**The Essence of Christianity**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV)

     The essence of Christianity is Jesus Christ living through the Christian.  Colossians 1: 27 (NIV) reads “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”  When a person invites Jesus into their heart, He comes to live in them.  The Bible reveals that a person has eternal life when, by a simple act of faith, they believe that God the Son died on the cross as a sacrifice for their sins and believe that He rose from the dead on their behalf.  The risen Jesus along with the Holy Spirit comes and lives in the believer to give them His life.  This simple act of faith begins a life- long relationship with God but how *do* we live the Christian life?

   “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Colossians 2:6 NKJV).  How did we receive Jesus?  We receive Jesus by admitting we could not earn our way into heaven by our own good works and we do not have the resources to measure up to God’s high standards of perfection.  In humility, we trust God to do what we could not and accept His free gift.  By that act of faith, God made us part of His family and “…blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3 NKJV).  We saw we did not have resources in ourselves but trusted in God’s provision and power to do what we could not do.  So how do we “walk in Him,” a term meaning how do we live out our daily life by God’s power?  First, we must realize that God’s calling for us in this life is humanly impossible love:

 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Love never fails…. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 NIV)

     These verses from this famous love chapter are often quoted at weddings.  This definition of love in the Greek language is called “agape” which describes the sacrificial unconditional love that Jesus demonstrates for mankind.  This “agape love” is humanly impossible but God lives in the Christian for a good purpose.  He wants to express a measure of His life of love in cooperation uniquely through each Christian.  Often we try to imitate Jesus without understanding that He wants to live His life through us not our life independent from His.  We access His life by depending on Him to work through us versus trying to achieve spiritual growth through human self- effort: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,” (2 Corinthians 3:5 NKJV).  Therefore, we live out our daily life by having faith in God’s strength and power trusting that we do not have the resources in ourselves to produce the life God desires without His help.  Eventually many Christians are dismayed to discover that they cannot aspire to the highest calling of the Bible in spite of their diligent effort:  “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”(1 Peter 1:15-16 NKJV).

      What then is God wanting us to discover? Jesus says:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5 NKJV)

The Apostle Paul elaborates on this very radical approach to Christian living:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NKJV)

      Paul was allowing Jesus to live through him by practicing the abiding life of faith that Jesus described in John 15:4-5.  Paul was not literally crucified with Jesus but is describing a Christian’s identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus that occurs when a person receives Jesus.  Paul describes God’s goal for his life, that Jesus may be revealed through him.  “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, *to reveal His Son in me*, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles…” (Galatians 1:15-16 NKJV).  No wonder many of us struggle to live the Christian life.  Because we may not understand God’s goal, we may be practicing the wrong thing.  We may think God keeps making things harder and harder so we will just try harder.  We may wrongly think God is continually raising the bar expecting us to jump over it.  Others may think since He commands them to perform the impossible it is their responsibility to fulfill His commands with their own human strength and wisdom.  The truth is God expects Godly living to be accomplished but in the new way of Jesus living through us. Paul admonishes the Galatian Christians for shifting from a simple life of faith in Jesus to human self-effort for spiritual growth:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3 NKJV)

     The Apostle Paul also describes the common experience of a sincere Christian’s frustration in trying the impossible task of living the Christian life with only human strength.  “O wretched person that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God---through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans7:24 NKJV).  Jesus is the solution for living a Godly life.  “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God---and righteousness and sanctification …” (1 Corinthians 1:30 NKJV).  Jesus is our righteousness and sanctification.  Just as Jesus delivered us from the penalty of sin so with our co-operation He will deliver us progressively from the power of sin.  He is the source of Godly character.  A Christian does not have a stock of “agape love” in themselves but must draw fresh resources from the power of God as the need arises.  If we honestly look within ourselves we often will be depressed or sometimes we will try to justify that we are really not such a bad person.  Neither attitude is what God desires.  God’s goal for us is to depend upon Jesus and the Holy Spirit to produce their fruitful life through us.  Paul prays for the Philippian Christians to be “ … filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ…” (Philippians 1:11 NKJV).

    Jesus gives an assessment of mankind’s attempts to reproduce His life.  “The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing…” (John 6:63NIV).  The word flesh can refer to the human body (Galatians 2:20) but this verse in the Book of John  refers to a part of us which is hostile to God’s purposes and wants to operate independently from God (Romans 8:5-7 NKJV). Often, it is hard to get Christians to admit they still have a bent toward wrongdoing even though our daily life frequently reflects our sinful, independent behavior.  Acknowledging our rebellious natural bent away from God’s goals can lead a Christian to question how it is possible to be a Christian and still have part of us hostile to God’s purposes.  Secretly, we may question why God would do such a thing to us?  He gives us an impossible life to live and then leaves us with the flesh that is imperfect and prone to habitual sinful behavior.  This may appear to be unreasonable until we understand God’s strategy.  He leaves us with the flesh so we will need to practice depending on Him to restrain it in order to allow His life to shine through us.  “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7 NKJV).  Jesus, “the treasure,” who lives in the Christian is the power source.   God views the Christian’s true identity as joined to Christ as part of His body.  We are considered by God as saints who still have the ability to sin. (Ephesians 5:3)  The flesh is part of us until we die but is no longer our true identity.  The flesh is like clothing.  It is part of us but not really who we are.  We are linked to Jesus as God’s adopted child yet for now on this earth are still saddled with the flesh so that we might develop intimacy with Jesus “as” our life.

    The Bible contains a number of terms to explain the process of controlling the flesh and releasing God’s life:  “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Romans 13:14 NASB).  “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:9-10 KJV); and, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10 KJV).

       In reality, in these referenced verses, the Apostle Paul is writing about the very life that Jesus lived.  Listen to Jesus as recorded by the Apostle John.  “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:57 NKJV). Jesus was modeling the life we are to practice.  Jesus depended on the Father to live His life through Him.  So, too, Jesus is now encouraging us to practice allowing Him to live through us.  Allowing Jesus to live through us is a lifelong endeavor and many of us are slow learners.

       The reality is that many Christians are a lot more prone to sinful behavior than we care to admit.  Nevertheless, God continues to unconditionally love us and does not fail or forsake His children, regardless of how it may seem.  God disciplines us to move us to a point of changing our mind (repentance) so that we may get back to depending upon Jesus to express His life through ours.  We learn any new thing through a lot of failure, including this life of dependence.  But God has a provision for our frequent failures:  “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NKJV).  God may even allow and use troublesome circumstances in our lives to bring us to the end of our own resources so we will depend on Him.  In 2 Corinthians 1: 8-9 Paul writes that his overwhelming trial was so that he would not trust in himself but in God.  Many Christians, however, try their best to live the Christian life by their own power or often give up and live by their fleshly passions and desires. Both these paths lead nowhere but to major frustration.  Living by our own human effort or living by our natural fleshly desires lead only to a hollow Christian experience.  In the midst of our troubles we often miss what God desires, for us to depend on Him for His help. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46:1 NKJV).

     If you have spent a lifetime of beating yourself up because you cannot measure up or have given up altogether, here is hope.  Jesus wants to carry your burdens and live His life through you.  Yet, by no means is living a life of dependence upon Jesus devoid of struggle. Understand that there is an internal conflict between our new nature and our flesh until the day we die. Trusting Jesus is our source of victory for overcoming the many temptations and satanic opposition we face in this world.  The objective of the Christian life is a lifelong practice of yielding to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us to manifest the supernatural life that only He can produce.

By Bob Jones and his neighbor Ron For more information on this subject go to

Bob’s website at [www.restinginjesuslife.org](http://www.restinginjesuslife.org)