

WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN ARE YOU?

One of the greatest responsibilities a Christian has in this life is to set a right example. Unfortunately, many fall short! This provocative article challenges you to become a true light to the world!

God is often judged by the company He keeps — or should I say, by those who claim to keep company with Him! Too many have been “turned off” religion because of the unfortunate example set by some who have claimed the label “Christian.”

Bertrand Russell, the noted mathematician and philosopher, was such an individual. Of the “Christian religion,” he generalized: “It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been for the most part extremely wicked. You find this curious fact, that the more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. In the so-called ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was the Inquisition, with its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burned as witches; and there was every kind of cruelty practiced upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.

“You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step toward the diminution of war, every step toward better treatment of colored races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and

still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world” (*Why I Am Not a Christian*, pp. 20-21).

What a painful, yet all too accurate, indictment of “organized Christianity”! Granted, Sir Bertrand generalized, but he wasn’t far off the mark. Much cruelty *has* been perpetrated in the name of Christ. Who can deny that the Inquisition was a “religious” affair? Who can lightly dismiss the burning of both books and people in the superstitious Dark and Middle Ages? Intolerance, racial bigotry, persecution and even hideous personal torture have often been the earmarks of allegedly “Christian” movements. And many who have held high office in the churches of the world have been, in retrospect, evil men.

One ex-minister, Paul Blanchard, wrote: “Barrels of sermons were preached on the perfection of the character and teachings of Jesus by men who never would dream of following in his way for a single day” (*Some of My Best Friends Are Christians*, p. 15).

The Greatest Enemy. Perhaps simple hypocrisy is the greatest enemy of Christianity! All too many who claim to be Christians do not practice even the simplest moral teachings of Christ. The *way of life* practiced by many who associate themselves with professing Christian organizations belies the authenticity of their conversion!

Jesus said to His followers: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives

light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

The works of Christians — and Christian organizations — should cause people to glorify God — not to condemn Christianity! Yet so often the opposite has been the case. The world of organized religion has often been one of conflict, power politics, Big Money, doctrinal dogmatism and intolerance. Millions have been tortured, bludgeoned and murdered in the name of religion. Wherever the churches of this world’s Christianity have gone, they have left a trail of blood and tears. Those who have murdered in the name of Christ have mistakenly believed that they were “doing God service” (John 16:2).

What About You? But all of the above is “big stuff.” What about the example of the individual, “unofficial,” lay Christian? What about the average church member? What about *your* example?

Does your way of life cause people to glorify God? Do people see your example as a reflection of Christ’s philosophy and will? *Can others see God in your life?*

Churches are only as good as the individual members of which they are composed. The “church” (Greek, *ekklesia*) in any given city is merely a group or community of believers who have been called out of this world’s sins to be a “light” to that community. Christians must exist as a part of society in general, yet they must separate themselves from society’s stan-

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dards. Jesus prayed of and for the church: "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one [Satan, the god of this world —II Cor. 4:4]. . . . As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15, 18).

Christians must coexist with society! They are very much in the world in the physical sense. But we have "dual citizenship": we also represent the family of God and His soon-coming Kingdom (Phil. 3:20). We are called "ambassadors for Christ" (II Cor. 5:20). We are "members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). As such, Christians must be conscious at all times of the responsibility to rightly represent God and His way of life. In a world of spiritual darkness, true Christians are the *only* real "light"!

The apostle Peter explained, quite dramatically, the Christian responsibility in society: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9).

A "chosen race"! A "royal priesthood"! *God's own people!*

Can you grasp the import of those words? Can you discern the burden of responsibility that Peter's statement places on each individual Christian? On you personally?

Christianity is not a game for religious hobbyists! It is serious business. Real Christianity is not a "weekend religion."

A Way of Life. Genuine Christianity is a way of life. It is a pattern of conduct. It is an attitude toward life, and it involves *actions*.

Priscilla and Aquila, leading lay members in the early Church, explained "*the way of God more accurately*" to the great speaker Apollos (Acts 18:26).

Speaking of his persecution of the Church prior to conversion, Paul said: "I persecuted *this Way* to the death . . ." (Acts 22:4).

In His teachings, Jesus expounded that way of life in great detail. He spoke of "good works" as being the key element in being a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16). In

the so-called "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus taught Christian *attitudes*. Once adopted, many of these attitudes will be reflected in good works — works of mercy, peace and humility, for example (Matt. 5:3, 5, 7, 9).

The good works of a Christian can include simple, mundane works of physical service such as feeding the hungry, clothing those who lack clothing, giving drink to the thirsty (Matt. 25:35, 36). Everyone has physical needs. The human race is interdependent — our very existence depends upon mutual cooperation. We were all created in the very image of God for a great purpose which He is working out here below. We are all our "brother's keepers." We share a common environment — this good, green Earth. When we do good to others we automatically benefit ourselves. "So then, as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all men*, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Both collectively and individually, the Church of God should take advantage of those opportunities which arise to be of physical service to those outside of the Church, and to those who are members.

Such service includes visiting the sick, helping widows who are in some way afflicted, and taking care of the needs of those who are orphaned through some unfortunate circumstance (Matt. 25:36; James 1:27). Each day we receive letters from inmates of prisons who wish to correspond or be visited by ministers. Some are even converted inside the walls of such institutions! Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God do visit with and counsel such individuals *when* they request it. When one is in such a situation, almost nothing is more important than knowing that someone "on the outside" *cares!*

One of the greatest services that can be performed for those who are suffering in some manner is *prayer*. It may sound trite to say so, but we should not underestimate the power of *faithful, believing prayer!* As James, the brother of Christ, said: "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).

Those who are afflicted can take heart from the fact that someone else is taking the time to petition God on their behalf. *Faith is contagious!*

The "Give Way." True Christianity is based upon the *give* principle—as opposed to the *get* principle. A truly converted person is not primarily self-seeking. He is not ambitious for himself so much as for others. He seeks others' welfare *before* his own.

For many that's a bitter pill to swallow. Most of us are, by nature, self-centered. We tend to think that the whole world rotates around our needs, our interests and our sensual desires. We tend to fraternize mainly with those who make us feel most comfortable — our "cronies," "buddies" and personal friends.

Yet Jesus said: "But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13-14).

Of course, we can always "spiritualize" that away and claim that Jesus didn't mean that to be taken literally.

What *did* He mean then?

Perhaps Jesus didn't mean *anything* He said?

Listen! To practice real Christianity is to go against *nature!* It's hard! It's tough! It involves *overcoming*.

True Christianity is not a way of elitism. It's not always comfortable. It is often awkward and difficult. It is sometimes embarrassing. But Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Founder of Christianity, said: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is *easy*, that leads to *destruction*, and those who enter by it are many. For *the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few*" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Most people take the path of least resistance — the easy way. We don't like to put ourselves on the spot and perform that which is difficult or embarrassing. We don't like to get our hands dirty with someone else's blood, or vomit, or whatever.

Right?

But if true Christians would stop

"posturing" and start *performing* acts and deeds of love and service once in a while, people would have a better impression of Christianity!

Christians need to stop trafficking in "word pollution" and start *doing* things. The Christian faith is demonstrated more by *works* than by words and claims. James wrote: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is *dead*. But some one will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I *by my works* will show you my faith" (James 2:17-18).

Study the entire book of James and you will find out what kind of works he was referring to. Be sure to read the above-quoted passages *in context*.

James wrote of being "doers of the word" (1:22) and looking into the "perfect law of liberty" (1:25). He spoke of bridling the tongue (1:26), visiting orphans and widows (1:27), being impartial and avoiding favoritism (2:1-4), not dishonoring the poor (2:6). Of the "royal law," he said: "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*" (2:8).

James spoke of caring for the physical needs of a brother or sister who is in need: "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' *without giving them the things needed for the body*, what does it profit?" (James 2:15-16.) And it is in *this context* that James says: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is *dead*."

Kind thoughts and pleasant words are not enough! A starving man can't eat platitudes!

Right Motivation. The good works of a Christian should not be done for the purpose of drawing attention to one's self. They should not be done as a means of advancing one's self in some local congregational "pecking order" or structure. James also said this: "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works *in the meekness of wisdom*. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. . . . For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vice practice" (James 3:13, 14, 16).

THE BIBLE DEFINES "GOOD WORKS"

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink . . ." (Matt. 25:35).

"Happy is he . . . who gives food to the hungry" (Ps. 146:5-7).

"He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor" (Prov. 22:9).

"For the fool speaks folly, and his mind plots iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the Lord, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink" (Isa. 32:6).

"If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right — if he does not . . . oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment . . . he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God" (Ezek. 18:5-9).

"And the multitudes asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise'" (Luke 3:10-11).

HOSPITALITY

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me . . ." (Matt. 25:35).

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:1-2).

"And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you" (Lev. 25:35).

"Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the church" (III John 5-6).

"Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13).

"He said also to the man who had invited him, 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just'" (Luke 14:12-14).

"Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (I Pet. 4:9).

VISITING THE AFFLICTED

"I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matt. 25:36).

"For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds" (Ps. 69:33).

"Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them . . ." (Heb. 13:3).

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their af-

fliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

SHARING, GIVING, CHARITABLE WORKS

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:16).

"One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered" (Prov. 11:24-25).

"If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be" (Deut. 15:7-8).

"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38).

"But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:17-18).

"The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide

you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever' " (II Cor. 9:6-9).

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:6-8).

DISTRIBUTING CLOTHING

"I was naked and you clothed me" (Matt. 25:36).

"Is not this the fast that I choose . . . when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isa. 58:6-7.)

"But if this man begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and fears, and does not do likewise . . . but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment" (Ezek. 18:14-16).

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isa. 52:7.)

"Good works" that are based upon personal ambition and a desire to enhance one's own reputation within a community are nothing more than a hollow, insincere sham!

Jesus Himself warned: "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).

God seeks those who are willing to serve in obscurity. Those who exalt themselves will be abased. Those who seek the praise of men may well receive it — and that's *all* they will receive!

Adopting Godly Attitudes. Being a light to the world involves adopting godly attitudes and forsaking worldly ones. John showed clearly that Christians should not adopt this world's standards when it comes to spiritual and moral values: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (I John 2:15-17).

A bit "hard line" for some? Maybe.

But those verses are part of the Word of God — and they reflect the *will* of God. (John is not talking about the kind of love *for the world* expressed by God the Father when He gave His only begotten Son — John 3:16. He is talking about the danger of loving the world's *ways* and adopting the world's false values and standards.)

Christians cannot practice "selective obedience." We cannot accept one teaching or command in the New Testament and summarily reject others. It's all part of "The Book." It's all the Word of God. Performing the will of God may be difficult but it's the way to ensure "abiding forever"! Not that you can "earn" your salvation — you can't. Eternal life is the free, undeserved *gift* of God. But once God has granted eternal life, you will be "rewarded according to your works"! (Write for our free reprint article

"No! — You Can't Earn Your Salvation." Also the booklet *What Will You Be Doing in the Next Life?*)

The Law of the Jungle. The Standards of this society are not often based upon true values. Certain unsavory characteristics seem to dominate — such as *greed and competition*.

The law of the world is the law of the jungle — "survival of the fittest." The law of God says exactly the opposite — "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Paul told the Romans: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and *not to please ourselves*" (Rom. 15:1).

This is *real* Christianity!

This is *the way* of which the Bible writers spoke!

Are you willing to practice *this kind* of Christianity? It's a far cry from religious hobbyism and petty doctrinal debate. There is very little philosophy, or science, or exegesis, or hermeneutics involved in this type of Christianity. There's not even much to argue about — except who's going to make the first move!

But this is "where it's at" so far as the Bible is concerned. This type of Christianity involves compassion, service, humility, and above all, *love!* Those who minimize the importance of love are not Christians at all. Their religion is a hollow form, "full of sound and fury signifying nothing" (to borrow from Shakespeare).

You disagree?

Fine.

You disagree with Paul and with God!

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, *but have not love*, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, *but have not love*, I AM NOTHING" (I Cor. 13:1-2).

Now what do you say about the importance of love?

Paul said love is far more important than the ability to "speak in tongues," prophetic powers, the understanding of mysteries, knowledge and even *faith!*

Love is the *paramount* virtue a Christian can possess! *Nothing* tran-

scends it. And "works of love" are the greatest works a Christian can perform! Is it any wonder Paul wrote: "Make love *your aim*..." (I Cor. 14:1).

True godly love is incapable of willfully inflicting pain or suffering upon a fellow human being. A Christian who loves wholly seeks only the comfort and welfare of others.

Love Erases Prejudice. Love can erase the hideous, hateful scab of racial prejudice from the heart of even the most entrenched bigot. Those who are led by the Spirit of God and fed by the Word of God know that *all* men, black, white or yellow, and every shade in between, were created in the image of the Great God (Gen. 1:26-27). They know that God "made from one [Adam] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth," and that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for *you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Acts 17:26; Gal. 3:28).

No one is "superior" within the Church of God because of color, status in society, or sex. We are all children of God and He and Christ alone are "superior"! We are brothers and sisters in Christ. Sons and daughters of God (I Peter 3:6).

There is *no place* within the Body of Christ for racial prejudice! Those of us who have allowed ourselves to be bitten with this evil, divisive, worldly bug need to deeply and bitterly *repent* before the God who made *all* of us in his very image!

Male Chauvinism. "Male chauvinism" is definitely *out!* God tells us that men and women in the Church are "*joint heirs* of the grace of life..." (I Peter 3:7).

(It should be noted that God has designated certain standards for husband-wife relationships within marriage [Eph. 5] and within the Church congregational structure [I Cor. 11], but these have nothing to do with "superiority" or "inferiority" within the Body. It is merely a matter of working within the natural roles that men and women have assumed throughout history. The Church of God *does* abide by these scriptural standards.)

And God is definitely *not* impressed with "gold rings and goodly apparel"! In fact, He is not a respecter of persons at all in that sense. God looks on the heart — not the outward appearance. Status symbols mean nothing to Him who judges impartially. All are free in Christ — whether slaves in this life or not.

The standard of God lifts the Christian above the values and standards (or lack of them!) of this world! We are to be different, unique, *converted* (changed)!

Through the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which we receive at baptism (Rom. 5:5), we live by the standard of the royal law of love. And "*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10).

The "good works" of a true Christian are "works of love." It is the responsibility of the Church of God to set an example before the world, one that will cause people to *glorify* God instead of to vilify Him! The Church is a city that is set upon a hill. The religion of a true child of God is *the way he or she lives life!*

Though we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world. We should have a higher, more noble, more godly set of values. We *must* have such or we are not really Christians! We cannot allow ourselves to succumb to the baser passions of the flesh and of the mind. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, constant prayer and study of the Word of God, we must rise above our own weak flesh.

Those who have been prejudiced must learn to look beyond the flesh and into the heart and there see the Spirit of God burning — and say, "Brother!"

And those men who have had a chauvinistic, superior, tyrannical attitude toward their wives, or women in general, need to repent and say with sincere feeling, "Sister!"

All of us, who have been selfish, lazy and comfortable, need to reach out to the world, and to our own brethren in the faith, the right hand of fellowship and say, "May I help you? Please, let me be of *service*."

Are you willing to be *that kind* of Christian? □

IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

The answer is yes, we do.

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