

1. True Christianity

My Dear Friend,

Our friendship gives you the right to expect my greatest effort to serve your needs. Don't think it is a burden for me to try to meet them. Your deepest needs are spiritual, and as it is my life's calling to help others grow spiritually, ministering to you brings me great joy.

I am sure that there is better help available than what I can give. I will probably not say anything you didn't already know. Still, I hope that you will accept this letter since we are friends. My prayer is that God may so direct my thoughts that the words I write will be helpful to you.

I want to start by sharing some thoughts about what a Christian is. I am confident you already know these truths, but I want to start here in order to give you a good foundation to build upon.

1. Mistaken ideas about Christianity

It makes me sad to think that many people who claim to be Christians don't really know what that means. Some people think that they are Christians because they have accepted the beliefs of a particular church. But the only testimony they have is that they belong to a particular church or denomination.

Other people think they are Christians because of their good works. They think that since they live at peace with their neighbours, don't eat or drink too much, go to church, say their prayers, and help the poor occasionally, they have satisfied God.

Still others think that they must be Christians because they have had deep emotional religious experiences. They always try to pray fervently and they hope to have their thoughts of heaven result in deep feelings. They think that Christ will receive them because of their emotions. They are persuaded that their emotions prove that they are deeply in love with him. To them the only proof they need of their salvation is their feeling that they are saved.

Knowing the truth, doing good works, and having emotional experiences are indeed a part of the Christian life, but they should not be mistaken for salvation itself. At best these things are fruits of the Christian life, but they are not its root.

There are many imitations of true Christianity. Even sinful attitudes and actions can be passed off as true Christianity. I don't mean the false worship of the heathen. That is obviously not Christian. What I am referring to are people who consider themselves Christians even though they don't live as Christians should.

They pretend their sins and evil desires are really good things. They act as if their cutting words and pride are evidence of their Christian seriousness. They pretend that their fierce wrath and their bitter anger are really holy zeal. Further, they make believe that when they are rebelling against those in leadership and authority they are displaying Christian courage and resolve.