

“Have We taken “Christ” out of Christianity?”

Written April of 2007

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:37-40

Introduction

With the help of the Holy Spirit, Today’s Sermon will be an objective viewpoint, with the Bible as its foundation for us to Honestly answer this question: “Have We taken “Christ” out of Christianity”. Our answer could mean Eternal Life or Eternal Damnation.

Sermon

How many of us here when asked if we believe in God or what Denomination we are, say: Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Adventist etc...or do you say I am a Christian; and if they ask what church you go to? Then you say the “X, Y, Z Church”, or whichever church you attend. Or does anyone here sometimes wonder if they gave the correct response. I think that somehow through the centuries of time we have forgotten the true meaning of the word “**Christian**”. In order to answer our opening question, we must go back to the beginning of our Church roots.

If we look at the early Church in the book of **Acts Chapters 11-13** it relates the events leading up to the year that Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch; unitedly ministering and bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of Antioch, while teaching them the Saving Knowledge of **Jesus Christ, as the World’s Redeemer**.

It was in Antioch that the Apostles were first called Christians. The name was given to them because Christ was the main theme of their Preaching, their Teaching, and their Conversation. In all they did, they Reflected the same Love they Preached about; the Love Jesus had shown during His Ministry. Maybe that’s where the saying: “**Practice what you Preach**” came about.

God gave them the name “Christians”; this is a Royal name in God’s Eyes, given to all who join themselves to Christ. Become One, in Spirit, with Christ.

John 3:20, 21 tells us: “**Those who live out of the Spirit work out of the Spirit**”.

Now a days when we hear the word “Christianity, we often think of our Religion and/or our Religious Beliefs. We tend to tie these two words together as our belief in God. The Dictionary defines:

- **Religion** = System of Faith and Worship.

> I was curious to know what the word “Belief” meant as well.

- **Belief** = To regard as true, to Trust in.

So, my question to you: is a “**Fact**” something that is regarded to be True? **Yes or No**, raise your hands and let’s see, who says yes and who says no!

Here’s a Historical Fact: the greatest conflicts that the World has ever seen were caused by religion. If this offends you, I’m sorry, but look at the Facts in any Historical Book about the: Spanish Inquisition, Crusades, The Coliseum in Rome, World War II, and even today look at Radical Islam, and the rise of Terrorism, all in the name of “Religious Expression”. All of these major conflicts have their foundation in religion.

Or how about this past Christmas, how many of you saw on the News, the uproar created when State and Federal Governments were debating over the use of the word “**Christmas**”, because it had Christ in it. They wanted to prohibit the use of the word “Christmas” because it promoted Christ. Thousands of Christians (*from all denominations*) rallied to support keeping “**Christ**” in the word Christmas.

It’s amazing how the Devil can take the greatest Gift God gave us: “**The Birth of His Son Jesus Christ**” and twist it around with Political and Religious propaganda. Not to mention the number of Church Scandals that has come to light this past year. Satan has a way of using Good things and Twisting them for his purpose.

Have you ever wondered how satan can take something that should be fundamentally good, and use it to create such Evil Destruction and Malice? I came across this quote which may shed some light on this question:

**“Religion is Man trying to reach God”
“Redemption is God Reaching down to Man”**

Jesus never brought a religion to Earth. He came to give us and show us the **Principles of God’s Kingdom**, so that we have the opportunity through Jesus Christ, to claim our **Birthright**. Jesus proclaimed His Father’s Principles in His very First Sermon. “**The Sermon on the Mount**”. In the (4) Gospels is the Good News Message and Our Mission as “True Christians” (*If we are in Christ*) that establishes **God’s Kingdom Principles in our Hearts**.

Religion sometimes attempts to substitute the Kingdom of God. Allow me to explain: Jesus told the Pharisees in **Matthew 15:3** “**You have made your Traditions more important than God**”. I wonder if we do the same thing today, by focusing on Rules, Customs, and Regulations; instead of showing Christ’s Love to others.

Jesus told His (12) Disciples that: “**if they loved one another and their fellow Brethren, it would be a sign that they were of Him, and that Christ was in them.**”

Religion has gotten so caught-up on **Customs** and **Traditions** that we push people away. We place more weight on someone’s Outward Appearance (*their Hair, their Dress, their Clothes and their choice of Jewelry*) instead of Loving Them like Jesus. I am the first to admit that I am Guilty of judging a book by its cover. **But Jesus said: “Come as you are”** and **Romans 12:2** tells us: “**That when we are transformed inwardly, then we will know the will of God**”.

When a Person is Born Again the Holy Spirit guides them to make those changes; yet time and time again I have seen Churches try to take the place of the Holy Spirit and Enforce those changes. Our Mandate/Mission as “**True Christians**” is to plant the seed, share the Light of the Gospel Truth, and let the Holy Spirit make those changes and the transformation in those people. It’s not our job to change them, it’s our job to Love them. As it says in **Matthew 7:5** do we sometimes “**tell our Brother’s and Sister’s of the speck in their eye and not see the Plank in our own Eye.**”

In other words, treat the Person next to you as if He or She is Jesus Christ. This is **Matthew 25:40** again: ***“If you’ve done it unto the least of these you’ve done it unto me”***. Think about this for a second my dear Brothers and Sisters; this is a Powerful Statement that we should apply to our daily lives. Do we Honestly follow this command? Do we apply the **Golden Rule** equally to every person we encounter?

It doesn’t matter what Religion or Denomination it is (*Catholic, Jehovah’s Witness, Islam, Buddhist*) unless Christ’s original Mandate and Mission are followed, they all risk losing Eternal Life. ***“Many will say Lord, Lord, in that day, and Jesus will say I never knew you”***

Isn’t it interesting that the greatest opposition Jesus had here on Earth was from the Religious Sect (*The Pharisees and Sadducees*), and not from the Beggars, Thief’s, Tax Collectors and Sinners; they were the ones seeking Jesus, seeking His Love, Grace and Mercy.

It didn’t matter the Jews knew the Word of God Backwards and Forwards, or that they had studied and understood the Prophecies of the coming Messiah. **They did not live the Word of God**. By not living out of the Spirit, their works or actions were not of the Spirit of God.

You see the Pharisees were searching for Truth, within themselves, but the problem was, they were the ones who were confused to begin with. In our Humanity we still do the same thing today; we try to find Meaning to our lives, we search for Truth, we search for Purpose in our lives within ourselves, which is a search in Vain. Only through becoming **“One In Christ”** (*A True Christian*) can we develop our **Gifts and Talents**, with the Holy Spirit guiding us, for the edifying of **The Body of Christ**.

God is not only calling Pastors, Ministers and Evangelists to do His work, but He is calling each and every one of us, in “The Body of Christ” to be **Living Representatives of Bible Truth**. Let’s keep in mind that Bible Truth goes far beyond Customs and Traditions of the Church. Let’s read:

John 14:6 “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”

Jesus Christ came to this Earth to be a Living Example of Bible Truth. So, I ask you this morning **what is, or should be the Foundation of Bible Truth? “LOVE”** my dear Brothers and Sisters. Jesus’ Ministry was centered on Reflecting the Love of God, to ALL Humanity. **Are we doing the same today?**

*This is a quote from **Chapter 14 of “Acts of the Apostles”** by **Ellen White** ***“We are His Representatives among men, God does not choose Angels who have never fallen, but Human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took humanity that He might reach Humanity.” “In His Wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for Truth in to touch with fellow Human beings who know the Truth.”***

Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the Salvation of his fellow man. The Holy Spirit has been sent to us, so that our words may be Sanctified by God when we witness to others, and that our hearts may be refined in the Spirit of God. God's plan is that we are to work to save our fellow man.

We have seen through History and even in today's time, that in our Humanity, we try to **mold God into our Image**, instead of **us being molded into His Image**. In our Humanity we try to fit God into our Earthly Traditions and Timetables, when His Divinity works on a different level and Timetables.

“Life without Purpose is an Experiment” Our Mission to spread the Good News of God's Love, it is what gives us Purpose in Life. It defines our Existence; it gives us Meaning in our lives. **Seek a Relationship with God, not Religion with God.** Religion alone won't Save us, and it is **Not a Guaranteed Magic Ticket into the Kingdom**; but our Relationship with God and accepting His Bible Truths and most importantly, living those Bible Truths will save us.

Closing

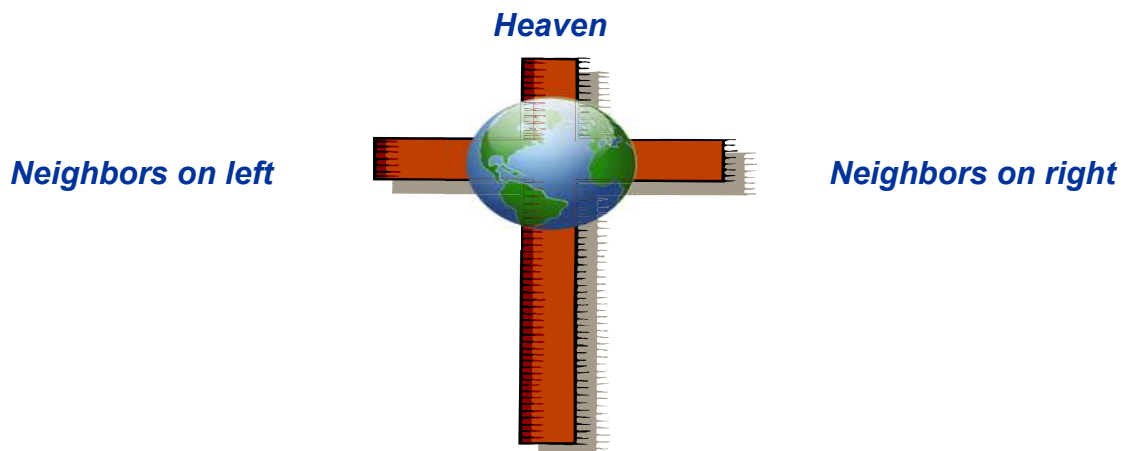
Its real simple Brothers and Sisters, the Bible is about a King, who has a Kingdom that has many Children, who must follow the Kings Principles to claim their Birthright.

I will give you a simple illustration, let's read first in **Mark 12:30, 31** what Jesus said the (2) greatest commandments were:

Verse 30: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, This is the first commandment”

Verse 31: “And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no greater commandment greater than these.”

USE CHALK BOARD FOR ILLUSTRATION



What is the symbol of Christianity? The Cross that we see here. The first commandment gives us a direct covenant communication and connection between Earth and Heaven (*Vertically*). The second commandment commands us to communicate that covenant from one end of Earth to the other (*Horizontally*) to our Brethren. Imagine Jesus on the Cross, this illustration puts Jesus's heart at the center of Earth, symbolizing His Love for us in Dying on the Cross.

The (2) greatest Commandments, are the essence of Christianity, because they take us back to the Cross as our Guiding Light.

We cannot have one without the other, because it will break the Covenant. Let us not forget our **Mission** and our **Mandate** from God. Our Thoughts, Words and Actions should always reflect Christ. We should Love our fellow man as Christ did. I Challenge you today to honestly answer the question we began our Sermon with today, **“Have We taken “Christ” out of Christianity”?**

I John 4:20 “If a man says, I love God, and hates his Brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

Christ paid much too great a price for us to pick and choose how anyone should come to the Foot of the Cross. Let's Read our final verse this morning found in:

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Maybe you're sitting here thinking: “man I've done some things that go against being a “True Christian”. I don't know how to approach God, or if forgiveness is even possible.” I'll give you my final illustration:

If your child (whom you love dearly) is hanging from a tree in eminent danger of losing his or her life, if he or she falls, are you going to first: Remind him or her of all his faults, maybe he didn't take out the trash, behaved bad last week or maybe told a lie last month; Or are you going to run and save him and forget about what he or she did in the past and put your focus on saving them and later rejoicing that he or she is alive after saving them. As a Parent, all you want to do is hold them and never let go and keep them safe.

Altar Call

Our God's Love and Grace are the same way with us. He just wants to hold us in His Arms again. **Forgiveness is yours if you just take the first step.** As we play our final song, I want to give you the opportunity to come forward for a special prayer; if right now you want to except Christ into your heart, take that first step into His Arms of Grace and Mercy.

Jesus said come as you are, let Jesus transform your brokenness into a new vessel of light; if you want to get back on track in your Christian Walk and reflect Christ in your Thoughts, Words and Actions come forward, if you want God to renew the Fire of the Spirit of God in your Heart come forward, Come and lay your burdens at the foot of the Cross, and choose to let your **Life be a Song of Praise to the King of the Universe.**

As we sing our final song, I encourage you to come forward; I will be in Prayer asking the Holy Spirit to touch your heart!