

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? WHAT ARE HIS STANDARDS?

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“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”—Acts 26:28.

A Christian is a person who intelligently believes that he is by nature a sinner, that by Divine grace Jesus Christ the Righteous died for his sins, and that through faith in the atoning blood, and obedience to the Redeemer’s teachings he has become “a New Creature in Christ Jesus.” For such, “Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” Such New Creatures are separate and distinct from all other members of the race. Instead of earthly aims, ambitions and hopes, theirs are Heavenly.

Getting Into Christ’s Body

It is not sufficient that these should make the proper start of faith in Christ and full consecration to do God’s will and not their own wills. It is incumbent upon them, after having made such a start and after having been begotten of the Holy Spirit, that they shall grow in grace, knowledge and love. (2 Peter 3:18.) This is styled “putting on Christ”; that is to say, adding the graces of character which God will accept and reward with association with the Lord Jesus Christ in His Kingdom. For these God has made provision of spiritual food in the Bible—“meat in due season for the Household of Faith.” (Matthew 24:45.) These are represented as at first “babes in Christ,” requiring “the milk of the Word,” but if faithful, gradually attaining full stature—“strong in the Lord and the power of His might.”

Such spirit-begotten Christians must needs “fight a good fight” not with others, but with themselves—overcoming the weaknesses and besetments of their own fallen flesh, the allurements of their environment and the wiles of the Adversary. Such as are faithful in these respects are Scripturally styled “overcomers,” “the very Elect.” The promise to them is that they shall have part in the Chief, or best, Resurrection, and thereafter be no longer humans, but spirit beings of the highest order—“partakers of the Divine nature.” These in death are “sown in weakness,” “in dishonor,” human beings, but are raised from the dead “in glory,” “in power,” spirit beings.—1 Corinthians 15:43.

Jesus’ promise to these overcomers reads, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I overcame and am set down with My Father in His Throne”—“I will give him power over the nations.” etc. Again He says, “Blessed and holy are all those who have part in the Chief Resurrection: on such the Second Death hath no power, but they shall be priests unto God and unto Christ. and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”—Revelation 3:21; 2:26; 20:6.

All Jesus' teachings are applicable to this special class: namely, those who become His disciples, his followers. His pupils. He did not assume to be a Teacher of the world, but merely of those who leave the world, sacrificing all to become His disciples. To these He said. "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Again, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you." The great Teacher did not include the nominal church as His disciples, but rather counted them in with the world. In evidence of this, we note the fact that the world which persecuted Him was the Jewish nation, professedly God's consecrated people: and that those who have persecuted the followers of Jesus have likewise been nominally people of God, but really of the world.

Duties, Rights and Privileges of Christians

These are the Christians addressed by the Master, saying, "I say unto you. That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man shall sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."—Matthew 5:39-42.

The thought of non-resistance is here, yet not to the extreme degree supposed by some. The turning of the other cheek, as illustrated by Jesus' own conduct, was a figurative expression, signifying the willingness to have both cheeks smitten rather than to do injury to another. Christians are to be law-abiding, whether they consider the laws just or unjust. If, therefore, the law deprive them of a coat, they are to yield it up. If it go still further and deprive them of their cloak, they are still to be nonresistant to the law, but submit to it with good grace, knowing that hereunto they were called.

Be it noted that neither the coat nor the cloak was to be given up upon demand merely, but only after the law, justly or unjustly, had so decreed. Similarly with respect to the compulsory walking of a mile; the Christian is not to submit himself to every whim of everybody; but, seeking to do the will of God, he is to go about his own business, unless the opposition to him amount to a compelling. And this compelling, under ordinary circumstances, would mean a legal compelling; for the protection of the laws of the land in which he lives may be sought to protect his rights and liberties, as St. Paul appealed to governors and kings.

Christians Live for the Future

Christians are to love their enemies in the same sense that God loves the world—sympathetically. They are not to love their enemies in the sense of affectionate love and tenderness, such as they bestow upon their families, friends and lovable persons. Their love for their enemies, as defined by Jesus, should be such as would lead them to feed their bitterest enemy if he were hungry, to clothe him if he were naked. They should not pray against their enemies, but for their enemies in the sense of wishing, desiring for

them enlightenment and true wisdom, which would turn them from being enemies and evil-doers, to make of them followers of Jesus or, at least, well-doers.

Christians are not to lay up for themselves treasures on earth; for they have renounced the earth and all hopes of a future life upon earth. Their walk in the footsteps of Jesus signifies that as He cast aside earthly ambitions, hopes and aims, so would they, taking instead the Heavenly ambitions, hopes and aims. In other words, they live for the future. This will not hinder them from the ordinary pursuits of life to the extent that may be necessary in “providing things honest in the sight of all men” in providing for their families, etc. But, with these Christians, any overplus above life’s necessities represents so much opportunity for serving the Lord and His Cause; and in so doing these are laying up treasure in Heaven—a future reward.

This does not signify that they must live “from hand to mouth” nor that, if they have possessions, they must riotously distribute these to others. On the contrary, they are to seek in all things to have the mind of the Lord—to do God’s will. God’s mind is a sound mind; and these Christians, in seeking to do God’s will, are said to have “the spirit of a sound mind.” This dictates that they should live wisely and economically.

Christian Stewardship and Citizenship

To these Christians, everything that comes to them or that they possess by nature is considered a thing of God, because in becoming followers of Christ they made a full consecration of their wills—their all—to God. Hence from that moment forward these Christians are stewards of God’s mercies—stewards of their time, their talents, their influence, their property, their all. According to the way they use their stewardship, investing their talents to the Master’s praise, will be His commendation of them, as represented in the parable. Whether many talents are possessed or few, the commendation is to those who have done well, have been good and faithful in the use of their talents, not for self-aggrandizement or show, or worldly accumulations of treasure, but faithful in the service of God, showing forth God’s praises in the assisting of others and themselves to the knowing and doing of the Divine will.

Christians are to “lend, hoping for nothing in return,” and not, as the world, merely to be willing to do good and to lend to those who would do as much or more in return. Christians are thus to illustrate the fact that they are children of the Highest that they have been begotten of God, that they have His Holy Spirit and disposition, and that it is shining out more and more in their words and conduct as they grow in the character-likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are not to go to war. Their fight is not to be with carnal weapons, but with “the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” They have the most powerful weapon

known in the world for their warfare. This does not signify that they may not put bolts and bars upon their doors to prevent robbery. It does not signify that they may not call for police protection; for this is a thing they pay for in taxation and are entitled to according to the laws of the world. They may not claim of their own nation anything than an alien might not claim; but they may claim all that an alien may claim. Indeed, Christians are styled aliens, stranger, foreigners, so far as the present government of the world is concerned. Their citizenship, according to the Bible, is the Heavenly one, which they will fully enter into when they shall have shared the Chief Resurrection.

No Christian Nations

The Bible knows nothing of Christian nations or of a Christian world. The Bible puts the Christian as separate and distinct from the world and from all nations. Christians are a nation, or people, by themselves, in the same sense that the Jews are a nation, or people by themselves. “Ye are a Royal Priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people”—a people for a purpose. (1 Pet. 2:9.) The term Christian nation comes from a serious doctrinal error which crept into the Church about 800 A.D. At that time Pope Leo III began to recognize as Christian nations all the nations which recognized his Pontificate. The custom has prevailed and is still in vogue amongst Protestants and Catholics; but it is wholly unscriptural.

A Christian conscripted to the army or the navy would be subject to the “powers that be,” and obeying the Master’s words, would go, as in Matthew 5:41: “Whosoever shall compel thee to go.” The Christian compelled to enter the army or the navy might properly request service as a non-combatant in the Quartermaster’s Department or in the Hospital Department, but if required to kill he is to obey God rather than man, and not kill. He may comply with his orders to the extent of going into the trenches and being shot at, but no further.

Is it urged that such a view of Christianity would wreck our present civilization? We reply that nothing in the Bible implies that our civilization is Christian or that the Lord ever expected it to be Christian. God’s time for saving the world from its sin and weakness has not yet come. The present is merely the time for calling, finding, testing and delivering the Elect. The Elect, when glorified, will constitute Messiah’s Kingdom, and with Him will be empowered fully with spiritual control for the government of the entire world.

Then will come the time for the enlightenment and uplift and blessing of the whole world of mankind—the non-elect. Theirs will not be a blessing of the same kind that the Elect will secure, but a blessing which they will appreciate equally. The world’s blessing and salvation will not signify a change of nature from human to spirit, but a Restitution to human perfection.—Acts 3:19-23.

What are today styled “Christian nations” are in the Bible styled “kingdoms of this world”; and their complete disintegration is Scripturally outlined as incidental to the establishment of God’s glorious Kingdom under Messiah, for which we pray, “Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, even as in Heaven.”

Some may wonder how it ever came to pass that all the people of civilized lands are enumerated as Christians—except Jews and professed infidels. Statistics tell us that all the inhabitants of Italy are Christians; that more than ninety-nine per cent of the population of Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, etc., are Christians—and that the total number of Christians thus reckoned is nearly five hundred millions. Surely it is time that intelligent people realize that some great mistake has been made, and that more than ninety-nine per cent of these “Christians” make no pretense of being followers of Jesus.

The error arose in the now long ago. When Pope Leo III recognized a king as a Christian king and his kingdom as a Christian kingdom, he recognized that king’s subjects as Christian. There we have the matter in a nutshell. The whole thing was a mistake. The king was not a Christian, did not know the meaning of Christianity and was not taught it. His kingdom was not a Christian kingdom, and his people were not Christians.

Meantime, here and there, obscured to the world, there have been true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in every denomination. They have been out of accord generally with the great leaders of the church systems as well as with the political leaders of the world. It has been true of them as the Apostle wrote: “The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not.” (1 John 3:1.) The world does not yet know, understand or appreciate that the Church of Christ is not to be found in any one of the professed churches of various names—Roman, English, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, etc. The Church of Christ is composed exclusively of those who have made a covenant with the Lord through faith in the precious blood, who have been accepted of the Lord by the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and who are seeking to walk to the best of their ability in the footsteps of Jesus.—1 Peter 2:21.

Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.

The theory that Christians only are saved from eternal torture has had much to do with the error of counting all civilized people Christians. The creeds save Christians only—Jews, Mohammedans, heathen, all go to Hell to roast eternally. Roman Catholics provide a second chance for members of their church, in Purgatory; and many Protestants hold to a second chance for the heathen who have never heard of Christ. All the while, however, the Bible declares for only one chance, but that a full one for every member of the human family.

The only chance offered during this Gospel Age is the opportunity of becoming a member of the Church—a true follower of Jesus. Such are to get the Heavenly inheritance, but not until the Resurrection. The remainder of the world will be offered an earthly future; and this offer will begin with the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom of a thousand years.

The Bible nowhere teaches that either saint or sinners pass to conscious condition at death. The Bible declares that all “sleep” and that the awakening time will be at the second coming of the Redeemer to establish His Kingdom. The First Resurrection will be the Church, and subsequently “every man in his own order.” When once the fact is grasped that the Bible Hell is the grave—Sheol, Hades—then all is plain.

The great Divinely arranged Purgatory, to last a thousand years, will be glorious. All the heathen and the ignorant, superstitious millions of Christendom, who were taught to call themselves Christians, but who knew that they were not, will have the opportunity of coming to a knowledge of the true God and of His gracious provision for them.