

According to the Bible, all humans are eternal. You will never not be! You and I will consciously exist forever! I would argue that this is one of those truths we must keep constantly before us.

Let me illustrate:

- One step: your life on Earth - let's call it "earth-time" - let's be generous say it is 100 years.
- Place flag: this represents death, - simply the doorway into eternity proper
- Walking: now we begin our lives in eternity count with me 100 yrs, 200 yrs, 300 years, etc.
- Stage end: how far into eternity are we? Halfway? We haven't even begun!!
 - ▶ You see how important eternity is! You were created for eternity!

As a Minister of God's Word it is my desire to help us

- Refocus our attention on matters of eternal consequence.
- To help us realign our priorities so that we do not waste our "Earth-time" but invest it for heavenly reward!

As the apostle Paul taught the Corinthians there is coming a day when the quality of your "Earth-time work" for the Kingdom of God will be tested to determine the degree of your eternal reward.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

In probably his 4th letter to the Corinthians, what we refer to as 2 Corinthians, in 5:9-11 Paul writes -

2 Corinthians 5:9-11

⁹ So we [I] make it our [my] goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

So Sunday after Sunday we meet together, in part, to try and persuade each other

- of the foolishness of becoming overly consumed with temporal concerns
- and the wisdom of focusing on issues of eternal consequence.

Fair enough?? So let's turn our attention to issues of eternal importance.

What I would like to do this morning is answer the question - What is the essence of Christianity? Or I might ask, "What is Baseline-Christianity"?

By their nature topical messages tend to cite numerous references. These will be on the screen for the sake of expediency.

When asked, most of you, if not all, would identify yourselves as Christian. I would do the same. We are not Hindu, or Buddhist, or Muslim or Jewish or "other". We are Christians!

All over the world, there is a lot of spirituality and religious activity taking place under the heading of Christianity. But what does it essentially mean to be a Christian? What is Christianity?

- Is it a religion? Not really, although it can be studied as a religion.
- Is it a world view? Not actually, although it does generate a particular world view.
- Is Christianity a lifestyle? No, not essentially, although it does express itself in lifestyle choices.

So, what is it? Christianity is essentially concerned with relationship - the restoration and maintenance of relations between God the creator and Mankind the created.

Christians are people who have restored relationships with God made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are humans who are spiritually re-born - spiritually alive because the life of Christ indwells them through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle John writes in **1 John 5:12**

"He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

John is not talking about physical life but rather spiritual life - it is the possession of the life of the Son of God himself that constitutes our spiritual life.

Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia in **Galatians 2:20**

I (the person I was before trusting in Christ - consumed with self, proud, independent) have been crucified with Christ, and I (the person I was before trusting in Christ) no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God...

So to Function According To Design we live by faith - conscious active dependence on the indwelling life of Christ.

This is Man As God Created Man To Be! This is the essence of what it means to be Christian!

- So - "Christianity" is actually - **Christ - in - you - ity**
- As Ian Thomas [founder of the mission organization that Roxy and I worked with for years] writes:

God created us in such a way that the presence of God as creator within the human being as creature is imperative to our humanity. We, in normality, are to be distinguished from the animal kingdom by a quality of life and behavior that can have no possible explanation apart from God himself indwelling us by his Holy Spirit.

To better understand the essence of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian or Man As God Created Man To Be we must begin at the beginning with the creation of man. In the time we have left I'm going to three points: ▪ Our purpose ▪ Our potential ▪ Our privilege

1st - OUR PURPOSE

We begin by asking the question - Why did God create us? Why do you, why do I exist?

- Well I think all of us know that the Bible teaches that the highest-level answer to this most basic question is - **You and I exist for the glory and praise of God.**

For example we read in **Isaiah 43:6-7, 20-21**

⁶Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth— ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

²⁰ The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, ²¹ the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

You are here so that as a result of your existence...

- As a result of all that takes place with reference to you and how you respond to it
- As a result of all that you choose to do or choose not to do

The glorious nature of God's character and worth will be seen, and worshipped and praised.

- by you directly
- by an observant world
- but especially by a watching universe with its countless spiritual beings worshipping and praising God as they witness his power, his love, his grace, his patience, etc. as he reveals his character as he interacts with your life individually and the life of the Church.

Eph 3:10-11

10His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So for example, God receives glory as he draws us to himself and transforms us from independent self-centered rebels into devoted children who love and care for each other and he does this without overriding our freedom of choice and without turning us into robots.

In fact all creation was made for the praise of God's glory but mankind - you and I - have a **unique potential** to accomplish this purpose! So my second point - **OUR POTENTIAL**

In Genesis 1:27 we read that out of all creation only mankind was created in the image of God.

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

We were created in the image of God with the capacity to demonstrate, to display or better yet to "image-forth" the character of God through our behavior and attitudes.

- E.g., out of all the animals God created we can choose to love Him and others. We can choose to forgive and show mercy or grace. We can pursue justice; we can make plans and can decide to be faithful.

However, as we read Scripture it becomes clear that only Christ ever fulfilled this potential. He is the only successful "Man As God Created Man To Be". Everyone else since Adam has blown it, everyone else "falls short of the glory of God".

In **Colossians 1:15** Paul writes,

¹⁵He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God..."

- We cannot see God but we can understand what he is like by studying and observing the life of Jesus - the choices Jesus made, the way he reacted to people and circumstances, the attitudes he displayed, the priorities he set, the goals he had.

The author of **Hebrews 1:3** says,

³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

- Jesus so consistently "imaged-forth" God by his life that if the character of God were represented by a king's signet ring Jesus was like the exact impression it would make in a hot-wax seal.

Now a very important question!!

- How did Jesus live the life he lived?
- How did he "Image-forth" the character of God so consistently?

Was it because he was the incarnate Son of God?

- If so, we are out of luck; we cannot become like Christ. We are not the incarnate son of God.

Fortunately it was not his incarnation that enabled Jesus to "live the life he lived" and to be "man as God created man to be" but rather it was his dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit by the way, that indwells each and every Christian in this room.

Notice Luke's account of Jesus just after his baptism in the Jordan by John - Luke 4:1,2

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Further down in v.13ff

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. ¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

I wish I had time to lead us in a study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus.

- An excellent book on this topic is entitled to "The Presence And The Power" By Gerald Hawthorne, a former professor at Wheaton College.

Or you can go online and search for "John Owen on the Spirit in the Life of Christ" by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson.

- Sinclair Ferguson concludes by giving the practical value of what John Owen taught on this subject:

2. Perhaps the simplest way to expand Owen's insight is to say: The Spirit was in Christ in order to create the master-copy of the lifestyle he would reproduce in all those who belong to Christ.

So Jesus is the "master-copy" of a life lived in complete dependence on the indwelling Spirit. He was able to "Image-forth" God because he was empowered by the Spirit of God.

- Again, this is " Man As God Created Man To Be"!
- Ill. We were not created to imaging-forth God like a photograph but rather like a mirror.

Now Scripture is clear that God is committed to our being "transformed into the likeness of Christ" - We are being restored to Function According To Original Design - humans made in the image of God who image-forth God because

A very well known passage - **Romans 8: 28, 29**

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.. "

So you can be certain that God is engineering circumstances in your life and is constantly at work, allowing events, not allowing others, to bring you to more complete and authentic acknowledged dependence on the indwelling life of Christ. For it is his created intention that all that takes place in and through your life will resonate not to your glory but to the glory of God as the quality of your life and behavior can have no possible explanation apart from God Himself indwelling you!

- In fact we are touching on a partial answer to that difficult question concerning our election - the question, “Why me?” “Why did God choose me?”

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

We were created to be like the Moon - to reflect the glory of the Sun, not our own glory. The moon has no radiance in itself. It must stand in the unblocked presence of the Sun in order to shine.

A glove has no power of its own. If it is stiff and hard and resistant it only gets in the way of what the hand can do in and through it. If it seeks independence from the hand it will accomplish nothing. To the degree it submits to the hand its only limitation as to what it can accomplish will be defined by the limits of power and skill and will of the hand.

So we come to our final point - **OUR PRIVILEGE**. We were created to be channels for the life, the presence, the power of God.

When God created Adam and Eve He blessed and then commissioned them in Genesis 1: 28,

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

- But he never intended for them to function independent of his presence and power.
- They were to be the glove he was to be the hand in the glove enabling them to accomplish all that he was asking of them.

They were to function in relation to God as Jesus did thousands of years later - in restful confident continuous dependence on God the Father.

Notice what Jesus said at one point to the Jews who were trying to kill him, - John 5:19

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. "

And in John 14:10..

"The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather it is the Father living in me who is doing his work."

And now we, who know Jesus as our Savior and Lord, have the privilege of being the gloves that the hand of God uses to accomplish whatever his purposes are in and through our lives for our good and for his glory - this is what it means to be a Christian!

- As Paul wrote to the church at Colossae in Colossians 1:27,

²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- In other words it is the presence and the power of the very life of Christ himself living within us that will enable us to enjoy the glory of heaven, but not only that - his indwelling life will enable us to fulfill the glorious function of our creation!

- Jesus told his disciples in **John 15:5**,

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. "

So in closing I draw your attention to **2 Corinthians 4: 7-11** - Like Paul our lives and our circumstances form the stage on which God desires to demonstrate the reality of his existence, the beauty of his presence, the awesomeness of his power and the attraction of his love.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, **so that** the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, **so that** his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

This is the essence of Christianity - a person who has been restored to a relationship with their creator through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ - and now through the indwelling life of their resurrected Lord and Savior they are being enabled moment by moment and day-by-day to live the life and fulfill the calling he has given them as they walk in constant dependence on his indwelling presence for his praise and for his glory. This Is Man As God Created Man To Be!

And what is the byproduct of Functioning According To Design ? Joy and Peace and Meaning !

How about you this morning?

A light bulb does not shine of its own power. It must be abiding in the socket -drawing the power to shine from a source other than itself.

- If there is dirt in the socket - if there is unacknowledged or unconfessed sin in your life you will not shine
- If the bulb is loose or unscrewed - if you are living in independence and prayerlessness
- Switch is just turned off - if you are living in willful disobedience the light will not shine.