

# What It Means To Be A Christian!

In the life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour are portrayed all that make for a true disciple of his. And according to the Scriptures, it is one's heart condition, which must be right with God, and one's ability by God's power to translate the vital beliefs and the high ideals of Christianity into practice that is of greater importance than our verbal confession of the faith.

Today, there are very many people who call themselves Christians and who do not by any standard deserve to bear the name. Several times we have made it known in black and white that nominal Christians are in the majority. This is a fact which no one is apt to dispute if only people know what it means, according to the Bible, to be a Christian.

It is amusing to find certain people who are idolaters claiming to be Christians and swearing to the Bible in the name of God in the law courts. They feel it is more modern and honorable to identify themselves as Christians in public. And if the police were asked to search these people there would be a lot of shameful nasty finds such as "demonized small calabashes in pockets, and chains of fetishistic cowries tied around the waists of some." Yet in spite of all these identification marks of devilism, they still wish to be associated with Jesus Christ. This has made pagans to have very low opinion of certain so called Christians.

There are some others who after swearing to the Bible in the name of God resort to telling of blatant lies, bearing false witness against their neighbour contrary to God's commandments in the very Bible they had sworn to and licked. Will it be right to call such people Christians? Of course, it will not. Pagans who take pagan oaths are sincere and are better than the so-called Christians who worship idols and still parade themselves as Christians.

But for the mercies of God and His exercise of the attribute of longsuffering, many people would have turned to pillars of salt or wood in the witness boxes for taking His name in vain. Unless such people take warning and sincerely repent of their sins, the curse of God would remain upon them. The divine law, which, since the days of Moses the prophet, has been in force till this Christian era, is: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." (Exodus. 20: 7.) In the Bible which some swear to, Jesus Christ said his disciples should not swear at all. (Matthew, 5: 33-37; James. 5: 12) What they should do is to affirm in the court or tribunal that the evidence they will give is the truth, and they should really say the truth.

## Nominal Christians

Now, let us direct our minds to those who attend church services. Can it be denied that there are many of them having some form of fetish under their beds, or hung above their doors or hidden somewhere in their rooms? Do some not take part in pagan ceremonies and festivals? Do they not vie with heathens for chieftaincy titles or associate with them in secret cults? Such people are not Christians though they may be deceiving themselves. "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.” (Matthew, 6: 24) And what is more St. Paul stated: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”-2nd Corinthians 6: 14, 15. No one can be a true servant of God and at the same time be a worshipper of idols and/or devils. The moment one turns to idolatry he ceases to be a worshipper of God. St. Paul said, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.”- 1st Corinthians 10: 21.

Certain Christians so-called have no faith. For every threat of temptation they waver between two opinions (1 Kings 18: 21), and whenever they experience the vicissitudes of life they doubt Christ’s power to help or to save, and run to witch-doctors and idols to seek aid. In a sense, the pagans who remain steadfast to their idol-worship are better than nominal Christians who for lack of spiritual understanding and faith ‘cross the carpet’ over to idolatry and thus cause reproach. To such faithless Christians the words of Paul the apostle of Christ do apply: ” Thou that abhorreth idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that maketh thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonoreth thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.”-Romans 2:22-24.

Every understanding Christian ought to know that idols are vain things which could not be relied upon for help or safety. The Psalmist declared: “Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Their (pagans’) idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”-Psalm, 115: 2-8.

It is not just everyone who professes to be a Christian that is truly a follower of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour himself said: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day (of decision), Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful Works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”-Matthew, 7: 21-23.

From the words of Jesus Christ just quoted it becomes clear that many of those who parade themselves as prophets and who claim to see visions, dream dreams and engage in “divine” healings or do wonders in his name do not derive their powers from him (Jesus) but from Satan the devil.

## **Vital Qualities**

A Christian, therefore, is a believer in Jesus Christ who not only understands the will of God but also does it. In all essential aspects of life, he must endeavour to be like our Master, Jesus the righteous. Christ said: “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” – Matthew, 10:25.

In order to be like Jesus Christ we must have vital qualities such as love, faith and understanding, and be equipped with the knowledge and wisdom, not of the world, but of God.

With these we can, by the grace of God, ever stand for and proclaim the truth of Christ notwithstanding the oppositions of gainsayers and the persecutions of the enemies of righteousness. A Christian should be humble, meek and tolerant. He must never compromise with evil but shun it. St. Paul stated: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." – 1st Thessalonians 5: 22. To be a Christian indeed requires a lot of sacrifice. Under no circumstance must he allow human or worldly considerations to override the demands of Jesus Christ. If the wishes of his parents or wife or relatives or whoever it may be, are in conflict with the requirements of Jesus Christ, he must at all times abandon the wishes of men and cleave to the Lord by doing his will even if this would offend his parents and so on. Jesus Christ said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." -Matthew, 10: 37.38. When on a certain occasion a multitude of people; followed Jesus Christ during his first advent. he turned to them and said: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."-Luke 14: 25.27. Christ did not mean that every Christian should just hate his parents or children and so forth without cause. It is when the parents or wife or brothers are wicked or if they are opposers of the truth of Christ, and therefore constituting an obstacle to his doing the will of God that he would shun them. If he does not, it will be him that lose his precious life in the end.

The cross that a Christian is required to bear is not a golden or wooden instrument nor is it a piece of brass or copper but the self-denial he must show and without which he cannot live up to expectation in the Lord. He must do away with the lust of the flesh and make efforts seriously to live a quiet and sober life, and above all, a life of holiness. Sinful and worldly things in which he might have been taking great pleasure before his conversion to Christianity, he must disregard and treat as things of the past. Paul the apostle had such experience, and he said: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." – Philippians 3: 7-9.

## **New Creature**

To be a Christian means to refrain from the life of sin. "Therefore if any man be in Christ," said St. Paul, "he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2nd Corinthians 5: 17) The old things that are gone are the works of the flesh some of which were recounted by the same apostle in his epistle to the Christians at Galatia. As it is written: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."-Galatians 5: 19-21.

But turning to the qualities of true Christians who are under the control of the Spirit of God, St. Paul further stated: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the

Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

“-Galatians 5: 22-26.

We agree that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners but he did not die that sinners may continue to sin. Rather he came to call sinners to repentance so that through his death the repentant ones may obtain forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in God's perfect Government.-Matthew, 9:

10-13; 20: 28; Luke 24: 47; Acts 13: 38, 39, etc.

Furthermore, St. Peter stated: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick (living) and the dead.” -I Pet. 4: 1-5.

Therefore, exhorting the Christians, St. Paul wrote: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things sake, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew. Circumcision nor un-circumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.” – Colossians 3: 5-11; see also Ephesians 4: 17-22; 5: 1-11.

As a good, loving wife is faithful to her husband or a good loving husband is faithful to his wife, so must a Christian who truly loves Jesus Christ be faithful to him. To serve mm (Jesus) and at the same time do ungodly or heathenish things or serve idols amounts to unfaithfulness on the part of such ones and it is spiritual adultery.

Anyone who examines himself against the background of all the Scriptures that have been expounded in this Sermon will know whether he is a nominal Christian or not. And if anyone is only a Christian in name and not in deed, he should pray to God to help him amend his ways. It is “not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified”.

(Romans 2: 13; James. 1 : 22-25) And Jesus Christ said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14: 15) Anyone who does not keep Christ's commandments is not a Christian, he does not know God or Christ.

As it is written: “.. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”-1st John 2: 3-5.