

CHRISTIANS IN DEED?

The world is full of nominal Christians—but how many are Christians in deed? The Christian Bible makes it clear that mere belief is not enough.

A United States Senator recently quoted a very moving, yet indicting poem, "Listen Christian!" (by Bob Rowland), which reads as follows:

I was hungry
and you formed a humanities club
and discussed my hunger.
Thank you.

I was imprisoned
and you crept off quietly
to your chapel in the cellar
and prayed for my release.

I was naked
and in your mind
you debated the morality of
my appearance.

I was sick
and you knelt
and thanked God
for your health.

I was homeless
and you preached to me
about the spiritual shelter
of the love of God.

I was lonely
and you left me alone
to pray for me.

Christian,
you seem so holy;
so close to God.
But I'm still very hungry,
and lonely,
and cold . . .

This poignant poem is an obvious modification of the words of Jesus

Himself as recorded in Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

What Jesus was describing was a way of life that involved more than mere lip service. It involved action—*deeds!* To the Jesus Christ of the Bible, mere nominal Christianity is woefully inadequate. Belief, of and by itself, is dead Christianity. James wrote: "You believe that God is one; you do well. *Even the demons believe*—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren?" (James 2:19-20.)

Perhaps, like Martin Luther, you believe that the book of James is "an epistle of straw." Will you then believe Paul? "For we [the Church collectively] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, *that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2:10).

Here we are told that the very purpose for which the Christian Church was created was for "good works." This was the consistent teaching of the apostle Paul. These were not works of law. They were works of charity, love, outgoing concern for the rest of humanity. Christ, James and Paul taught that Christians should be *humanitarians*. Those who were more wealthy in the congregations were expected to do more: "As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be

haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in *good deeds*, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future . . ." (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

The "good works" of a Christian are not a mere by-product of his Christianity. They are central to it. His eternal reward will be affected by the quality and quantity of those works. They are the reason he or she exists in this present evil society: "... Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for *good deeds*" (Titus 2:13-14).

This is the Christianity of Christ!

This is not a selfish, egocentric, sheltered, self-feeding brand of religion. Rather, it is an outgoing, serving, giving, helping, concerned pattern of life. The Church of the living God is not a "closed shop." The spiritual body of Christ echoes the words of Jesus Himself who said: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus did not come with a burdensome religion of endless, Talmudic dos and don'ts. He delivered a way of life that was based on love and compassion for fellowman. Christ's Christianity is based on an active relationship with the world

The True Christian- A Doer of Good Works

Titus 2:7 — "Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds."

Titus 3:14 — "And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds."

I John 3:17 — "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?"

Prov. 3:27-28 — "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go and come again, tomorrow I will give it'—when you have it with you."

Heb. 10:24 — "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works."

I Tim. 6:17, 18 — "As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous."

James 1:27 — "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction."

James 2:15-16 — "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?"

Luke 10:36-37 — The parable of the Good Samaritan—"Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' "

Deut. 15:7-8 — "If there is among you a poor man [or woman], one of your brethren [your neighbor], 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."

Prov. 21:13 — "He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard."

I Thes. 5:15 — "Always seek to do good to one another and to all."

I Thes. 5:14 — "Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak."

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

Lev. 19:34 — "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself."

out of which one is called. He sent his disciples "into the world" (John 17:18) with a message of hope and comfort. He prayed only that they would be kept from the world's sins—from its evil. "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

Jesus did not expect his followers to be spiritual isolationists. He expected them to mix and mingle with contemporary society, all the while being a light and an example. He said Christians should shine like a beacon of light in a darkened world. They are to be like a city that is established upon a high hill which no one can miss (Matt. 5:14-16). Those who observe the life and actions of true Christians are to be inspired to "glorify God" as a result of what they see.

This kind of *active* Christianity is something less than comfortable! It puts you on the spot. It *forces* one out of the comfortable shell of religious hobbyism. It requires you to "put up or shut up."

Christians of this type are but a tiny minority in the world of nominal Christianity! Most nominal Christians would rather "worship" in the quiet sanctuary of majestic stone cathedrals and church buildings, singing hymns and forming social clubs, than be out letting their personal Christianity shine in tangible good works! It is like the difference between destroying a city by the push of a computer button and stabbing a man in the chest while he is looking at you. Today's professing Christianity is *impersonal* and *irrelevant*. It is self-centered. It is meaningless in a world of general suffering, political oppression, economic crisis, starvation and malnutrition, social upheaval and violence.

God's people *must* be different! They must be more than mere denominational religious hobbyists with esoteric "doctrines," beliefs and practices. They must come out of this world's word-laden Christianity and become truly converted to Christ's!

Hypocrisy is Out! Christ did not come to start the First Church of Hypocrisy. He founded a Church

(Greek: *ekklesia*) in which the chief claim to greatness was *service*. He taught: "... But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).

While practicing and preaching a life of service and self-sacrifice, Jesus launched a verbal tongue-lashing at those ecclesiastical hypocrites who sat in Moses' seat: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! *first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean*" (Matt. 23:25-26).

The apostle Paul taught strongly against hypocrisy among the membership of God's Church. In addressing a letter to the Christians in Rome, he wrote: "You then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?" (Rom. 2:21-23.)

He explained that it was not the

hearers or preachers of the law who would be justified before God, but the *doers* (Rom. 2:13).

Christians are to be *doers!*

They are to abound in good works no matter how much critics ridicule "Christian do-gooders." The New Testament is filled with scriptures showing the need to perform such actions and deeds (see accompanying box). These are not primarily works of law, but works of service, love, compassion and concern. True Christianity is a state of mind—not a set of legalistic dogmas and Talmudic legislation.

(God has given certain laws and practices which produce character and ensure an orderly society. But there is *no law* that a Christian may keep that will make him righteous or guarantee salvation! Salvation is not a matter of law but of grace, as Paul plainly taught. Yet law-keeping is still very much a part of the Christian way of life.)

God teaches that Christians should "get involved." They should participate in those activities which benefit their local community. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "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).

No one is excluded. *All* are to be blessed by the good works of a Christian. Paul does show that one should not neglect service to the Church in favor of those who live outside of "the faith," however. He wrote: "Bear one another's burdens, and so *fulfil the law of Christ*" (Gal. 6:2).

Which law of Christ did he have in mind? Undoubtedly that recorded in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This love and outgoing concern for others is the *very essence* of true Christianity. It is the answer to "legalism." It is the life force of the converted mind! Without love and service all law-keeping, ritual, tradition and denominationalism is meaningless. A Christian without such good works is no Christian at all.

Will you accept the challenge to become *more* than a nominal Christian? Will you respond to the plain teaching of the Founder of true Christianity and become a Christian—in deed? □

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