

## Real Christianity

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 John 4:13-21 | May 22, 2022

Shootings, slurs, slander. So much done in the name of Christianity that is repugnant, unbiblical, and idolatrous. Winn Butler lead singer of Arcade Fire criticized people who refused to welcome immigrants at the Texas border by saying they are “pretend Christian, fake Christians.” Which means in his mind there are *real* Christians. How do you know a *real* Christian? That you’re the real deal? John says it has to do with *receiving, confessing, loving*. Let’s take a look.

### Receiving the Spirit

How can you tell a real Christian? It has something to do with receiving the Spirit: *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit*. You become an authentic Christian *because* you’re given the Holy Spirit. First the Spirit, then the giving. The **Spirit**: why is the Spirit essential to true Christianity? Jesus expounds: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you (Jn 14:16–17)*. *First, notice the Spirit divides*: the real Christian knows the Spirit; the world does not. He doesn’t say if you say a prayer, if you’re pro-life, if you go to church, you’re a Christian. No matter how much religious makeup you put on, if you don’t have the Spirit you don’t know God. And there’s a lot of make up in this country. How do you *know* you have the Spirit? *Second, the Spirit unites*. The Spirit comes *to dwell with us and in us*. Why is this necessary? Well, if the Spirit didn’t abide in us, we couldn’t abide in God. We’re so unrighteous and godless we cannot bridge the chasm between us and God. *So God bridges the chasm for us*. The Spirit comes right down into our soul and *unites us with Christ*. Why? Because without the Spirit the work of Christ wouldn’t stick to us. He brings the death, life, and moral beauty of Jesus into us and lives there, so that whenever the Father looks on us he sees the very righteousness of Christ. Owen: *It’s as if we have done all that Christ has done*. Which is why he’s called “*the Spirit of Jesus*” (Phil 1:19; Acts 16:7). He makes it possible for, as John says, God to abide in us. Mind-blowing. *But it gets better*. John also says it’s because of the Spirit that we *abide in God*. Matryoshka. John says, *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us*

understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ (5:20). There is a sense in which the Spirit puts Jesus in us, and another sense in which he puts us in Jesus. It is a mystical, glorious, profoundly satisfying union to which nothing else compares: not the union of best friend to best friend, husband and wife: the *summum bonum* of relationships. The real Christian has this. Are you living like you have this? Others pine for it. Winn Butler cries out: *get this spirit out of me, spirit of anxiety, another lost soul just trying to feel something.* They're trying to feel something when you have everything! Union with Christ in the Spirit isn't transactional; it's relational. John: so that we may know him who is true. That we may *abide* in him—that's your application. Know him, abide in him, enjoy union with God! Now if all that's true, why do real Christians so often *not* look like Christ? That brings us to the **receiving** of his Spirit. John says we are given of the Spirit. Given means we receive the Spirit initially, continually, and consummately. The Spirit unites us with Christ *initially*. So while you'll find a righteous standing with God in real Christians, you won't find perfection. Young Christians often make stupid decisions. But as they mature they look back on their younger selves and regret the bridges they burned by haranguing family members *more about hell than Christ.* Or proselytizing *politics more than precious union with Christ.* Initial giving. It doesn't excuse their actions, but it may explain them. Babes in Christ. But if a person *has received* the Spirit, Christlikeness *will come.* Initial receiving leads to *continual receiving.* It's why we're told to *be filled* with the Spirit. The reason so many Christians live lackluster, joyless, powerless lives is because they are not continually filled with the Spirit. They are dangerously filled, overstuffed with politics, clothes, music, work, food—little appetite for the things of God: Scripture, prayer, holiness, Christ, church, mission. Want to be filled with the Spirit? Want to be a real Christian? Want the headlines to change? *Change your diet. You are what you eat. Stop eating junk food. Start seeking the things of the Spirit. Ask him to help you. He is your helper. Pray morning and evening. Worship Christ with his church Sunday after Sunday. Repent of sin and rejoice in Christ with other disciples.* If you don't do this, don't be surprised if someday you're called a fake Christian. *You are what you eat.* Finally, we will receive the Spirit *consummately*. Comparing our earthly body to our resurrection body Paul says, just as the first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving

[spirit](#) (1 Co 15:45). When the Spirit resurrects those in Christ he so suffuses them that they will forever reflect and desire Christ!

## Confessing the Son

Is that all that is required for real Christianity? Not at all. John expounds: [And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.](#) John testifies to two things central to true Christianity: Jesus as Savior of the world the Son of God. What does he mean by **Savior of the world**? There is a famous inscription in temple of Athena in Priene that commemorates the birth of Caesar Augustus, who ruled during Christ's life. The inscription describes Caesar as a god sent *as a savior* to make war and peace and that his birth was the beginning *of the gospel* for the world. But we also know Augustus exiled his daughters and killed off his enemies failing to secure true *pax Romana*. Enter Jesus, sent by the Father, not to enforce his kingdom through murder and absolute power but to bring his kingdom through sacrifice and redemptive power. The *true savior* "of the world," but in what sense? In John 4:42 Samaritans believe a Samaritan woman's witness regarding Jesus and respond by saying: ["We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."](#) If you weren't a Jew, you were of the world. But they realized in the presence of Jesus that he was saving them, Gentiles, welcomed in! Then shouldn't we welcome others in of all races? If Jesus is the true *Savior of the world*, shouldn't we be compassionately telling people about him? I talked to a church planter this week who met a 60 year old couple. The wife was Jewish, husband agnostic. As he spent time with them, he mentioned he was doing a sater Passover meal. They asked if they could join. And as the wife ate the broken matzah bread and drank the wine, she received Jesus as the bread broken for her, the blood poured out for her forgiveness of sins. She and her husband received Jesus, not as Savior of the Jews but as Savior of the world. That's why we support work in Malaysia, Montreal, Dublin, and it's why City Life exists to renew this city spiritually. A real Christian also confesses Jesus is the **son of God**. In Daniel, Son of god is a divine title for the messiah, so he is not only a redeemer but divine, and in the ancient world to make a confession wasn't to say a private prayer; it was public profession of *allegiance*. A radical commitment to Jesus over Caesar,



and so it should be today. A real Christian is someone who swears allegiance to Jesus as Son of God, yielding to his rule every aspect of their lives. How do you need to respond to him today? Are there parts of your life you're refusing allegiance (money, time, family)? Are there sins you need to bring to the Savior? His arms are wide open. He willingly forgives, restores, renews. Come to Jesus today—Savior and Son—and take another step into real Christianity.

### **Loving One Another**

A real Christian is someone who receives the Spirit, confesses Jesus is Savior and Son, and loves the brothers. *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.* You can go to church, study doctrine, and pray a lot but if you don't love the church—the brothers and sisters, then you're not a real Christian. You say that's a little extreme? Not according to God. The argument is lesser to greater. If you can't love people you can see (lesser), then how can you love God whom you can't see (greater)? John circles back to the priority of loving one another as a test of true faith. Loving the born and the unborn, the immigrant and the resident, the people in your CG and not in your CG. It's a bottom-line command. If you love God, you must love the church. Over the past couple weeks people in our church have faced a miscarriage, diagnosis of tumors in an 18 year old, and the death of a one and a half year old. This world is broken, and this church has responded in the love of Christ. You have loved the brothers and sisters by pouring out support, prayers, meals; moving people, counseling people, and calling people. Keep it up City Life. Keep loving the brothers and sisters and show the world real Christianity, people who receive the Spirit, confess Jesus as Savior and Son, and love the brothers.