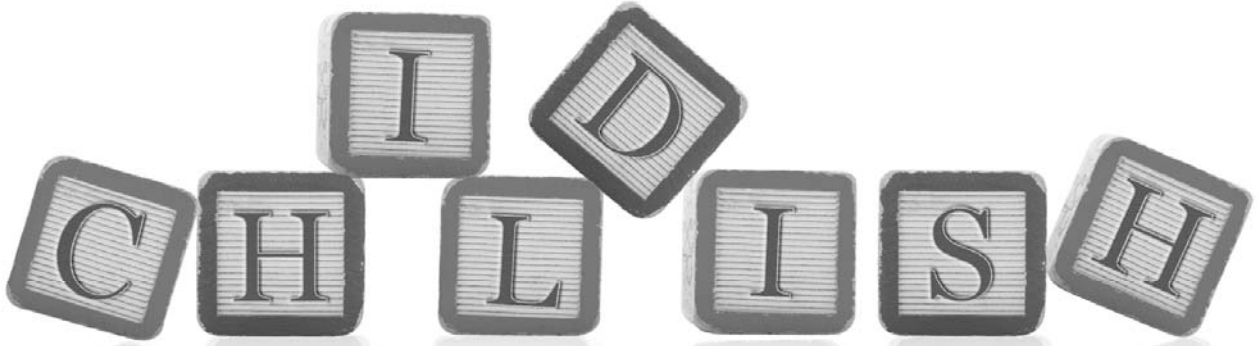


put away



things

CAUTION:
Reading this material might
cause you to grow up in Christ.

f o r r e s t w y c h o p e n

Copyright © 2007 by Forrest Wychopen

Put Away Childish Things

By Forrest Wychopen

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved solely by the author. The author guarantees all contents are original and do not infringe upon the legal rights of any other person or work.

Copies of this booklet, in its entirety, may be made without permission from the author.

Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Bible.

Any Scripture with **bold** or *italics* sections are used at the discretion of the author for the purpose of drawing the reader's attention to a particular truth.

Contents

First Things First- 4

The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make
All Have Sinned
Do You Believe?

What Now? - 8

Simply Abide
How Do I Abide in Christ?
The Meditation of my Heart

True Christianity - 13

The Proof of True Discipleship
Tough Love
The Traits of Love

Childish Things - 21

Speaking
Understanding
Thinking
Will You Stand For Christ?

First Things First

Although I believe every Christian can benefit from this teaching, I am constrained to write specifically to the **younger generation**. This booklet is really just a long, personal letter that is saturated with Christian love and concern for your growth in Christ. I have a desire to see each of you truly commit your lives “specifically” to Jesus Christ and for Him to be the love of your life. I sincerely yearn for you to *know* Christ as your very life and for you to *know* His sufficiency in all things. For some of you this will be a **wake-up** call, for others it will be a source of encouragement as you continue down the path of Christian living. For each of us it will serve as a reminder that Jesus Christ is really the only person who can live the genuine Christian life. The attempt to make progress in any aspect of your Christian life apart from knowing this truth will ultimately end in failure and disappointment.

We are all involved in spiritual warfare and are on the same side of the struggle. As a matter of fact your parents and I experience many of the same temptations, worries, and fears that you may be experiencing. We all face the temptations to think, say, and do the wrong things—and we often do. Sometimes we worry about the future. And, if we’re completely honest, we will even acknowledge our fear of not measuring up to the high standards and lofty expectations of others. Remember, I was a teenager too and although our backgrounds and circumstances are different I faced many of the exact same battles you are currently facing. I understand what you’re going through.

I know your parents agree—we desire for you to live the best life possible by avoiding the same mistakes we’ve made. But you are no longer a child and it is time for you to take hold of the truth you have learned and make it your own. I am referring, of course, to the truth that Jesus Christ is everything. I am talking about Christ becoming intimately personal and genuinely real in your daily life. You lack nothing in Christ, and you are complete [*thoroughly equipped*] in Him. Is He the love of your life? Is He is the “standard” which you are living by? It will be impossible to yield genuine fruit if you are not first wholly committed to the person of Jesus Christ.

THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION YOU WILL EVER MAKE

Have you become a true Christian and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ? Stop and seriously think about that for a moment. I am not asking if you are a good person. The Christian life is Jesus Christ. Are you a disciple of Christ? There can be no “I guess so,” or “I think so,” or “I hope so” when it comes to receiving Christ and living the genuine Christian life. This is serious business. We must each know beyond any doubt that we’ve obeyed the **Biblical** prescription for having eternal life. Otherwise, we will end up standing next to all who are eternally condemned. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have

cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you**: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22–23).

Listen to this warning. *You can be a teacher of sound Bible lessons in the name of the Lord and still be cast into the lake of fire. You can exercise Biblical authority by casting out demons in the name of the Lord and still be lost. And it’s even possible for your life to abound with many wonderful works and still end up eternally separated from God.* The words, “I never knew you” are sobering and terrifying words of rejection and should cause you to give serious thought to your relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Bible warns, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because **strait is the gate**, and **narrow is the way**, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

What must I understand?

The way to everlasting life is narrow. This means that the way is compressed down to a single and slender path. There are not many ways to Heaven—there is only *one* way. Do you believe what Jesus said? “Few there be that find it.” Wow, think about those sobering words. This means few in number or quantity will actually find the straight and narrow way. Examine yourself and make sure you are in that number. You’ve got to get this right. The only way to truth and life is through Jesus Christ. “Jesus saith unto him, I am **the way**, **the truth**, and **the life**: no man cometh unto the Father, **but by me**” (John 14:6). Jesus is not a way, a truth, or a life. Nor is He some way, some truth, or some life. He is: “**the way**, **the truth**, and **the life**.”

ALL HAVE SINNED

When I was a teenager no one had to explain the Greek definition for sin in order to convince me that I was a sinner. My God-given conscience told me when I did wrong—often before I did it. So when I first heard the Gospel it didn’t take much to convince me of my sin and need of salvation. There is no need for me to provide pages of sound theological fact in order to convince you either. Romans 3:10 and 3:23 provide more than enough evidence. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” All unrighteousness is sin. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Exactly how many times do you need to sin in order to become a sinner? How many times can you lie before becoming a liar? How many times do you need to steal something before becoming a thief? How many times do you disobey your parents before you dishonor them? If you said just once, you’re correct. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in **one point**, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

It's difficult for us to understand that one violation of God's law makes us guilty of all because we can always find someone who is worse than we are. But when we measure ourselves by God's divine standard, which is Jesus Christ Himself, every single one of us will come up short! Death is upon every human being as a result of sin. You will not escape the penalty of sin. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and **so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned**" (Romans 5:12). The word *death* does not simply refer to physical death. Death refers to eternal separation from God. **Romans 6:23 says**, "For the wages of sin *is death*; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

DO YOU BELIEVE?

We are all familiar with the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus found in John chapter three. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (sitting on the council of seventy men called the Sanhedrin) and a Pharisee. He was highly regarded by the people. And he was a religious man who studied the scriptures fervently and had impeccable character. But he was lost.

One night, Nicodemus secretly came to Jesus. He acknowledged that the miracles performed by Jesus gave evidence that He was a teacher sent from God. The Lord Jesus wasted no time; He got right to the heart of the matter. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Of course, Nicodemus was wondering how it was possible for a grown man to enter into his mother's womb for the second time and be born all over again. Jesus explained, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Nicodemus was confused and asked, "How can these things be?" How is a person born again? The simple and direct answer confounds many people to this day. The answer is this: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Jesus did not say you must pray or attend church in order to be saved. He did not demand years of good works and good deeds. He did not give several rules and regulations for you to obey. He simply says, believe in Me.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever **believeth in him** should not perish, but have eternal life." God sent venomous snakes to bite the people of Israel as judgment for their sin. Snakes were everywhere. In His mercy, God made a way of escape. Moses was instructed to lift up a brazen serpent on a pole. If the people who had been bitten looked upon the brass serpent, they would live. How simple is that? Look in faith and live! Jesus made it crystal clear to Nicodemus. Whoever believes in Me will not perish. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever **believeth in him** should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Those who believe in Jesus Christ have everlasting life, but those who reject Jesus Christ will face eternal death.

Is the second death something that will occur in the future, or is death and condemnation already upon those who have rejected Jesus Christ? "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not **is condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only

begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:18–19).

Condemnation is not another word for dying a natural death, implying that all things will come to an end when we take our last breath of air. Rather, this word denotes eternal separation from God, a condemnation that will last for all eternity. Notice that the criterion for selecting or choosing whether a person is separated or put asunder is based on his belief or unbelief. “He that **believeth on him** is not condemned: but **he that believeth not** is condemned already [*now*], because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

The death sentence is *already* upon those who do not believe that Jesus Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). The unbeliever is condemned already, even though he has not physically died. The unbeliever lives in a very present reality of death. He is already dead in trespasses and sins.

Jesus Christ must be the focus of our belief. Our trust, reliance, dependence, and faith must center on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is **always** the object of genuine faith. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day?

If there are any doubts in your heart and mind, why not settle this issue once and for all? Your ability to live a genuine Christian life and your final abode depend on it.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30b–31). If you have not trusted Jesus Christ alone, will you believe in Him and receive Him now?

What Now?

We have received Christ by faith; now let us continue to walk in Christ by faith. That is really the core issue of what I want to speak with you about; putting away childish things, growing up in Christ, and allowing Him to live His life through you moment-by-moment. How very exciting it would be if believers came together in unity with one mind that was centered on Jesus Christ. As true Christians we should be more excited about Christ than anything else in life. Are you willing to follow Christ with your whole heart?

We are equipped with the power and the desire to live a genuine Christian life because Jesus Christ lives in us. He brought to us unlimited amounts of grace and truth in His very person, so when we have Christ, we have everything we need in order to live a fruitful Christian life. We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 1:3.) Everything we will ever need is in Christ. Do you believe that?

What I am saying is that our relationship with Jesus Christ results in changed behavior. It is very important for us to understand the difference between “learned” behavior and “spontaneous” behavior. Let me explain what I mean.

Do you have good behavior only because you have been taught what good behavior looks like? (A pet dog can learn to be obedient!) Or do you have good behavior because Jesus Christ has changed your heart and given you a desire to please Him? In no way am I suggesting that good Christian virtues should never be taught. We all know better than that. But we must clearly know that it's the person of Jesus Christ Who equips us with the power, ability, and desire to live out the various Biblical truths we have been taught.

SIMPLY ABIDE

Consider the important lessons we learn from Jesus' parable of the vineyard found in John 15. Jesus is the True Vine, the Heavenly Father is the Vinedresser, and the believers are the branches. From this teaching, we understand that the branch does absolutely nothing except abide in the Vine and bear fruit. The branch does not toil or strive to bring forth fruit. It is not ambitious, regimented, or determined. The branch doesn't even make plans for what it should be doing, does it? The branch simply abides in the Vine, soaks up the Son, and bears fruit.

Imagine being a new branch. After a couple of years there is not much fruit in your life. You feel guilty about this so with heartfelt sincerity you tell both the Vine and the Vinedresser that you are going to *rededicate* your life and commit to bringing forth more fruit in the coming year. “I'm going to be a better branch.” (We've all said it.)

Curiously, the Vine asks, “How are you planning to bring forth more fruit?” You respond, “First of all I plan on attending a plant-growth seminar. I will learn the best techniques of growth and fruit production and then apply the truths I have learned. Then I will find books that give me the step-by-step method of how to be a disciplined branch and commit to doing *my part*. I will form accountability groups with other branches and work harder. I am determined to do it.”

In response the True Vine rejects your plan. He counsels, “Simply abide in Me, for without Me you can do nothing; through Me you can do all things.” The Vinedresser agrees, “Trust in My care for you. I will prune and purge you in order to bring forth more fruit.” You still insist, “This sounds too simple.”

Obviously there is nothing wrong with Bible-centered seminars or books that encourage us to grow as Christians. But unfortunately, in many instances these resources actually end up leading us away from the Lord Jesus Christ by directing us to cling to a particular principle, program, or plan instead of Christ Himself.

What I’m saying is that the provision for an abundant Christian life is not found in a particular formula, system, or standard; it’s specifically experienced in the True Vine. As we abide in Christ alone and Christ abides in us, fruit will appear. Apart from Him, however, we can do nothing real and genuine. Jesus is not merely an aid to help us live the Christian life; when we become followers of Christ, He becomes our entire life. The fruit of an abiding life is simply the character and person of Christ living through me.

HOW DO I ABIDE IN CHRIST?

We have all made the comment or at least heard someone say, “It’s just too good to be true.” Most of us have been cautioned to avoid things that sound too good to be true because they’re probably too good to be true! “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: **for without me ye can do nothing**” (John 15:5). Doing the one thing of abiding in Christ sounds impressive, but it also sounds way too simple. There has got to be more to living the Christian life than just simply abiding in Him. How can something this simple be entirely good and true?

Scripture teaches us that the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ is good *because* it’s absolutely true. It simplifies the Christian life by centralizing Christ in our thoughts which in turn affects our actions. The branch yields fruit because of life in the vine and careful workmanship of the husbandman. The branch simply abides.

After other believers hear this truth the first question they usually ask is: “How do I abide in Christ?” I must admit that when I started to learn this truth, I too wanted to know the process of *how to* abide in Christ. Not only was I seeking a method for myself but I wanted to share a practical way with others on how they could experience the abiding life.

Personally, my past had been so inundated with the mind-set that I must always be doing something that the idea of “doing nothing” came across as outright lazy. I assumed there must be something I should be doing. It is very important for us to understand the small details of what Jesus said. He did not say without Him you *will* do nothing, He said without Him you *can* do nothing. When we truly understand that without Christ we can do nothing, we will actually begin doing something that is genuine.

To my surprise, the more I searched for a particular system or method of how to abide in Christ the more the Holy Spirit kept taking me back to Christ alone. There was no greater need in my life than to simply know Christ. I soon discovered that if I placed more attention on trying to find the process for living the Christian life instead of longing to know the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, I drifted from His fullness and abundance. My intimate awareness of Christ began to slip away and I didn't like it. Nothing else completed my life like Jesus Christ did. The Heavenly Father kept placing me back on the trellis of truth by turning my heart, mind, and will back to Christ alone. All I wanted was Christ. I was consumed with knowing Him. The more attention I gave to Him the more satisfied I was. This may sound too simple or too basic but when Christ is all we desire we soon discover that He is all we need.

The abiding life is not found through a particular method. What I mean is that the abiding life is not acquired through something *we* do. The abiding life is simply the result of identifying Jesus Christ through the written word of God, the fiery trials of life, and grievous times of loving chastisement. God the Holy Spirit assures that we will know the preeminence of Christ in all things. It's nothing that we do; we simply receive, by faith, the truth that God desires to give us.

As we saturate our mind with God's word, we'll begin to identify Christ in each commandment, exhortation, truth, and principle. We will discover that a trial is designed to take us into a deeper and more intimate walk with Christ. And we'll understand that loving correction from God the Father is designed to strip away our self-willed behavior and turn our heart to the complete sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is the Biblical antidote for abiding in Christ? It may seem like I've given you a lot of different things to do but in reality I have given you one word of advice: **make a conscious effort to seek the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and know Him.** Walk with Christ in faith. Understand that spiritual fruit is simply the manifestation of Jesus Christ and His character. Think about the person of Jesus Christ and dwell on Him. Get to know Him through the word and talk with Him in prayer. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask God for spiritual understanding and knowledge of this life-changing truth. **Seek Him.**

You will discover that as He becomes your life focus, His purpose for your life will be clearly defined. He will begin to direct your life in ways you never imagined. You will not wander around aimlessly when Jesus Christ becomes your life. Nor will you bury yourself in “good

spiritual activities” in an effort to appease your conscience so you can feel better about yourself. He will guide you. The more Christ-minded you become the better off you will be.

Beware of the enemy who as a roaring lion seeks to destroy us by taking our focus off of the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember the subtle, sly, and sneaky adversary will use “religious” activities and events to thwart our love for Christ. Keep in mind that our relationship with Jesus begins with initial salvation, continues throughout this mortal life, and ushers us into the glory of eternity. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

As we know Christ personally and intimately He becomes our life and begins living through us in a practical way. He begins directing our thoughts and actions through His revealed word. Our *will* is changed. He reveals the sin we need to repent from and then gives us the power and the desire to forsake it. Our motives for the things we do become pure because it is Jesus Christ who orchestrates our spiritual activity. We begin to understand that the Christian life is not about us and the works we do. Rather, it is about Christ and the works He does through us. Simply abide. As we abide in Him, He increases; and as Jesus increases, we decrease.

THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART

A heart that is habitually set on Christ will not be acquired overnight—it will take time. Let me encourage you to be patient and do not get discouraged or give up the pursuit of knowing Christ. What do you spend time thinking about?

I can recall the personal battle that raged those early days of growing in grace and knowledge of Christ; especially at night. Personally, when my mind wandered from dwelling on Christ, I made a conscious effort to go back to John 15. I would quote the first five verses and think about each word, again and again. This is important: I recommend that you memorize passages of scripture that teach and exalt the person of Christ—there are many: Psalm 23, Matthew 11:28–30, John 15:1–5, Colossians 2:6–10, and Ephesians 1:15–23 to name just a few. As you quote these passages and meditate on each word, you will discover new and exciting insights. As you fix your mind on Christ, something will begin to happen. He will become very real and personal. He will become your dearest and closest friend. Each day you will start thinking more on Christ and less on yourself. It will soon become a normal and habitual part of your daily life to think on Christ and His fulness.

We are all susceptible to becoming excited about purpose, programs, performances, principles, plans, or procedures more than the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your thoughts can drift off on anything. What do you spend time thinking about? Be completely honest. Is it school? Or perhaps music, sports, or career. Maybe it’s marriage? I am not suggesting these things are wrong or evil. But the devil’s scheme is to clutter your mind with something other than Christ.

As you read the Holy Scriptures, God will impress a particular passage, verse, or even a specific word on your heart. When He does, I admonish you to saturate your mind with every word and allow the Holy Spirit to personalize the truth. God impresses a particular passage, verse, or word on your heart for a reason. Commit it to memory. Then listen for God's still, small voice in your inner man. Be still and know that He is God. Wait on the Lord and you will renew your strength in Him. Finally, understand above all else that the Heavenly Father's will is to exalt the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will specifically testify of Christ and glorify Him. I cannot stress this point enough, it is important for your thoughts to be specifically on Christ.

The next time you hear a sermon, identify Christ. The next time you read the word, seek Christ. If you are experiencing a trial, see Christ in it. If God is correcting you, turn your heart to Christ. Learn of Him. Saturate your mind with Christ and remember that every Christian virtue reveals the person of Jesus Christ. He is the manifestation of all truth. You can start right now!

As your knowledge and understanding of Christ increases, you'll begin to understand that He is *all* you need. He is all you'll desire. He will become the delight of your heart, and you'll enter into a life of genuine fruitfulness. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk ye in Him**" (Colossians 2:6).

"And now, little children, **abide in him**; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28).

True Christianity

The evidence of a genuine Christian life is never the result of learning a list of specific Christian duties and then trying hard to do them. When we have the “appearance” of being something we are not it’s called hypocrisy. Putting on the mask of good behavior when it’s really not in you may fool others, but not God. We have either become new creatures in Christ, or not. The evidence or proof of a genuine Christian life occurs as a natural result of being connected to the True Vine—Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, fruit will come.

Of course, I am not suggesting you will become “sinlessly perfect” in your present mortal condition. I realize that we each face the struggle to do the right things in our Christian life on a regular basis. It’s not easy, is it? On the one side, we are saved and we are sure of that. But on the other, we have moments when we do not “feel” like we are saved because our outward behavior contradicts what we confess to be. There is a very real battle going on in each of us.

This is where we must decide *how* we are going to live the Christian life. There are two primary possibilities. We will either commit ourselves to Bible-centered standards and rules, **or** we will follow and commit to Jesus Christ Himself. Both appear to be the right choice, don’t they? But let me ask you some questions. Does a branch yield fruit because it strives and works diligently to bear fruit by committing to certain growth standards or rules of the vineyard? Or does a branch yield fruit naturally because it simply abides in the vine and receives care from the vinedresser?

My desire is to see each of us live the genuine Christian life by loving and knowing Jesus Christ and trusting our Heavenly Vinedresser to purge and prune our lives as He sees fit. Our love for Jesus Christ will result in changed behavior and obedience to Him. Be a Christian by simply following Christ. Abide in Him and bear the fruit He desires to bring forth in your life.

Although there are many commands, exhortations, admonitions, and truths contained in scripture, there is one key truth that proves you are a disciple of Christ. Do you know what this truth is?

THE PROOF OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

It may seem like a small thing but God’s word places a very high priority on love for one another. As a matter of fact, His word says: “Again, a new commandment I write unto you, **which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past**, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. **He that loveth his brother abideth in the light**, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:8–11).

It is important for us to know the differences between light and darkness as it is being used in John's first epistle. In God there is absolutely no darkness. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all**" (1 John 1:5). In other words, there is no association with darkness or wickedness with God—ever. There is never a lack of divine understanding because God is always light. He is always truth. He is always perfect knowledge. And the spiritual purity and perfection of God is unchangeable.

Prior to receiving Christ we were all in spiritual darkness—we were alienated from God and were the enemies of God. There was absolutely no light in us prior to being saved because God, who is light, was not in us. Make note that the contrast between *light* and *darkness* is absolute. For the believer, "darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." The scripture is not suggesting we can bounce back and forth from light to darkness. Nor does it suggest that we will become the very essence of true light, like little gods. If this were the case, none of us would ever have one sinful thought, do one sinful deed, or say one sinful word—ever. The Christian, however, is always "positionally" in the light because the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, is always in him.

Our new life in Christ produces genuine love—and proves true Christianity.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. **He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.** Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14–15).

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and **every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.** He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7–8).

It is crystal clear: when we possess genuine love it proves that Jesus Christ dwells in our heart. Love provides the clearest evidence that we are truly the disciples of Christ. The fruit of love is the primary indicator of living a genuine Christian life.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; **as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another. **By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples**, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34–35). Love is the greatest mark of true discipleship.

The old commandment says "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39b). But to His disciples a new commandment is given. This does not cancel out the first commandment, but rather, ushers us into a new and deeper type of love. Not only should we love our neighbor (fellow mankind) as we do ourselves but now we should love one another (fellow believers) **as Christ** has loved us.

This commandment clearly reveals *our inability* to love one another the way Christ instructs us to. In other words, most every one of us can be a good neighbor by doing unto others as we would have them do unto us; but try to love a fellow believer **as Christ loves you!**

How does Christ love you? None of us can even begin to imagine the depth of love that Jesus Christ has for us. But by faith we can each be assured that even though He knows our every thought, word, and action, His love for us is unchangeable. He loves YOU this very moment as much as He ever will. There is nothing you can do to change the depth of His love. It is in light of this reality that Jesus commands us to love others as He has loved us! In other words, we are to love even those Christians who are *unlovable*. How is this even possible? That's the point! The only possible way for us to possess genuine love is by abiding in Christ and letting His love flow through us. Do you see the importance of knowing Jesus Christ as your very life? He is really the only person who can live the genuine Christian life. We will never be able to obey the commandment to "love one another as He has loved us" apart from fully abiding in Christ.

TOUGH LOVE

I guess one of the first things we should address is that authentic love does not tolerate sin. I am not saying it is our job to hunt for sin in other people's lives. That's easy to do and there are many self-righteous individuals who have a passion for setting others straight. If you are like I am, you can examine your own heart and find enough evidence of wrongdoing that will thump you off the pedestal of self-righteousness. I don't need others to tell me. We do, however, have the Christian and Biblical responsibility to always "hate the sin," but "love the sinner." There will be times in your Christian life when you'll need to make the difficult choice of withdrawing from a fellow believer because of the practice of specific sin in their life.

We should all be aware of the Biblical mandate to separate ourselves from fellow believers who are committing certain sins. We do not lack love when we withdraw from a fellow Christian who is living in known sin, but rather, we are obeying the Holy Scriptures. As a matter of fact, when it is done properly, God uses the isolation and subsequent humiliation to bring forth true repentance and changed behavior. What are these Biblical warnings?

"But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Fornicator is a person who indulges in unlawful intimate relationships. *Covetous* speaks of a person who is eager to have more, especially what belongs to others. It refers to someone who is greedy of personal gain. *Idolater* is a person who participates in any way in the worship of the heathen. The heathen will worship and love money, sensual pleasure, worldly philosophies, traditions of men, certain ceremonies of the world, and not Christ. (See Colossians 2:8.) It also refers to a covetous man as a worshipper of material wealth or possessions. *Railer* speaks of a person who reviles or scolds in harsh, insolent, or abusive language. It refers to someone who is given over and habitually angry, instead of possessing kindness and gentleness. *Drunkard* is a person who gets intoxicated or drunk. And *extortioner* is someone who obtains money or property from a person by force, intimidation, or undue or illegal power.

Romans 16:17 warns, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which **cause divisions** and **offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned**; and **avoid them.**”

2 Thessalonians 3:6 says, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly**, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14 admonishes, “And if any man **obey not our word by this epistle**, note that man, and **have no company with him**, that he may be ashamed.”

THE TRAITS OF LOVE

There will be times in your life as a Christian when you are required to withdraw yourself or pull away from a fellow believer because of their lifestyle. Be careful though, none of us have the right to separate ourselves from a fellow Christian simply because he or she is different or does not measure up to the lofty expectations of what we think they should be. Differences are not sin. We must also realize everyone cannot be our closest and dearest friend. We simply have more in common with certain people and as a result have a natural and growing friendship. Most of us have a “very best” friend who we enjoy being around. There will always be different levels of friendships. But remember, the commandment to **love one another** is not reserved for only our dearest and closest friends—it is for all believers.

The Bible gives us an idea of what the love of Christ looks like. These traits are the practical aspects of love in action toward each other. But I want to remind you; our “fruitfulness” is always the result of our “faithfulness” to Jesus Christ, not from the drive and discipline of living a regimented Christian life. When we love and follow Jesus Christ by faith, He lives His life through us; and the essence of His love is in our hearts and minds and subsequently manifested in our actions. When a branch is connected to the vine, grapes will appear spontaneously. When we are abiding in the True Vine, Jesus Christ, we too bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

The more we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord the more love we are able to demonstrate genuine love toward each other. That’s why the scripture informs us that others will identify us as Christ’s disciples by the love we have for one another. “**By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples**, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). One of the best passages for identifying the *type* of love we should possess is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Let’s take a brief look at “charity” and examine ourselves in light of God’s word. Dr. Dave Reagan pointed out that the word charity does not refer to “giving financial charity” to the needy. That is made clear in **1 Corinthians 13:3**, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” Charity refers to the love we have for one another. Charity is a *specific type* of love which is explained in 1 Corinthians 13. Remember, the Lord Jesus Christ is the personification of charity and the only way we can possess genuine love is through Him.

Charity suffereth long. This means we are patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others. When someone is offensive, do you suffer long or do you quickly react? In other words, charity backs away and allows God time to work in a person's life without injecting our own will. Charity does not give up or lose heart quickly. I am so thankful Jesus never gave up on me. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Charity is kind. Charity is gentle and mild and displays kindness to others. Sometimes our words or actions are mean and shrewd to others. Little "jabs" or "sarcasms" will often wound others. None of us like to associate with someone who is always uttering unkind words or doing unkind deeds. Aren't you grateful Jesus Christ is full of charity—even when we do not deserve it?

Charity does not envy. Do you burn with the zeal to be better than someone else? Charity does not envy the attention someone else may receive. Does it ever rub you the wrong way when someone else is publicly honored and you're not? True charity is not jealous of what someone else may have or do; charity genuinely delights in others blessings.

We can all be grateful that Jesus Christ does not grasp at His own glory but lovingly and willingly shares Himself. "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and **I am glorified in them**" (John 17:10). "And **the glory which thou gavest me I have given them**; that they may be one, even as we are one:" (John 17:22). Jesus Christ is not consumed with self-exaltation—He willingly gave Himself.

Charity vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up. In other words, charity does not boast of itself. Genuine charity does not look for a way to exalt itself. We really need to guard our heart and make sure we have not placed ourselves on a lofty platform of superior rank compared to others. Do you view yourself as being better than others? Be honest. When we are arrogant it will manifest itself in our words and deeds. Charity is Christ-centered, not self-centered.

The perfect example of genuine charity is Jesus Christ Himself. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But **made himself of no reputation**, and **took upon him the form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and **became obedient unto death**, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5–8). Let the mind of Christ be in you! Be like Jesus.

Charity does not behave itself unseemly. This means that charity does not act unbecomingly. Behaving "unseemly" is when we do not live according to the values that are appropriate to our position or condition as a true disciple of Christ. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: **old things are passed away**; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Charity does not seek its own. In other words when we possess genuine charity we are not always seeking or craving self-interests. Do you spend a lot of time thinking about or striving after your own interests? Aren't you grateful that Jesus Christ considered our need of salvation and deliverance instead of His own comfort and glory?

Charity is not easily provoked. Charity is not quickly stirred with anger. When we possess genuine charity we display kindness, gentleness, patience, and calmness. Charity does not explode with anger when others mistreat or misuse us. Nor is it provoked to anger when others fail to say or do what we think they should be saying or doing. Charity is not a time bomb of emotion with a short fuse waiting to explode.

Jesus Christ is our example, "Who, when he was reviled, **reviled not again**; when he suffered, **he threatened not**; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:" (1 Peter 2:23).

Charity thinks no evil. Charity does not think up ways to injure or destroy others. And a person with charity in their heart does not think about evil or wicked things. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things are **honest**, whatsoever things are **just**, whatsoever things are **pure**, whatsoever things are **lovely**, whatsoever things are of **good report**; if there be any **virtue**, and if there be any **praise**, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Let me ask you some questions. Is Jesus Christ true, honest, and just? Is He pure, lovely, and of good report? Does He possess moral excellence and is He praiseworthy? The logical and obvious answer to each question is, yes. It is imperative, therefore, that we set our minds on Christ and think about Him. As our focus is on Christ, His character and virtues flow through us.

Charity does not rejoice in iniquity. Do you ever sit around with your friends and actually enjoy hearing the specific details of someone else's sin? Charity does not find pleasure in hearing about someone's iniquity or unrighteousness. We are all tempted to delight in the gory "details" of sin and must always guard ourselves against gossip or evil speaking.

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is **a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret**" (Ephesians 5:11-12). If you are going to sit around and talk, why not magnify and exalt Christ?

Charity rejoices in truth. Charity finds joy and gladness in truth. Our greatest source of truth is Jesus Christ Himself. He did not come to give us principles of truth, but truth itself. The fullness of truth abides in Christ, and you lack nothing when Christ is the focus of your life.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) **full of grace and truth**" (John 1:14). "For the law was given by Moses, but **grace and truth came by Jesus Christ**" (John 1:17). "Jesus saith unto him, **I am the**

way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children **walk in truth**” (3 John 1:4).

Charity beareth all things. The word *beareth* literally means to cover over with silence. It means to keep secret, hide, or conceal a matter. Often, whenever we discover the shortcomings of someone else we can hardly wait to “leak” the news to our dearest and closest friends. Whenever you start a conversation with: “*You promise not to tell anyone what I’m about to tell you?*” there is usually no good that will come from it.

Personally, I’m grateful that my sins are forgiven. As Corrie Ten Boom once said, “*They are now cast into the deepest sea, and a sign is put up that says, NO FISHING ALLOWED.*” Aren’t you grateful that Jesus covers our sin with silence? “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for **charity shall cover the multitude of sins**” (1 Peter 4:8).

Charity hopeth all things. Charity does not lose hope in the power and ability of God to accomplish His perfect will and purpose in our lives through Jesus Christ. “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed **in Christ Jesus our Lord:**” (Ephesians 3:11). Charity waits patiently with hope, joy, and full confidence in God. Often, we are ready to give up on someone else because they are not doing the things we think they should be doing.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us **in Christ Jesus** before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Charity endureth all things. Charity remains faithful to Jesus Christ under misfortunes or trials. We can each be assured that hardships and trials will come our way. Trials are a very natural part of life but we can endure these trials when our faith and love is centered in Christ. Genuine love endures all things. Do you love Jesus Christ with your whole heart, soul, and mind?

Charity never fails. I guess if we could choose the single greatest attribute of charity, it would be this one. *Charity never fails.* What an amazing promise from Holy Scripture. I pray: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, **being rooted and grounded in love**, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to **know the love of Christ**, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17–19). The clearest mark of true discipleship is the love and charity we have for one another. “**By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples**, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). What is the greatest evidence of true Christianity? “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but **the greatest of these is charity**” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

After reading the attributes of charity, do you feel overwhelmed? Are you thinking there is just too much to learn, apply, and perform? Good! I'm with you. This is exactly why the message of Christ is so freeing. He is the only person who can live the genuine Christian life.

Our abiding friendship with Jesus Christ is evidenced by the love we have for one another. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you...These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:12-14, 17).

This teaching from Christ is not some tricky scheme designed to play with our emotions or manipulate our will. He is not suggesting: "You can be my friend *if* you will obey what I say." Instead, He is teaching us that as we abide in Him and have charity one toward another with a pure heart, it provides proof and evidence that our relationship is genuine and that we are truly the friend of Jesus. The spontaneous result of knowing Christ is manifested by the love and charity we have for one another.

"I am crucified with Christ: **nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Childish Things

The Apostle Paul states that when he became a man, he put away childish things. “When I was a child, I **spake** as a child, I **understood** as a child, I **thought** as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). He was speaking metaphorically. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that literally denotes one kind of idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. In other words, the Apostle Paul was not exhorting the Corinthian believers to grow up and mature as adults. He was encouraging them to grow up in Jesus Christ: to know Him, walk with Him, talk with Him, and abide in Him. In the context of his teaching he was exhorting the church at Corinth to be mature, grown-up Christians by having charity one for another with genuine Christ-like love.

The Apostle Paul references the literal realities of natural human life in order to make application to daily practical life as a Christian. In other words, he exhorts us to stop speaking, understanding, and thinking like a child does. Your speech, understanding, and thought life will naturally change as you grow older. But it is possible for you to grow older without ever truly growing in Christ. Grow up in Christ! It would be wise for us to remember the words written to the believers at Corinth earlier in the epistle.

Paul wrote: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even **as unto babes in Christ**. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1–3).

The Christians at Corinth behaved as carnal Christians. In other words, the believers at Corinth walked like people who didn’t even know Christ. It’s as if Christ had no part of their life. They were saved but instead of being spiritual and manifesting the character of Christ they were carnal or fleshly in their behavior. The marks of growth and genuine love were certainly not among them. They were jealous of each other, angry, contentious, and divided. They were not unified with the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were “babies in Christ” and lacked the genuine characteristics of Christ-like charity as seen in chapter thirteen. So Paul admonishes the church at Corinth to grow up and yield the fruit of charity that Christ desires to bring forth in their lives. “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save [except] **Jesus Christ**, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

When we examine Paul, there is one glaring reality that is continually exposed in his life: he loved Jesus Christ with all of his heart, and Jesus Christ was his very life. Whether it was a letter to the Church at Rome, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, or Corinth; the central focus of

his message was always Christ. He continually directed fellow believers to Jesus Christ because he knew that Jesus was really the only person who could live the genuine Christian life.

I assume we all understand that a child speaks, understands, and thinks like a child; but I say again, the Apostle Paul was not encouraging the believers at Corinth to grow up and mature into adults. As we consider these last thoughts let's keep in mind that the real thrust of Paul's message was for the believers at Corinth to grow up and mature *specifically in Christ*. He yearned for them to speak like Christ, understand like Christ, and think like Christ. Are you speaking, understanding, and thinking like Christ? "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? **But we have the mind of Christ**" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

The "charity" chapter does not merely chronicle descriptive aspects of love that we should endeavor to achieve. Nor is it just another list of things for us to do. I am not suggesting we should ignore the attributes of charity. And I am certainly not saying the characteristics of charity should never be taught or applied to our daily lives. I am simply stressing the fact that these attributes reveal the character of Jesus Christ Himself. He is the perfect fulfillment and personification of each quality. We know we are growing-up in Christ when the attributes of charity are manifested in our words, understanding, and thoughts. Do you want to know if you are living out the charity of Christ in your daily life? Then simply measure your actions by the holy standards which are chronicled in 1 Corinthians 13. The divine attributes of charity only become experiential realities and spontaneous actions when we abide, dwell, and continue in Christ.

SPEAKING

"When I was a child, I **spake** as a child..." (1 Corinthians 13:11).

You can always tell what consumes a person's mind by the things they spend time talking about. People naturally and spontaneously speak about the things they love and the things that consume their life. Unfortunately, among many true believers there is often very little mention of Christ in their daily conversations because of a superficial or shallow relationship. This is a tell-tale sign that you are not growing up in Christ. Are you growing in Christ?

Another visible sign of having an anemic relationship with Jesus Christ is when a person becomes bored or is uncomfortable around those who do love to speak about Him incessantly. (Do you feel left out when someone speaks about Jesus all the time?) When Jesus Christ is not the highlight of our conversations it should be a warning that we've left our first love. As committed Christians, we should never tire of speaking or hearing about Jesus Christ. Is Christ the love of your life?

What do you talk about with your friends? Do you testify of Christ and His preeminence in all things? Do you exalt the Savior? Do you glorify Jesus Christ with your conversation? Let's be completely honest. If we do not first have a personal, abiding, and growing relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ we'll discover that it's not possible to speak of Him with true sincerity.

It's okay to speak about things that are going on in your life. God created us for friendship and fellowship. But we should all know that it's abnormal for a Christian to rarely speak of Christ. If the truth be known so many lack the ability, or even the desire, to speak of Christ because they simply do not have a growing personal relationship with Him. You will not sincerely speak about something or someone you do not know.

One of the clearest evidences that Jesus Christ is truly in control of our conversation is when our words are spoken in charity. I am referring to genuine charity, not some type of "flowery" or "bubbly" expression we often convey when face-to-face with a fellow believer on Sunday morning. Words that are genuinely kind, selfless, humble, pure, and saturated with truth reflect Christ. Genuine charity can only come from Christ living His life through us. It only stands to reason that since Christ personifies each attribute of charity listed in 1 Corinthians 13, He is the only one who can produce genuine charity and love in our lives.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). We might be flamboyant, eloquent, and persuasive speakers who dazzle others with our fine speech and crafty words but if the love of Christ is not flowing through our life our words are empty and a lot of irritating noise! People usually know it too. They know when you're a phony. Every one of us needs to apply James 1:19. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Are you a gossip? I am amazed at our propensity to highlight the failures and blunders of others. We are liars and hypocrites. We claim to love the brethren, and yet we devour them behind their back. You know I'm telling you the truth. Review the qualities of charity I've already shared and make them personal realities by abiding in Jesus Christ.

Above all else, I want to encourage you to love Jesus Christ with your whole heart and mind. As you grow in love for Christ your words will become more and more Christ-like and you will be endowed with the characteristics of His genuine love. You will stop speaking like a child does and begin blessing others with Christ-like conversation. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

UNDERSTANDING

"When I was a child...I **understood** as a child..." (1 Corinthians 13:11).

In addition to child-like speaking, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to grow out of our child-like understanding. In his letter to the church at Corinth, he exhorted the members to grow up in their spiritual understanding of Christ. Keep in mind, Paul had to speak to them as unto "babes in Christ" because they were not growing in Him (1 Corinthians 3:1).

True spiritual understanding is not acquired from growing older and experiencing more in life. Nor is it obtained by filling your mind with various Bible truths. God will certainly use His word and other resources to equip us with spiritual understanding but just because you reach the age of 50, go to church on a regular basis, attend Sunday School, sing in the church choir, read your Bible, serve in various ministries, read the most popular Christian books of the day, and attend every available Christian seminar and workshop, does not guarantee you will obtain true spiritual understanding or genuine spiritual growth. You may accumulate an abundance of various Biblical facts over the years and still never attain true spiritual understanding.

Are you growing in personal fellowship with Christ? That is the real concern for all who want to live a genuine and fruitful Christian life. Do you know Him better this year than you did last year? And do you walk moment-by-moment in the light of His understanding? This is really the single, most important issue for all true Christians. I am not asking if you know more facts about Him; I am asking if you know Him with personal and intimate understanding. Jesus Christ is the key to living a genuine Christian life. Without Him, you can do nothing!

All believers are endowed with the gift of spiritual understanding.

There is no reason for you not to be growing in spiritual understanding. We have all received a spiritual anointing through rebirth. “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20). It is important to note that Jesus is the Christ. The word *Christ* means the anointed one. You have unction or anointing because the Christ is in you!

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and **hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.** This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

What now? “But **the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you**, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as **the same anointing teacheth you of all things**, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, **abide in him**; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:27–28). This verse does not mean that men do not or should not teach. It means we do not need the “teachings” or “philosophies” of men.

Jesus Christ will give us clear understanding as we abide in Him. I am praying that: “The **eyes of your understanding being enlightened**; that ye may **know what is the hope of his calling**, and what **the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints**, And what is **the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe**, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:18–20).

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee **understanding** in all things” (2 Timothy 2:7).

THINKING

“When I was a child...I **thought** as a child...” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

The evidence of our true integrity is tucked away in the hidden and silent chambers of our mind. Others may have the impression we live a sanctified life when in reality we may be scoundrels. Many of us, if not most, end up revealing our sinful mortality at some point in life because we simply haven't learned to bridle our tongue. But we must understand even if we have mastered the grace of possessing a meek and quiet spirit (that is to say, we've learned to keep our mouth shut), God still knows our every **thought**. He probes our thoughts and even the intentions of our heart. Job reminds us of this fact. “I know that thou canst do every thing, and that **no thought** can be withholden from thee” (Job 42:2). God knows our every thought!

How is your thought life?

One of the greatest evidences of genuine abiding fellowship with Christ is when we have Christ-like thoughts. This is the test of true character. We know we are growing in Christ when the way we think becomes more holy, pure, and loving. The scripture admonishes that we should be “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity **every thought to the obedience of Christ;**” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Bring your thoughts, every thought, captive to the obedience of Christ!

Our thought life is refined and polished as we abide in Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” (Proverbs 23:7). What we think will eventually come out of us. Do you dwell on the holiness and purity of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are your thoughts filled with the word—which is Christ?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Also, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

WILL YOU STAND FOR CHRIST?

We will never find the “perfect” Christian. But I encourage you to unite with other Christians who love Jesus Christ and are willing to openly testify of Him. Make a commitment to associate with the crowd who glorifies and exalts Jesus Christ. It may seem awkward or even a little bit unnatural at first but the more you get to know Christ the more natural and meaningful your conversation will be as you praise and exalt Him.

Let me caution you to avoid committing to any teaching that does not direct you to love and follow Jesus Christ. If your speech, understanding, and thoughts are not changed as a result of truly growing in Christ, your new fad will soon blow away with the next wind of doctrine.

If you are not doing so already let me encourage you to start growing by seeking Christ in your personal Bible reading. When you read the Holy Scriptures purpose to identify and know Jesus Christ. Ask the Heavenly Father for intimate and personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Prayer will be a natural and spontaneous occurrence when you begin growing in Christ. Prayer will become a habitual reality as you know Him.

Let me give you an example that conveys what I'm saying here. One night I was cuddling Sarah Beth, my youngest daughter before bedtime. I was going over a particular scripture in my mind and spontaneously spoke out loud to the Lord in prayer. Surprised, Sarah asked, "Daddy, *who* are you talking to?" I responded, "I'm speaking with Jesus, sweetheart." Curiously she asked, "How do you *hear* His voice?" I paused for a moment to think about her profound question. After a brief moment of silence, Sarah quirked, "HmMMM, gotcha thinking there didn't I?" After a good laugh, I returned to a more serious mood and prayed for the words to answer Sarah's probing question. How would you answer?

I asked Sarah if she had ever started to do something that her mother or I had told her *not* to do. She thought and then responded, "Yes, sir." I then asked her if the specific verse of scripture had ever come to her mind, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). She quickly answered, "Yes, sir." I explained that when she recalls scripture like that the Lord is speaking directly to her heart. "Ohhhhh," she said with excitement, "then the Lord speaks to me all the time!"

The Lord will speak to YOU through His word. I've often read or quoted scripture longing for more understanding. When this happens, I simply ask, "Lord Jesus, what are *you* saying to me?" Then I wait. As a Good Shepherd who promises to guide me, He will often answer my request by bringing other passages of scripture to my mind. Try it. These are times of sweet fellowship and intimate communion with the Lord. I suppose this is the real essence of prayer. He speaks to me (through His word), and I speak with Him. The beautiful part of this truth is that I can actually pray anytime and anywhere. I can pray without ceasing because Christ is always present.

Don't worry about anything else. Long to know Jesus Christ. Growth will begin when you desire Him. Above all else **make sure that Jesus Christ is the central focus** of your life. I suppose each of us need to have our own "Mount of Transfiguration" awakening.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet

spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.**

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. **And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only**” (Matthew 17:1–8).

What are you doing to bring completeness and satisfaction to your Christian life? What spiritual activity do you maintain in order to please and glorify God? What teaching are you holding on to that keeps you in the rut of self-determination and self-will, resulting in self-glory? This ought to be our passion: *Only Jesus! Only Jesus! Only Jesus!*

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge **of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

Your friend, servant, and brother in Christ,
Forrest Wychopen