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What Is Christianity?

By Harold Turner

To ask the question, what is Christianity? may seem unimportant to many, yet, there are many different ideas expressed to define Christianity. Some might suggest that because a person holds high moral values and standards he is a Christian. Another might suggest that because one believes in a supreme being, and especially if he believes that Jesus is the Christ, this makes him a Christian. Another might suggest that because one belongs to some church he is a Christian. Does living a good moral life, expressing some faith in the reality of Jesus, and belonging to a church really give us the true picture of Christianity?

Christianity actually means to be Christlike. We can never understand Christianity apart from understanding Jesus. For me to pick up the moral laws and principles set forth in the gospel, and begin to conform my life to their teachings, is to fall short of the idea of Christianity. To embrace doctrine apart from the person and character of Jesus is to miss the point of Christianity. Christianity centers upon Christ. He is the foundation upon which the Christian life is to be built. "For other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11) As essential as the doctrine of Christ is to building the Christian life, it is not the foundation. It is the tool and guide for building a life centered on Christ. We fall short of the idea of Christianity until we have Christ as the center, as the purpose, the cause, and the goal for the life we live. We are not serving laws, but the law giver. His laws guide us in the ways He desires that we serve Him. Paul gives a good description of Christianity in Gal. 2:20, saying, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Christ was clearly the center of Paul's life. His purpose for living was simply Christ, as he said in Phil. 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ." And Paul expresses his goal in Phil. 3:8-10, saying, "...that I may win Christ, and be found in Him...that I may know Him..." To be a Christian is to embrace Christ as the center of my life, and to live for the purpose of doing His will in all things with no

reservations or restrictions.

Since one cannot understand Christianity apart from understanding Christ, it would seem that the most important thing in life would be to learn what Jesus was really like, and then to strive to be as nearly like Him as possible.

What was Jesus like? There is no way one can answer this in a brief discussion. But there is one thing about Jesus that stands out possibly above all others. Jesus is a picture of the fullest idea of love. The Bible states that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and Jesus is the express image of the Father (Heb. 1:3). We may never be able to fully define the idea and meaning of love, but one thing certain, the more we learn about Jesus the better idea we will have for it.

The love of Jesus is characterized by compassion. To have compassion is to have deep feelings of stress for the misfortunes of others. In Matt. 9:36 the Bible states, "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Jesus felt for the confused, the sick, the brokenhearted, the weak, etc. The writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities..." (Heb. 4:15) Jesus was not some super-human with no feelings for the ills of his society. He stood by the graveside of a friend and wept. His heart went out, and goes out, to those who struggle in life.

What kind of religion do we have if we take the compassion out of it? Like Jesus we must feel for others. We must feel in a way that compels us to reach out to them in whatever way we can. In Eph. 4:32 the Bible teaches us to be tenderhearted. And in Rom. 12:15 Paul said, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." This can't be obeyed just as a law. It involves feelings of compassion. We can never feel true compassion until we have taken another step with Jesus—unselfishness.

The love of Jesus is characterized by unselfishness. How great were His personal problems in Gethsemane? or on the cross? In both cases Jesus showed interest in the problems and needs of others. He suffered just as surely as we suffer, but He

looked beyond His own personal needs to the needs of others. He emptied Himself of all selfishness and gave Himself to serving others.

What kind of religion do we have when self must be considered first? We can never serve Christ when we are constantly asking, What do I have to give up? What do I get out of it? Until we truly crucify the old man with Christ, and let Christ live in us, we can never grasp the idea of Christianity. Paul said, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ." (Phil. 2:3-5) We can't do this just as a law. It involves an attitude that sees and feels beyond self. It involves an attitude that is acquired by totally surrendering self to Christ.

The love of Jesus was also characterized by forgiveness. What kind of person could forgive his enemies while suffering agony on the cross? Only a person whose life is full of love for others, and that has been emptied of selfishness. When they crucified Jesus, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34.) He died in order to make forgiveness possible.

Jesus taught us to forgive others. Jesus said if your brother "trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." (Luke 17:4.) Forgiveness must come from the heart (Matt. 18:35). It involves feelings, rather than just some forced action. In Eph. 4:32 Paul said, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." How do we want Jesus to forgive us? So must we likewise forgive others.

Another characteristic of the love of Jesus is mercy. Mercy is an action of response to the needs of others. The numerous people who asked of Jesus, "Have mercy on us," were not just wanting Him to feel sorry for them, but rather to solve their problem. Mercy is a spirit of caring about the needs of others. The love of Jesus begins with a deep feeling of compassion that causes Him to reach out to the

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They That Mourn

By Terry Frizzell

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

In this statement, Jesus has in mind the ones who mourn in reference to sin. We believe this because Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 7:10, saying, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." No person can find comfort in Christ while he mourns for the things of the world. The Christian life demands that we give our attention to the things of Christ that will make us ready for eternity. We cannot do this and mourn for the things of this world. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24.) From this verse it becomes clear to us that when a person mourns in reference to sin he will not have his mind on worldly things. If he mourns for the things of this world, then he cannot have his mind on the things of spiritual value.

They that mourn in reference to sin are blessed because they have the promise of being comforted. God has made ample provision for our pardon. In John 3:16 Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yes, the Son of God was offered on the cross for the sins of the world. He was victorious over death, and now offers pardon to all that will be in subjection to His teachings.

Just before ascending back to the Father, Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28:18-19.)

Peter told the ones who were mourning about their sins to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38)

Jesus further stated, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32-33.)

Paul tells us in Gal. 3:27, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

If you are one who mourns because of the sins in your life, you can have very simple, if you truly mourn you will accept the teachings of the Lord and become obedient to His teachings. Through faith you must turn away from

Making The Church Grow

By Ted Knight

The primary aim of every Christian should be to promote the growth of the church. This is the very heart of the great commission and represents a duty resting upon each child of God personally. Not one Christian is exempt from service in the Kingdom of God. YOU are an instrument through which God intends to spread the gospel to all the world.

How do we become effective tools of growth for God? What does it require to have growth?

(1) Vigorous leadership is a must if the church is to go forward. It is a fact that the church will not rise above its leadership. If those who serve as elders will not step out in front and lead God's people to greater growth, there will be no growth. We need leaders who indeed lead. God's people will scatter like sheep without a shepherd unless the leaders lead. Leadership requires vision, faith, determination, and complete trust in God as the Chief Shepherd. When men of faith act upon God's word and lead His people forward, the church is going to grow.

(2) The membership must follow the leadership. Just as it is true that the church cannot grow without leadership, it is also true that it will not grow without followship. If the leaders are doing their work well and members of the church refuse to follow, there is a tragic problem somewhere. To fail to follow the leadership of godly men, who are guiding us in the right way, is to be guilty of sin.

(3) There must be a spirit of love and cooperation as we all strive to build the church in unity and peace. It is not possible to build a strong congregation where there is a spirit of division because of hate and strife. God will not bless the efforts of such ungodly people.

(4) In order for the church to grow we must at all times follow the instructions given from God in His word. There is no excuse for our departing from the Book! There is no success when we wander from the Old Paths. With our feet planted solidly upon His holy word, and our heads bowed in prayer before His throne, we can march forward to a world lost in sin.

God wants His church to grow. I think that most Christians want to be a part of such a forward movement. But, it won't happen by accident. We must MAKE it happen! I hope that you will dedicate yourself to this purpose.

your sins in repentance, confess your faith in Christ before others, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins. The promise of comfort for mourning over sins cannot be, unless we turn to God from our sins. Comfort comes only through forgiveness.

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What Is Christianity (Cont.)

needs of others. He felt, and He cared for others.

In order for us to be a Christian in the truest sense, there must be within us that powerful transforming love of Christ that helps us to feel and care about the needs of others, and that helps us see beyond ourselves. To be a Christian is to want above all else to know Christ, to win Him, and to be found in Him, and to be like Him. Jesus must be the center of our life, the purpose for our living, and the goal that we strive to attain in life. Apart from this we may have a religion, but we do not have Christianity. May God help us to strive harder each day to be transformed more into the image of our Saviour.

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"An easy-going religion makes the going easy for the devil."

"I complained that I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet."

Christianity -- Servant Or Master

By W. L. Totty

There are many in the church of today who have not as yet learned the lesson of humility and are struggling for power, for recognition, for being known as "the greatest."

This is nothing new. It is an age-old problem that existed among even the apostles of Jesus before the church was established. While Jesus was personally teaching His disciples upon earth, we are told "And there was strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." (Luke 22:24.) Jesus settled that question for them by telling them, "He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." (Vr. 26.)

Mark's account says that Jesus sat down and called the twelve and said unto them "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." (Mark 9:34, 35)

This does not at all teach that it is improper to aspire to be great, provided one understands what true greatness is; that is, that it is self-denial service in God's kingdom.

Jesus taught His disciples the greatest lesson in humility on the occasion when He washed their feet. They, of course, protested, because they recognized Him as the Lord, and, no doubt, felt that this was too menial a task for one so great to stoop to perform. However, He told them: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye ought to do as I have done to you. Verily, verily I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." (John 13:14-16.)

We all at times need to be reminded of the rebuke by Naaman's servant, when he asked his master, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" (2 Kings 5:13.) Naaman was upset because the prophet had not done some showy, pompous thing but rather had told him to go to the river Jordan and dip seven times to be healed of his leprosy.

However, to point out the advice that Jesus gave His apostles does not always sit well with the person who wants to lord it over someone else. He is like the scribes and Pharisees. He has an exalted opinion of himself and loves to be seen of men. He wants to be master over others. But the Bible states that "one is your master, even Christ," and that "whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 23:2-12.)

Sometimes we witness a young person who aspires to be someone "great" in that

he wants people to take notice of him. The problem lies in his not wanting to become great by service rendered. One, many times, wants instantaneous recognition. He feels within his heart that he has an abundance of talent that ought to be recognizable to his associates without any works to his credit to prove himself. But for the most of us, it takes a lifetime of works to prove our worth; and sometimes true worth, or worthlessness, as the case may be, is realized only long after our demise.

It is not wrong for one to "desire the office of a bishop," except if it might be for the wrong motive; i.e., to exercise dominion over someone else and for self-aggrandizement. If one desires the position, he must realize that he has to first prepare himself to meet the qualifications.

James wrote, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." (James 3:1.) The word "masters" here used in the King James Version is also correctly translated "teachers" in the American Standard Version. The ambition to become a teachers in the American Standard Version. The ambition to become a teacher is a worthy one, provided one will submit to the discipline of rigorous preparation to do so. But for one to put himself into the position of a teacher, being ill prepared for the task, makes him more subject to receiving a heavier judgment or condemnation. One in the position of teacher has the grave responsibility for leading in the right way always. He has a great influence on his hearers, either for good or bad. The Bible says if one should be guilty of causing another to stumble, it would be better that a millstone were tied around his neck and that he be cast into the sea. (Matt. 18:6.) He also said, "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." While it is true that every follower of Christ is responsible for teaching to the limit of his ability, not all could be, nor should be, public teachers. Some of us need to be ears, noses, and feet, instead of eyes. (See 1 Cor. 12:14-17.)

The one who is a success in God's sight is not the one who is always in the forefront necessarily. The person who meekly and humbly goes about his daily task in a Christlike manner may be accounted more worthy of eternal bliss in the day of judgment than all that the world considers "great." In the parable of the talents, to each of those who were faithful servants, the Lord said unto him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25:21; Luke 19:17.) The judgment of each was based

Zeal Without Knowledge

Ordell Heavin

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Romans 10:1-3.)

There are many people about us who have no religion at all: there are others who have just enough religion to make them miserable, and there are others who are filled with zeal and love for the Lord's cause, but who have no knowledge of what God's will is. Zeal and enthusiasm are important factors for serving the Lord, however they must be directed only by God's word. Rapid progress is good only if done in the right direction. Zeal needs to be directed by spiritual knowledge. Paul did not charge Israel with indolence or lethargy, but because their zeal was not directed by proper knowledge of God's will. Paul could understand their problem because of his previous life. In Act 22:3 Paul told the Jews that he had been "zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." His zeal, however, had not been guided by God's word, but led him to persecute God's people.

Zeal may motivate strong actions, but without proper guidance the actions can be dangerous. Zeal coupled with ignorance caused Israel to reject and crucify the Son of God. It caused Paul to persecute the church; imprisoning and putting to death those who were serving the Lord. So, while we must have zeal, it must be controlled by the guidance of God's word.

Another problem is knowledge without zeal. Some have knowledge of God's word, but have no zeal to accomplish what He commands of us. I knew a person once who had studied his Bible until it was worn, and he had made note after note about the truth, yet he never darkened the meeting house door. Yes, some have knowledge, but their zeal for pure and undefiled religion is woefully lacking. Some are like the Pharisees of whom Jesus spoke in Matt. 23:2-3, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not." These

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upon his talents, whether many or few, and his faithful use of them.

We pray that in the end it may be said of us, "...thou hast been faithful over a few things,...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Repent Or Perish

By Joe Sponaugle

One of the first teachings of the New Testament is on repentance. We read in Matt. 3:1-2, "And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The people who heard John preach had no trouble understanding what he said or what he meant. And those who accepted his teaching were ready to receive Christ when he began his ministry.

After Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, and after His temptation in the wilderness, He began to preach and say, "Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17.) Again, the people had no trouble understanding what He said or what He meant. In fact, Jesus said unto the chief priests and elders, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." This was true because these sinners were willing to repent of their sins, while the chief priests and elders were not. As Jesus ended His earthly ministry and was about to go back to the Father, He said, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47.)

Thus we can see that repentance is a very important doctrine of Christ. In fact, Jesus said, in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." We can hardly miss understanding these words, can we? But the problem is not understanding what Jesus commanded, the problem is believing and obeying it. A lot of people do not believe it is necessary for them to repent of their sins in order to be saved. This must be true because so few repent of the sins they are committing.

One of the Greek words from which "repent" is translated, is "metanoeo". W.E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, defines this word to mean a change of one's mind or purpose, a change for the better. Repentance involves a change of the mind, but a change of the mind concerning what? Concerning sin. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4.) And all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

To repent of sin is to change one's mind about sin. To change from loving sin to hating sin. To change one's mind from disobedience to obeying the will of God. When we are doing what God has said not to do, and we repent, we stop doing what is contrary to His will. Those who have not stopped an evil practice have not repented of it. Those who are lying, stealing, committing fornication, adultery, murder, etc. must stop doing them if they repent.

Too, those who are failing or refusing to do the good that God commands, like, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, worshipping God as He commands, teaching others the gospel, etc. must begin doing these if they repent. And if they do not begin doing them, it is proof that they have not repented of their neglect of doing good.

The Bible says, "Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance." (Matt. 3:8.) The fruit of repentance is the reformation of the life of the sinner. The penitent sinner stops doing evil and begins doing good. The penitent sinner hates evil and loves righteousness. The penitent sinner stands for Christ and against Satan. This is the fruit of repentance. Without fruit, there is no repentance, and without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin.

Some have become so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13), and so love sin that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance (Heb. 6:6). Many have a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). But Jesus teaches that we must repent of our sins or we will perish. Repentance will remove the sin from the Lord's church and allow it to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We cannot expect to convert the lost to Christ until we clean up our own lives through repentance. We can all have a part in this work by beginning with ourselves. Let us preach repentance to all the world, and let us practice repentance in our daily lives.

It is wonderful to know that God has forgiven us of our sins after we have obeyed him. Peter told the sinners of Acts 2, to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." (Act 2:38). Those who are not Christians must follow this pattern today. Those who are Christians, and who sin, are told to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Thus, all sinners must repent to be forgiven of their sins. There are no exceptions. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3.)

"A Holy God will not call an unholy people to do His holy work."

"The highest learning is to be wise; and the greatest wisdom is to be good."

"It is no advantage for man to know much, unless he lives according to what he knows."

Zeal Without Knowledge (Cont.)

knew the law, and taught the law, but they did not obey the law themselves.

Knowledge of God's word must be put in to use. James said, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17.) Saints must have a knowledge to discern both good and evil, but that knowledge must find expression in activity. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16.) The world must see our good works before we can be effective in leading them to Christ.

We first need knowledge, and then we need zeal to express this knowledge in an active way. To be zealous and enthusiastic without the control of God's word will lead us to failure. Some have zealously tried to build up the church by ideas and plans unknown to God and His word. The zeal for numbers have caused some to fail to progress spiritually. This has brought about various gimmicks and promotional gadgets in the place of the word of God. God's people must cultivate a zeal for, and knowledge of, God's word, then and only then will the cause of Christ prosper in the land. God is glorified only in His church, but this is accomplished only when the church labors with spiritual knowledge. If and when we reunite the zeal and knowledge of the early church will we be able to evangelize the world for Christ. May God help us to be zealous, but to be zealous only through the knowledge of God's word.

"According to the Bible, a man's life does not consist in what he possesses, but in what possesses him."

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