

950304 Christianity is a Way of Life HLH

I wanted to address this afternoon in a split sermon a subject that goes back many years into church, which is fundamental to why we are what we are as a group and why each of us should be what each of us is as an individual.

What it means when we say Christianity is a way of life, we are speaking of it in the sense of the biblical term, however some people may perceive it.

Paul was once before Governor Felix.

This is the story of his last visit to Jerusalem, the misunderstanding that arose at the temple, the seizure, and then later, after a number of events, the defense before Governor Felix.

And he tells us a little bit about his experience through the author of the book of Acts, Luke.

Now I would like you to note that in addressing Governor Felix, he says, but this I confess to you, verse 14 of Acts 24, that according to the way which they call a sect, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things written in the law and the prophets.

That was a term to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures, the divine teaching, and the messages that came through the prophets for future times as well as for that generation.

The prophets as well as Moses foresaw the coming of Messiah, foresaw the coming ultimately of the government of God over all human beings and in all.

But he said according to the way which they call a sect, earlier in this chapter we have the statement as to what the sect was named.

In verse 5, in leading forth with a brief accusation before the same governor, the accuser said, we found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Now this was early enough that in reality the general term among Jewish Christians was simply to call Jesus' disciples Nazarenes after their teacher who grew up in the city of Nazareth in the Galilee.

Later on in Antioch in northwestern Syria we have quite a different situation where in the Greek speaking world they were called Christians, that is people who follow the Christ or if it were translated out of the Hebrew it would be people who follow Messiah.

So in a sense when we speak of Christianity we are speaking of those in the world who follow the Messiah, that's what a Christian is, the one who was anointed, the Son of God who came with a message about the purpose of human life and how we should live.

The same Paul on two occasions wrote letters once to the Philippians and once to the Colossians.

I should like to read first the one to the Philippians.

I was asked to speak at the close of the eighth grade when we had an eight and four structure.

I did not write the speech at the graduation, it was written by a teacher.

The teacher chose the verses that I would like to use today and perhaps because they were used then I still think of them as most fundamental in explaining what it means to live a particular way of life.

I would like you to turn to the book of Philippians chapter four.

You're familiar with verses eight and nine but let's take a look at this as we approach now in the last month of the sacred year, the Hebrew calendar, the month in this occasion as second Adar and look forward to the time next month that commemorates the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Finally Brethren says Paul, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are a good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praise worthy meditate on these things.

Now in this particular verse let us break it down and take a look.

It's one thing to have summarized it, to have concluded the speech and everyone thought he understood it, it's another thing to look at it and ask some questions.

We are addressed concerning things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and anything that is praise worthy and we're to think on these things.

Now life is involved with thinking, life is also involved with doing but we ought to learn that it is wise to think first before we act rather than act and then think about what you've done.

And so we'll start with this one which in one sense is a kind of conclusion or summary of how we ought to live but take a look at where our minds should be.

Where would we find what is true and noble and just and pure and all the other things that are described? Well in a sense Paul already answered that when he spoke to Governor Felix but let me go back to the statement in Governor Felix because there is one thing I did not then read which seems appropriate to bring now to our attention.

As far as how Paul learned of the way that he should go, he discovered that in the worship of God of his father, the God of his fathers, he had come to understand these things by believing what is written in the holy scriptures.

This being so I will drop to verse 16, he said, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense either toward God or men.

He chose to conduct himself in such a way that he could pray before God with a good conscience.

He could also conduct himself before men with a good conscience.

Now in another book altogether in the book of Hebrews we learn that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ chapter nine of the book of Hebrews, which I won't take the time to read here, makes possible the fact that we can have a conscience free of guilt.

The Messiah paid a penalty, the penalty of sin, which is lawlessness.

It is an attitude toward that which is good, that which is right, virtuous, noble and pure.

It is the wrong attitude toward the very things we read in Philippians four, verse eight.

So Paul wanted to have a life and led a life which was in a sense twofold.

One, a life with a good conscience, and two, a life freed of any guilt that might come to his conscience so that he would know it is forgiving, it is forgiven, and in a certain sense that tells us that Paul must have also been forgiving.

Because the scripture tells us when the Messiah explained these things, he said that we should forgive others, their debts, their trespasses against us, if we wish to have God forgive ours against him.

So we have a perception that Paul's attitude here reflects a comprehension of the sense of being forgiving, which he learned in Holy Writ.

Therefore, when we read in Philippians these terms, we are finding that Paul, in fact, is looking at the scripture that he inherited from his ancestors, the scriptures that tell us what is true and what is noble.

These are all the positive sides of life, not what is false, but how are you going to really understand truth unless there is also falsity made clear in scripture? Let's take the first illustration of how you can learn how to understand what is true.

God explained to the first man and the first woman truth on a particular issue.

Then there came a personality who said, well, has God really said that? And so you learn right at the start that there is a distinction between truth and sometimes what appears to be true, but in fact was meant to be false.

Now what is interesting about this is that God did not tell us what the devil told Eve.

God has seen to it that the devil is himself quoted.

It's not a third hand explanation.

So it is very important that in the pursuit either of truth or falsehood to learn the truth of a matter or the falsity of a matter that you get at the source and the fundamental source of all knowledge on what is true and by contrast what is false is scripture.

The same thing of that which is noble or innoble that has honor, if you please, or lacks it, that which is just versus unjust.

This is a world in which tragically some countries lack a great deal in justice.

We should be just in dealing with one another and just before God, all of which is made possible in the sense that we are willing to forgive any who may be unjust to us in order that we may be just before God because we all partake of human nature and human nature that does not have as a part of its nature the true understanding, the noble understanding or the just understanding.

These are the things we learn in life.

You are not born with these characteristics.

We acquire them and we acquire them fundamentally in life within the fellowship of the church through spiritual study, the study of spiritual information, knowledge and wisdom which is holy scripture.

So what we have here is a perspective that we look at ourselves and look at scripture and we look at our conduct and we see how we measure up to that conduct.

We focus on that which is pure and in so doing we discover examples in the Bible that are not pure.

We read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We read the story of men who were willing to give their lives for others.

We read that which is lovely and we read that which is ugly.

And we are to learn to say no to that which is untrue, in noble, unjust and impure and to focus on that which is what is given here in these summary statements in verse 8.

We focus on what is lovely.

We do not pay attention to evil reports.

We pay attention to good reports.

We don't focus on other people's faults.

We seek to help them.

We seek to be an example both in word and deed.

I would like to take a moment of time.

Someone in the congregation here brought me into acquaintanceship with a near relative and an accompanying friend.

And they were going to go to the South Pacific including New Zealand Australia and then to return to Sweden.

My wife and I have a Hindu friend now for some twenty years whom we have corresponded with and only recently I received correspondence from him.

I told these two young people that if they should go to the city of Nandi in Fiji they must by any means call upon this person.

He's a taxi driver, a person who offered in the crisis of 1982 when the terrible storm ruined both Tonga and Machu Fiji.

He offered his youngest daughter for us to rear.

We felt it was wiser for him to do that with some help from here.

They wrote back having met him.

Like good taxi drivers in Fiji, I will use the word good in quotes here as we speak of good and bad drivers, he invited them to his home, which he has never done for my wife and myself because they didn't have anything adequate in earlier days.

But I told him what kind of person we know him to be and they wrote back.

I thought that was very nice to receive a letter that he had done things for them that no one on the trip so far had done.

A good report.

It's nice to hear that in the world there are some people of whom Paul wrote in the book of Romans who without the written scripture but learning from experience in the example of others are able to show the intent and purpose of the law, either excusing them or accusing them and they become conscious by looking at other people, how they should behave, by reflecting on how other people have dealt with them.

A man not in the Christian fellowship, but let me go one step further because if people such as I mention and we have come to be acquainted with in life examine life itself without the help of scripture how much more should we be able to accomplish before others an example of the Christ-like life.

What was unusual is that I never knew about this Hindu taxi driver until I was introduced to him by way of a letter from his Muslim friend whom I had first become acquainted with and when my wife and I needed Abdulaziz's services in Fiji when he was unavailable he said I would like you to have the finest driver I know and he presented a Hindu.

We have had many fine years corresponding with both gentlemen and it illustrates a very important point the extent to which hopefully our example has influenced them and their examples influence others and for that matter me.

Sometimes we overlook the impact or don't adequately reflect on the impact that others have.

First of all is the standard for all Jesus of Nazareth and then there are those human beings in life who have simply chosen to think more seriously about how we ought to live.

We often think of it in terms of the Christian world but it can also be of other religious groups where people have learned to think and to watch another's example.

Both of them know I happen to be a minister in the Worldwide Church of God and I regularly have intentionally I communicate to them not by the normal means of post and I have a reason.

I write them indirectly and send a letter to the leader of our church in Fiji and he meets with them that way they never lose sight of my relationship with the church.

It is not just one human being with another.

We also all should represent the institution that Jesus Christ chose to build on earth and I am very glad when two people who know something of us through the Scandinavian English work that we do in Sweden they're not members come to find that people of whom we can give a good report who are not even of our fellowship exhibit that.

It's important that we learn how to discern people in the world to know those whose conduct can be so described.

You might be surprised the effect you can have on other people whom you do not know.

I was responsible for giving the shall we say eulogy for a church member now thirty one years ago in Central California a man whom God used and who had a good report who sought that which was true behaved nobly and just purely and lovely toward his sons in law and toward the people whom he worked for a man who was a millionaire in property if not in liquidity.

I was surprised at the audience there were people who arrived in Cadillacs you could expect them there are people who may have wanted to be seen but there were most certainly among them people who paid their respects absolutely sincerely there were people who arrived in older cars of

lesser worth there were people who walked there there were people who walked there without shoes and without all the buttons on the shirt who spoke very little English.

One of them was asked or let us say was told that this man had died and his simple words in translation oh that kind man that man's religion was a way of life Milton Reimann was his name he was a member of the board I thought how remarkable at the time and I still do that people can see in others in the world and among ourselves and that we should be equally observant of the way of life of other people and never forget to examine ourselves in accordance and then Paul speaks of whatever virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy to meditate on all these things that means we look at the written scripture we hide our eyes from none of it we learn to live by every word of God and use judgment and mercy faith and the love of God to examine scripture judgment and discerning the intent and meaning we use mercy in applying scripture to others we act on faith to carry out what God asks us to do and we do so through the love of God rather than human will then Paul in Colossians chapter one has a very nice summary beginning with verse nine we since the day that we heard of the Colossians faith do not cease to pray for you and ask that you be filled with the knowledge of his will now to know the will of God is very important but to know it in all wisdom and spiritual understanding because there are some people who may know what God's will is but don't realize that not everybody wants to hear about it remember you don't cast your pearls before swine that is the proverb there are people who want to hear and would like to ask more and people who don't wish to hear and sometimes it's wiser to desist to desist from your conversation and depart on good terms and try another day when I first met Abdul Aziz I had a chance to spend 12 hours with him it happened to be during the month of Ramadan that's the time when you you commemorate the portions of the Quran and you fast during the daytime and break a fast each evening I was really shall we say impressed by the fact that I had never met someone who had a non-religious rank but he was a teacher of the youth the Muslim youth president of the Muslim youth league and in that sense he was a very responsible and responsive person and we talked over many things even the coming of Messiah the second time it was a remarkable experience and opportunity but we have to have wisdom to know when others are interested and have spiritual understanding not just mental understanding or intellectual because there are a lot of people who look at the Bible and who may understand but they understand only with the intellect they lack that which is possible through the Holy Spirit of God because the biblical record is not wholly spiritually discerned by historians by physicists or lawyers it is ultimately discerned through the presence in the human mind of the Spirit of God now the purpose Paul said that we should be filled with the knowledge of his will in wisdom and understanding so you have all those three fundamental areas knowledge wisdom and understanding that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord that is that we should therefore follow up and be found conducting ourselves as we walk life through worthy of being called a Christian worthy of being called a member of the Church of God a disciple of Christ whatever term you would like to think of fully pleasing him now the Christian walk then is a way in which we behave ourselves in a worthy manner we fully please Jesus Christ who walked before us being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God now these reflect those two areas of life fruitful and every good work refers to what we do to increase in the knowledge of God tends to focus in on the reflection that comes from study strengthened with all might that is where you become strong and convinced and willing to follow through irrespective of the problems that may be yours strengthened with all might according to his glorious power for all patience and long suffering with joy there are those who are patient and long suffering with misery because they find no joy in this experience but we should have the strength that comes from an understanding of reading and living the word of God that leads to a whole new way of life because we see it not in terms of legal terms we see it in spiritual terms the intent and purpose of everything that is written by way of example or by way of

instruction and we have the strength to endure these things wherever they may be found with patience and long suffering so that we may give thanks as Paul did here to the father who has qualified us please note there are those who have left us who are trying to qualify Paul does not say that we qualify he says the father who has qualified us both now through the presence of the Holy Spirit and previously through the death of the Messiah who paid for all those things that would stand in the way of being just before God the father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light God is light Jesus Christ is a reflection of that light God is love Jesus Christ reflected that love as a human being on earth because he was the very mind of God in the flesh and Paul says let this mind be in you which was in Jesus Christ which is imparted through the spirit of God we acquire that mind by way of study and learning and following the examples of one another I would suggest that you take some time and reflect on your relationships and your friends in or out of the church some of us I know that Mr. Ducot has a significant number and I'm sure that there are many others who do and some have fewer people outside of the fellowship of the church but I have had the privilege of meeting people of different backgrounds and we should reflect what kind of impact do those people have on us and we on them I in fact address this question to the Thai businessmen in Southern California at the Thai temple the impact that the Thai community has had on me as an individual things that I might not have thought of either by example that I have seen in our society or the church society or never thought to focus in on in scripture itself and in the same way I hope that they would consider our example as also worthy in summary our good friend of many years Abdulaziz some years ago came to the United States his brother is in Canada and he was going to journey there to meet him he did not wish me to drive him because I am not a taxi driver and he would not have asked me to do this which he did not and only when he saw in Southern California what he wished to do he told me he had arrived and I met him and we embraced in the Muslim fashion and he said why are Americans and then he named some things that were not quite as complimentary as he felt Americans such as he had known personally were he found a country that didn't quite measure up to its standards and I felt it was very important that I should introduce him to somebody who did and I introduced him to a Jewish lady introduced him in his life to a Jewish lady at UCLA and the Institute of Archaeology he asked her of her welfare and he was measurably impressed by what Americans can be like but he said sorry she said to him well if you're going to see your brother why did you come here first he said to her because I must first pay my respects to one who was older than my brother now I had never thought about that but that's quite a remarkable view of life to treat someone who is not related to you not even of your religion or maybe we might want to correct that and say who shares some things we never thought that we did because we never understood one another before who paid his respect before he chose to see his brother I hope all of you in walking the Christian way of life will reflect on what Jesus might have done or what others think and do and make a choice by saying no to that which doesn't measure up and saying yes to that which is true and noble and just and lovely of good report