. We hear all sorts of different poetic fancies about crucifying self; but the real crucifying of self, of doing what God has said, is hardly enlarged. And this is where I sometimes feel a little reticent to enlarge it, because I know from what I have been reading and what I have put away in my life, that those kinds of activities are still in the lives of the people I am ministering to; and I feel reluctant, like Sister White also did, to speak up on those things. She didn't want to expose anything anymore, and the Lord frowned upon her. I feel that very closely. But no; no matter how much it hurts, I have had to speak it up, and it has caused friction.

So what should these considerations do for us?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The word of God is going to achieve this.

Hebrews 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. 14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

This is what we should be doing. And we will find the time of need frequently, when we have to go to focus upon Jesus and deal with God's expectations in our life according to Jesus as our High Priest. This is the all-important exercise, that for Christ's sake we deny self. Come to Jesus. Ponder Him. Let the truth of Him cut to the very discernment of thought and intent. Let it do its work. Let it pulverise everything that is of the flesh and make it of none effect. Fix your eyes upon Him. Follow Him. Learn of Him. *Learn of me*, He said, *for I am meek and lowly in heart*. And by so doing, all we have pondered here as to what constitutes true conversion and true Christianity may truly be a reality to us.

Conversion is a change of heart, a turning from unrighteousness to righteousness. Relying upon the merits of Christ, exercising true faith in him, the repentant sinner receives pardon for sin. As he ceases to do evil, and learns to do well, he grows in grace and in the knowledge of God. He sees that in order to follow Jesus he must separate from the world, and, after counting

the cost, he looks upon all as loss if he may but win Christ. {RH, July 7, 1904 par. 3}

What I found attractive and which held my affections is now replaced by my affections for Jesus. Never forget that.

...he looks upon all as loss if he may but win Christ. He enlists in his army, and bravely and cheerfully engages in the warfare, fighting against natural inclinations and selfish desires, and bringing the will into subjection to the will of Christ. {Ibid.}

This is true Christianity.

Daily he seeks the Lord for grace, and he is strengthened and helped. Self once reigned in his heart, and worldly pleasure was his delight. Now self is dethroned, and God reigns supreme. His life reveals the fruit of righteousness. The sins he once loved he now hates. Firmly and resolutely he follows in the path of holiness. This is genuine conversion. {Ibid.}

May God grant us that we may have true Christianity. I thank God for the purity of His word. Let us go forward and be the true Christians that we have examined here.

Amen.