

The Christian Life

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the essence of the Christian life, emphasizing the rarity of the term 'Christian' in the Bible and the need for authentic Christian living. It explores the distinction between a normal Christian life and an average Christian life, highlighting the importance of experiencing the indwelling life of Jesus through surrender and the operation of the cross. The speaker urges listeners to seek a deeper, more meaningful union with God's Spirit, leading to a visible manifestation of Christ's life in their own lives.

Scripture: Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16, John 5:39, John 10:10, Romans 8:2, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Ephesians 1:11, Acts 2:42

Topics: "Authentic Christian Living", "Union with God's Spirit"

Description

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Transcript

Hello, my name is Fred Tomlinson and the title that I have given to this talk is, quite simply, The Christian Life. It's interesting, as we turn into the scriptures, we find that the word Christian is very scarce. As a matter of fact, it's in the 11th chapter of the book of Acts and verse 26 where we read, And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

So that's the first reference we have to the word Christian or Christians there. And there's only one other occasion in the book of the Acts of the Apostles where the word is used and on this occasion we're in chapter 26 of the book of Acts and King Agrippa has been dealing with the Apostle Paul, or was it the other way around? But the fact is that at a decisive moment in the backwards and forwards, King Agrippa says, Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian. And it's interesting, so that's just two references to the word Christian in the book of Acts which is the book which catalogues the earliest days of the Christian Church.

There is in fact a third reference to the word Christian in the New Testament and that comes from the Apostle Peter in his first epistle where he states if a person suffer as a Christian and then he continues on to make his point. So just three references, pretty scarce in the New Testament and we know that at the

same time, in the context of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, another title has appeared and that is the way, those that were of the way and that phrase comes six times in the book of Acts and clearly that became the brand label of choice at that time and there you are. But today the word Christian of course is very very common, I don't need to tell anyone that, and we hear about Christian books and Christian music and Christian bookstores and Christian schools and so on.

I mean, I keep saying well there's no such thing as a Christian book or a Christian music or a Christian anything. We understand as we study the scriptures that the only entity that can be referred to as Christian would be men and women. But those who listen to me more regularly will know that it's not infrequent for me when I'm referring to the word Christian in the course of my talks that I prefix the word Christian with the word authentic, authentic Christians.

That can sound rather patronising, it can sound as though I feel that the word standing alone is insufficient. That's really not at all the reason that I would do this. The fact is that it's just that I want to attempt to expose the widespread shallowness of much of the professing Christian community.

It was a long time ago, decades ago now, when someone put into my hand the book by Watchman Nee entitled The Normal Christian Life and I found that book to be very helpful at that stage in my own journey. I believe that the point behind that book really, at least this particular part of the book, was to contrast between what he would refer to as the normal Christian life and the average Christian life. Essentially what he was doing was claiming that to be average in this realm was to be aberrant and would, as a result of that, be in a position of deviation from the biblical criteria.

Tragically, that deviation today has reached what we could realistically refer to as pandemic proportions. Now, with that said, I think there would be merit in pursuing an analysis of these two categories, but that is not my intent in this session. My intent, rather, is to attempt to shine a light on this popular phrase, the Christian life.

You will know that the phrase is often not much more than a buzzword. It's unknown in Scripture. There's no reference anywhere in the Scripture to the Christian life.

And so today people talk about living the Christian life, they talk about the deeper Christian life, they talk about teaching the principles of the Christian life. And for us today, rather than trying to sort out these categories, the normal Christian life and the average Christian life, I think it would be far more profitable a pursuit to examine what we are thinking about when we actually use the phrase Christian life. Because it seems to me, if we don't get this issue sorted out clearly in our minds and in our understanding, we will lack the authority that Scripture gives to the actual experience of being Christians.

And we want to know what that means. So if someone were to be asked, how would you define the phrase, the Christian life? I think there would be those who would say, well, I think it's to live the way that Christ lived. That makes sense.

And we could then respond to that and say, well, how did he live? How would you describe that? And someone could very well say, well, I think his life was characterized by love. It was characterized by meekness. It was characterized by selfless serving.

And each of these categories are absolutely true. But the fact is, those category headings are speaking of what Christ did, how he behaved. In reality, the life was, in fact, the key to who he was.

It was the very essence of his being. I think many fall into the trap of reading and knowing the Scriptures and believe that as a result of that, that they are experiencing the Christian life. It's interesting to reread John's Gospel, chapter 5, verses 39 and 40, I believe, where Jesus actually tackles this.

And he says to those who are listening to him, you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. But, he went on, these are they that testify of me. And you are not willing to come to me that you might have life.

And, so very, very clearly, the Christian life is not merely a lifestyle. The Christian life is he who came from heaven. John would also have Jesus saying in chapter 10 and verse 10 of his Gospel, I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

That you might have life and have it more abundantly. The Apostle Paul would write in Romans chapter 8 and the second verse about the spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus. And in verse 9 of chapter 8 of Romans, he's talking about the spirit of Christ dwelling in you.

Dwelling in men and women. As a matter of fact, in that verse he says, if any men have not the spirit of Christ, he's none of his. I think one of the big problems that we face, frankly, is that we live, of course, in a very material world and rather than allowing ourselves to be stretched into the obviously unfamiliar realm and territory of spiritual realities, we attempt to compress our understanding into a more comfortable realm.

Into the more comfortable realm where we're able to reason things out and think about things and think through and so on. But in doing so, we find ourselves missing the essential power and impact of this great truth of the Gospel. The Christian life, if we're not careful, is reduced down to words.

If you like Christian words, New Testament words. And people who know me well know I am not in any way diminishing the value, the indescribable value of the words of Scripture. But the fact is, if we're not careful, we're reducing everything down to those words, to teachings.

We're reducing things down to a Christian lifestyle. We're reducing everything down to Christian practices and Christian traditions. But the authentic Christian enjoys a secret union, a fellowship, with the Spirit of God who indwells them via the new birth.

Amen. And so the Christian life is an intensely personal, invisible participation in the divine life. Paul writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 13, he says, He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

That is an incredible statement. It's a statement which, in my mind, overrides the more common reference we hear about having a relationship with Jesus. We do and we may, by the grace of God, have relationship with Jesus.

But that relationship needs to be defined more clearly. And in doing so, we would find that this relationship is a union. It's a bonding together.

It's a joining of the divine spirit with my regenerated spirit as a human man who was once a sinner. But by the grace of God, I'm brought into fellowship with God and I participate in the very life of God that you might have life. What a wonderful, wonderful statement that really is.

And, you know, I believe God's purpose and God's intent is to so impact our human spirit with his life that the Adamic default of our lives is eclipsed by the life of Jesus, the indwelling life of Jesus. And the outcome of having his life dwelling within our hearts, within our beings, will be that the life becomes manifest. It becomes visible in our mortal bodies.

And the degree, I believe, of that manifest or manifestation of his life through us will be in direct proportion to the degree to which you and I surrender ourselves and our self-life to the operation of the cross. You know, whatever is visible in and through my person that has not passed through the cross will not be the authentic Christian life. At best, it will be my Christianized self.

And that can be very refined, but it's still not the authentic Christian life, the life that we read about. The normal Christian life, I think, can be described from scriptures in many different passages. I'm just reading here from 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and in verse 10 I read Paul saying, that he was always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that, or in order that, the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

I'm not satisfied with that tremendous statement. He moves on to what for us is the next verse, the 11th verse. He says, for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that, or in order that, the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Amazing. Paul makes this astounding statement. It comes as no surprise to us because we've read his writings more thoroughly already, but nevertheless as we refocus upon it, what an amazing statement.

He's saying as we surrender ourselves to the principle of the cross, to the death of the cross, with our self-lives, he's saying that that indwelling life, that life, his life, the life, will as the result become revealed, manifested through our persons. He says in the 10th verse it'll be made manifest in our body. That's grand enough and clear enough, but in this following verse he says that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

He's saying, do you get this? It's as though he's underscoring it, he's highlighting it, he's putting in capital letters, bold capital letters to make it plain. He said, I'm talking about this body which was once a vessel of shame. These members which were instruments, or a better translation, weapons of unrighteousness unto sin.

He said the transformation within has been such that the very default of my life has been transformed. I have a new heart, I've received the Spirit of God who has come to join himself to my spirit and I am a new creation in Jesus and by the Holy Spirit of God and I'm new, I'm made new entirely. And these members which were instruments of unrighteousness unto sin and death, he said, have become instruments or weapons of righteousness unto God.

Glory to his name. To experience this in one's life and to receive his life and to allow his life to flow through us insofar as we're yielding ourselves, our self-life and self-desires and ambitions and all that is self to the cross, to the death of the cross. The life of Jesus is manifest and this praises God's glory.

This is what he's after. Reread Ephesians chapter 1 verses 11 and 12 and you'll have this confirmed very, very clearly. Perhaps as a kind of footnote to this brief session, I could say that in your personal life you may have entered into the riches of the Lord's grace.

You may, like Paul, be conscious of him within working in you mightily, the way Paul describes it in Ephesians chapter 3. And yet, in spite of that, those around you in terms of your family and your friends and your workmates and your church members, they may be conscious of your morality, your moral behaviour. They may be impressed with your good works and with your caring nature, with your humility, with the kind tones of your voice. And all of these that I'm just referring to, they're very well evidences of the life.

Yet, in spite of being exposed to those evidences of the life, inwardly, in their hearts, the people around you have not yet actually seen the life. I hope you understand what I'm saying. They've seen evidences through your life which may have been very convincing and very powerful in their own way and ought to be, certainly.

But what I'm wanting to emphasise is the fact that having been exposed to these things in and of themselves, this does not constitute them, whoever they are, actually seeing the invisible divine life. And, you know, seeing they see not. As I'm saying these things, I'm thinking of Elisha, Elisha the prophet.

I'm thinking of his servant. You'll remember a situation that is described in scripture where Elijah and his servant are in a very vulnerable situation, where they are in the town, where they are, they're surrounded by an army, they're coming for Elijah. And the big question was, what on the world are we going to do? And the servant was afraid.

And Elisha prays to God and he says, Lord open his eyes. And the text of scripture says, and the Lord opened his eyes and he saw, he saw, what did he see? He saw another army out there and they were a flaming army of fire there and it put to rest the servant's anxieties because it was the proof positive that God was looking after them and there was nothing to be afraid of. But, you see, Lord open their eyes and that must be our prayer for these who are around us.

Lord, open their eyes. It's not just my good behavior and my qualities. Even though they be of God that are going to do the work, Jesus would say, except the father draw them, they cannot come.

And how important that really is. Glory to God. I'm thinking just now, you know, in the context of living, let me suggest a person in one way, there could be a hundred different ways we could think of this, but in one way or another, a person, perhaps it's a person in our family, perhaps it's our own spouse even, and they're being exposed to these good works coming forth, being, you know, as it were, their feet are being washed by the kindness and the grace of God in this brother or in this sister.

And now then, if the Spirit of God is working in the life of that person and he's ordained this moment, then it won't be merely because of what they're seeing that they will be convinced, but because inwardly in their own hearts, the Spirit of God opens their eyes and they see what is otherwise invisible to their minds, to their understanding. And somehow in that moment, that person receiving the benefit of the authentic Christian man or authentic Christian woman, they sense that they are experiencing the fragrance of Jesus. They sense in some way that the life, the life of God is touching them.

He's ministering to them. He's opening their eyes and they're beginning to see. And you know, I know what I'm talking about because this happened to me.

It's happened to me more than once, but I'm thinking of at a particular occasion. It's now many, many years ago, decades ago, certainly, but I found myself in a situation, I won't take time to describe it, but I

was just chatting with a man across a counter and I'd been served a cup of tea and we're chatting. And in that moment, I saw something that was registering.

It was more than just the form of the man and his personality or his kindness being extended to me. I saw on that same occasion, another man, a young man playing his guitar near to me. And while I was engaging in this conversation across the counter, I kept glancing down to this young man because there was something so pure about him.

It wasn't the fact that he was clean shaven or something. There was something that was impacting me. The spirit of God was working upon me.

He was beginning to open my eyes. The next Sunday, I went to a meeting and I shall never forget watching, looking at, gazing at the preacher. He was speaking.

He was speaking profound things. I can't remember anything that he was saying back then, but I can remember the impact that his life or something about his life was having upon me. And my big arguments, the walls that I had erected in my life, they were all just melting and collapsing there as I sensed I was in the presence of Holy God.

And you know, that must happen. And we must pray for one another that God will open their eyes. I pray that for those of you who are listening to me, it's very likely that there are those who need their inward eyes opening to the broader understanding and perspective of the blessing of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring transformation and Christ likeness, to bring the very life of God to be resident within you.

You know, it reminds me of the woman at the well. Do you remember her? It's Samaria. And it was a divinely ordained meeting, no question about that.

A conversation ensues and Jesus says some things to her. I won't take time to talk about the detail, but it's clear from reading this in the text of Scripture, John chapter four, that she really didn't have a clue as to what he was talking about. It was all a mystery to her.

And, you know, he could give water where she did not need to come with the water pots to the well anymore. So whatever it was, it was baffling to her. But the fact is her inward eyes were being opened and she saw in this man that there was something divine.

There was something she desperately longed to know and have an experience in her own life. And she said, Sir, give me this water. And then some things were said and so on, which I won't go on to talk about just now.

But this is what happens when God opens a person's inward eyes to the life, not merely to the doctrine, but to the life of God. It's like something is opened up within. Eyes are opened.

The heart becomes opened. Other things melt and are eclipsed in the presence of this spiritual reality. This is the authentic Christian experience.

It's the authentic Christian life being ministered by the Holy Spirit. And for those whose hearts are opened, it fits. It fits perfectly.

We've been designed for it. And this is exactly what was happening in that context. You know, there's another text of mine from the Song of Solomon where we read these words, draw me and we shall run after thee is the way the wording of the text goes.

Draw me and we will run after you. And you know, that's exactly what you need to do, perhaps as you've never done it before. If you sense in your heart that God has arranged this moment, he's speaking to you, he's touching a live nerve in your heart where everything within you has been longing for a more meaningful or more authentic experience of the life that was manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you need to run after him, run after him.

In other words, respond with all of your energy and open your heart up to him to receive this great blessing of God, which is made available for each and every one of us. You know, I can't close this talk without just peeping through into another area, as it were, but still related to the same topic. You know, where there's a gathering together of the authentic Christian men and authentic Christian women and they meet together, all who are partakers of the life of God.

This is not merely a gathering of folk who are sharing the same religion or they're agreeing on certain theological topics. This is more than just, hello, how are you? But they share the bond of the common life. They're experiencing the ultimate experience, if you will, of the mingling of kindred spirits.

This is fellowship in Jesus. This is life indeed, said a hymn writer. Glory to God.

You know, all kinds of separation is foreign to us and here we are. I'm sitting here in my study this evening and I'm talking to people who will listen to this, I imagine, who will live in far-flung places from where I am at the moment in Western Canada. But the fact is, notwithstanding this, there's a union that we can experience.

As a matter of fact, it wouldn't be inappropriate to say to you that every Sunday morning here in local time for us, Pacific time, we have an online fellowship meeting, starts at 10.30 our time. And it's not unusual for us to have 10 different countries from around the world represented in the meeting. It's not a huge meeting at the moment, but it's beginning to increase.

But they're not people who just are nominal average Christians. These are people who are coming together because they share a hunger for a deeper, richer, more meaningful, more authentic experience of the life of the Spirit of God in their hearts and in their lives. And I'd like to extend an invitation to you.

Whoever you are, you'd be most welcome to join us and come with us together. Most of my messages are actually preached there in that setting. And we have a brother who sings and it's just a lovely, warm, simple hour or so of fellowship together.

Please consider coming. You can find details on our website, which is mckenziefellowship.com or on my YouTube channel, which you may be watching on now, which is Turn to the Scriptures with Fred Tomlinson. But go on to one of those menus, mckenziefellowship.com, Turn to the Scriptures with Fred Tomlinson.

Go there, follow the link. And one of our brothers here will send you the Zoom link for that meeting. Come and join us.

Join in and let's enjoy the richness of, in the truest sense, Wesley put it this way, mingling our friendly souls together and sharing the joys of true Christian fellowship and waiting upon God with His Word to speak to our hearts and finding a union together, even in the midst of such remote separation, physically speaking. Well, praise the Lord. I hope this has been meaningful to you.

If you would like to share something with me, leave a comment on the YouTube channel. And I really appreciate the remarks and comments. Try to respond to most of them as I can.

But I want to say, God bless you. Let me just pray as we close. Father, this is your Word.

This is your Gospel. This is your plan. And you, Lord, are the sovereign God.

And we pray, Lord, that you will, in actual reality, open the inward eyes of men and women, even many of these that are listening to me talking here. And here with my simple words, Lord, I pray that the Holy Spirit of God may impact hearts and reveal truth and stir responses such, Lord, that they allow you to come into their lives in the wonder of your fullness and with the wonder of your blessing. I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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