

Essential Christianity

By Steve Bray

John Wesley did not have precisely the same beliefs as Jonathan Edwards. And yet, Wesley extracted vital truths from one of Edward's books (*The Religious Affections*) and published the material in a form that would help Methodists better understand the true Christian life. It is in this same sense that we have extracted many of the following lessons from two books written by men with Lutheran beliefs. While there are fundamental differences between Wesleyan/Arminian doctrines and Lutheran doctrines, there is also a similarity between the two. There are writers from both camps that insist on seeing certain basic fruits from the life of a believer before he can be accepted as one who has experienced the new birth. In other words, a mere orthodox belief is not enough. Everyone who is truly born of the Spirit will experience a moral purification—sanctification begun—that will begin to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This truth will be developed further in the following material so the reader may test himself to see if he is in the faith that produces the fruit of Christ's Spirit from his life. (2 Cor. 13:5)

Both John Arndt in his book, *True Christianity—Book One*, and C. O. Rosenius in his book, *A Faithful Guide to Peace with God*, have stressed the vital elements of a Spirit-empowered Christianity. Since we cannot possess the salvation of Christ without His indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:9), nor can we go on calling ourselves Christians if we are not currently living by the Spirit, we believe these teachings are greatly needed in this day. Most people within the church are now basing their hope of salvation on what they call an orthodox belief. But something is lacking in their faith because they have not begun to manifest the fruit of Christ's Spirit.

It was Arndt's purpose to address this same problem when he published his book in 1712. The situation has not changed. We believe that everyone who is now calling themselves a Christian should give the following lessons an earnest and prayerful consideration. Those who have received the gift of the Spirit will find

true harmony with what has been said. Those who have not yet received the gift of the Spirit will often rise up in rebellion against God's truth, but at least there will be an opportunity to uncover the deception that has blinded the eyes of so many in these last days.

Preface

True Christianity consists, namely, in the exhibition of a true, living, and active faith, which manifests itself in genuine godliness and the elementary fruits of righteousness. We bear the name of Christians, not only because we ought to believe in Christ, but also because the name implies that we live in Christ, and that He lives in us. In a word, Christ has come to live through the temple of our body and manifest His spiritual life to the world. The power to live in the godliness that God requires comes from this participation with Christ in His divine nature.

Everyone tends to seek to improve themselves and gain distinction in the world by acquiring much knowledge, but very few concentrate their efforts on learning how to live through the life of the Son. Many seek for ways to build up their reputation, but where do we find people seeking to be like Jesus who made himself of no reputation and a servant to all. His display of a meek and humble life of self-sacrificing love became the living example and the rule of conduct for everyone who would seek the highest wisdom and knowledge. And yet, how little do we find even people within the church seeking out this wisdom that comes down from above.

Many people are willing to serve Christ in certain ways, but very few will consent to follow Him along His path of the cross. But He has left us without excuse when we neglect this essential walk of faith—the only path that leads into a real participation with Him in His life. The truth is forever established in the eternal Word of God: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt 16:24-25)

The life we find is the spiritual life of Jesus. He is the one who has come to give us life and life more abundantly. (John 10:10) Not only is He a revelation of the way and the truth, He is also the source of the life that we are to manifest in this world. (John 14:6) And while He offers His life to everyone, there are only a few who are ever willing to enter into his holy life and share with Him in His nature of humility, meekness, patience and self-sacrificing love. We believe there are many within the Church who say “Lord, Lord,” but they have held back from following Jesus. They have been unwilling to face the scorn that comes from rejecting the self-seeking ways of the world and walking in the self-denying way of the cross.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matt 7:21))

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (Heb 13:12-14)

Christians today, like the Jews in Jesus’ day, are looking to worship a messiah that is someone other than the true Christ. That is why they cannot accept the life that Jesus has come to give His true followers. The false messiah they have chosen to follow has an imposing appearance—one that is magnificent, rich, and conformed to the world. Few are choosing to follow the poor, meek, despised, and lowly Christ who sacrificed Himself for the good of others. To these He will one day say, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23); you were not willing to die to your own will and live in the humble, self-sacrificing life of love that I revealed and made available to all true believers.

The lessons in this book are intended to show you how to go beyond being forgiven for your sins through a belief in Christ’s shed blood. Justification is only one part of essential Christianity. Jesus also came to save us from our sins by enabling us to share with Him in His life. We must enter into this participation

with Christ in His life, living through Him, if we are to enter into the true salvation of the Lord.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Rom 5:10)

Jesus did not come to save us “in” our sins, but rather “from” our sins. He lived above sin and gained a victory over the devil. We can now share with Christ in His victorious life. True Christianity consists, not in a mere belief in words, nor in any external show, but in a living faith, from which proceed fruits that will manifest Christ’s own life and nature.

The lessons provided in this book are intended to turn the reader from self to Christ. It will describe the essential nature of sin, reveal man’s helplessness when it comes to conquering sin in his own strength, and to show how all hope for deliverance will be found in Christ. He has become the beginning, the middle, and the end of our justification and salvation from sin.

Our Only Hope

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (1 Cor 1:30)

In this impressive sentence, the apostle Paul teaches us that all things necessary for our salvation are found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Man cannot save himself.

Sin, indeed, can be committed by man himself. But he cannot recover himself from the fall that produced a deep depravity within his very nature. He is able to submit himself to the devil because he now shares with the devil in a fallen nature. But he cannot pick himself up and live in holiness to God. As a dead body cannot quicken itself again, so men, “being dead in sins” (Eph. 2:1, 5), cannot raise themselves again into life.

Thus it was necessary that the Son of God should come into this world to recover what was lost in the fall. He entered into a normal human body and revealed how Adam should have lived. The Bible refers to Him as the Second or Last Adam because He is the beginning of a new lineage of people who have been enabled to enter back into a life of holiness to God.

Those who live by the flesh-life they receive from the first Adam will continue to live in sin. It is natural to them. They cannot help but live by their own will. In contrast, those who are willing to bury their old flesh-life in the grave by coming to Christ through repentance, and then living through His Spirit, will be empowered to live for God and His will. They will no longer go on in “the sin” of self-will.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 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. For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Rom 6:3-7)

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Rom 6:16-18)

The Scripture calls the natural man a “servant of sin” (John 8:34), and one that is “sold under sin.” (Rom. 7:14) Since all self-will is sin, he cannot do anything but sin. The desires of his own flesh are what determine what he will do in life. He simply cannot get free of self-will until he has received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his... But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Rom 8:8-14)

Christ charged His apostles, before all things, to preach repentance. Without a decision to turn from self-will to live by God’s will, it is not possible to receive the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit will only be given to those who have chosen to enter into a life that is wholly led by the Spirit. A person who chooses to live by self-will remains a rebel against God. God has the only “acceptable” will. (Rom. 12:2) And His ways are far above the normal thought processes of fallen man. That is why we must receive the gift of the Spirit before we will be able to understand the ways of God. Only in this way can we ever have the mind of Christ.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Cor 2:9-10)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:12-14)

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:16)

The faith that is willing to turn from self to God for life from above is a very active principle within the soul. It converts the whole man. It results in the gift of the Holy Spirit and enables him to walk in the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ comes to subdue and vanquish sin. Whoever, therefore, imagines that his sins have been pardoned without receiving the Spirit of Christ to enable him to overcome sin is most miserably deluded. He is under a terrible deception that will have dreadful ramification throughout all eternity.

Superficial Christians need to realize that “the one thing needful” is the salvation of the soul. This should become their chief care and constant solicitude. Nothing in the world should be permitted to interfere with the salvation of their soul. They must shun all those things they use to develop a false sense of peace. They will need to take their eyes off other men and look to God alone for the life that comes from heaven. Like Enoch, they should learn to walk with God in this world if they hope to be raptured into the next.

What Salvation Does

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph 4:23-24)

Man was created in a way that would permit the spiritual image of God to be manifested through him. It was intended that God's righteousness, holiness, and goodness would be revealed in all of his actions. As the Spirit filled his eternal soul, the "light of life" would be manifested through Him. He would be so immersed into the life of the Spirit that he would breathe nothing but God's divine love, purity and power.

As man remained filled with the Spirit of God and walked in the Spirit, he would have continued to recognize God as "all in all." He would recognize God as the source of all uplifting spiritual life and godliness. He himself would be a mere vessel to display the image of Another. In this state he would have constantly enjoyed a relationship with His Creator where God was everything and he was nothing in himself. He would only remain a valuable human being in the world while he lived to display God's glory.

When the Son of God was sent into the world to live in a mortal body, He came for the specific purpose of displaying the life that Adam lost when he turned to Satan's way of self-exaltation and self-will. If the Son while living in a mortal body was to become, and continue to be a display of the divine image, He must wholly surrender Himself to the will of His Father in heaven. He would be required to permit the Father to work in Him whatsoever was in the divine will. Therefore, by denying His own will, He was able to do everything His Father wanted to accomplish through Him. He said it was the Father who spoke through Him, the Father who did the miracles, the Father who directed His every step. And yet, He said it was the Holy Spirit who worked all of this out in His life as He walked by the Spirit.

The Son, who came to show the world how Adam and all human beings were designed to walk, then directed everyone who wants to be saved from their fallen state to follow Him. They too would need to deny themselves and take up their cross if they hoped to find the same kind of life in the Spirit. They would also become holy instruments that He could use for His purposes. Such a man, when he truly follows his Lord, follows not his own will, but the will of His Lord.



[BACK TO HOME PAGE](#)