

BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26).

A LITTLE BOY asked his father, "What is a Christian?" The father explained to his son just what a Christian should be according to the Scriptures. But he told him so well that, when he had finished, the boy answered, "Father, have I ever seen a Christian?"

I have a real sympathy for that boy. In this befuddled age, when even the faithful are split by isms and schisms galore, one feels like rising in the midst of the bedlam to ask, "Just what is a Christian anyway?"

We have become so taken up with the things that accompany the Christian experience, the secondary matters, that the Christian himself can hardly be identified nowadays. The traveler has been lost in the baggage.

One thinks of the housewife who answered the doorbell to be greeted by a stranger who abruptly asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

She was so taken aback that she could think of no answer and closed the door in his face. When she told her husband of it, he suggested, "But why didn't you tell him that you are president of the missionary society and teacher of the ladies' Bible class and active in all church work?"

"But he didn't ask me about that," she replied; "he asked me 'Do you know Jesus Christ?'"

So, in the midst of the things we do and belong to, it is well to open the door on ourselves once in a while and ask abruptly, "What about you? For all your religious zeal and church work, do you know Jesus Christ?"

A Christian is one who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour and is living by faith in Him and in fellowship with Him. But we may go into detail and, to use the time-honored method of alliteration, put it thus:

I. *First, a Christian is saved.*

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

It does not say “such as were sincere” or “such as were sanctimonious.” The desire to build up an impressive church roll and send a pretentious letter to denominational headquarters has filled our churches with a strange assortment of saints and sinners, lost and saved. If the devil is pleased to see an unsaved man join the church—and he is—he ought to be happy today, for more are joining than ever before.

What is a true experience of salvation?

There must be conviction of sin by the Spirit through the Word of God; conviction that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that we have broken God’s law and are under condemnation, God’s wrath abiding upon us.

There must be repentance toward God, a change of mind about sin, self and the Saviour; godly sorrow for sin, turning with broken and contrite heart from sin to the Saviour.

There must be faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith that receives Him into the heart as the Son of God Who was made sin for us, Who bare our sins in His own body on the tree, Who rose for our justification, by Whose blood we are cleansed from sin, and through faith in Whom we are born again and receive power to become the sons of God.

Then, belief with the heart must be followed by confession with the mouth, the public expression of an inward experience by which the redeemed of the Lord say so.

It is obvious that if all this is involved in an experience of salvation, it is miles away from perfunctorily signing a card or merely joining church. It is the most profound experience of human life when bondage turns to freedom, when darkness becomes day, when the angels of God are set singing because a sinner has come home.

II. *In the second place, a Christian is not only saved but he should be sure that he is saved.*

A born-again, blood-washed believer has no right to go through this world a human question-mark, up one day and down the next, never able to stand at any time or place with full assurance of salvation. For the Word sets forth as plainly as day the blessed certainty of knowing Whom we have believed (II Timothy 1: 12): of knowing that we have eternal life (I John 5: 13); of knowing that He abides in us by the Spirit He has given us (I John 3:24); of knowing that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren (I John 3: 14).

The twice-born believer carries the evidences in that he is a new creature (II Corinthians 5:17); he loves (I John 4: 7); he is not committing sin (I John 5: 18); and he overcomes the world (I John 5:4). In a day of human question-marks every Christian should be a living exclamation-point bravely traveling through an uncertain world, knowing that he knows he is saved because God said so and God’s saying so makes it so.

III. *A Bible Christian is not only saved and sure but also sound.*

We are to be “**sound in the faith**” (Titus 1:13), for we live in a day when men will not endure sound doctrine (II Timothy 4:3).

An aged woman who had a habit of using rather frequently the phrase “ner nuthin’,” went to hear a Modernist preacher, who delivered a lavender and rose-water sermonette, starting nowhere and ending in the same place. After the service, she went forward to shake his hand and said, “I sure did enjoy yer sermon; it didn’t have no doctrine in it — ner nuthin’.” Certainly, if we have not sound doctrine, we have nothing!

It is a day of trumpets with uncertain sound. The less a preacher is sure of, the more intelligent some think him to be. It is true that we are saved by Whom we believe rather than what. But when the “whats” of doctrine deny the supernatural in the Whom, we have denied Christ Himself. We are witnesses unto Him, the Whom (Acts 1:8) but we are also witnesses of these things, the “whats” (Luke 24:48).

There is a great deal of pleasant teaching today to the effect that it matters not what we believe so long as we are all sincere and smiling, and we are paying for it in thousands of professing Christians who know little of what they believe and can give no reason for the hope within them. The blood makes safe, the Word makes sure, and as we continue steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, we are made sound, steadfast and immovable.

IV. *The next mark of a Bible Christian is that he is surrendered to God.*

“**Yield yourselves unto God**” (Romans 6: 13). True victory begins with a surrender to the will of God. It has been pointed out that God required Abraham first to give up Ishmael, the worst thing in his life, born of the will of the flesh. He took Ishmael away, and he never came back. Then God asked for Isaac, the best thing in Abraham’s life, born of faith. He gave Isaac back.

So does God want the Ishmaels, the bad things in our lives that He may take them away and they may never come back, and He wants the Isaacs, the best things, that He may sanctify them to His glory.

We need a day of national repentance for the way we sing songs in our churches we do not mean.

It is perhaps easier to lie to music than in any other way. Consider how we sing:

My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine,
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign.

Yet we have not resigned the follies of sin. We sing:

Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way;
Hold o’er my being absolute sway.

Yet we have no intention of allowing God absolute sway. We sing:

Take my life and let it be

And often that is just what we do mean—"Let it be; don't do anything with it, Lord; just take my life and let it be." We sing:

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.

But who can imagine yielded hands playing cards? We sing:

Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

But who can imagine yielded feet on a dance floor? We sing:

Take my voice and let me sing
ALWAYS, ONLY, for my King.

But who can imagine a yielded voice singing the silly songs of this world? And how easily do we sing:

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.

Yet we hold on to it with all our might!

Somewhere I have read of a child whose hand was caught fast in a glass vase. No one could understand how the hand went into the vase and would not come out. Finally, at great risk to the hand, they broke the vase and found that the hand was doubled in a little fist and there was a nickel in the fist! How often does God have to break us, our hearts and our lives, to make us surrender something worth less than a nickel!

V. A Bible Christian is not only surrendered but also separated.

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (II Corinthians 6: 17).

The early Christians were a peculiar people; now we are a popular people.
The early Christians were despised and derided outcasts from high society.

Not many wise, mighty, or noble had been called. The world's interests and enthusiasms meant nothing to them. Paul and Peter could not have been found in an amphitheater watching a gladiatorial contest in the hope that their young people might be attracted by their broadmindedness to come to church.

When the early Christians had anything to do with the frolics of heathenism, it was to be fed to lions or to be burned on a pole. Persecution failed to stop the church, but what persecution could not do popularity has almost done. It never was more fashionable to be a church member than today and perhaps at no time has it meant less.

Christians are the light of the world, and our Lord suggested two simple things that can smother the light of our testimony: *a bushel and a bed*.

The bushel stands for money-making, business cares, commercialism.
The bed stands for luxury, ease, worldly pleasure.

Most of our testimonies are either under the bushel or the bed. Most Christians are either too busy or too lazy to “**let their light so shine.**” We are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Ephesians 5: 11). Mind you, it is not enough to let them alone; we must reprove them. We are to “**abhor that which is evil**” (Romans 12: 9).

But separation is not merely a negative matter of “Don’ts.” The Pharisees were separated and yet in their sins. It is not enough to be separated from; we must be separated unto the Lord. God wants ourselves, not merely the giving up of this evil or that. Peter forsook his boat and nets when first he followed the Lord, but it was three years later that he gave up Simon Peter.

Sam Jones used to say: “I was going around with my pockets full of dirt when the Lord said, ‘Sam, give up that dirt and I will fill your pockets with diamonds.’ Who wouldn’t give up dirt for diamonds?”

VI. *The Bible Christian is Spirit-filled.*

“**Be filled with the Spirit**” (Ephesians 5:18). In the early church it was surprising to meet disciples who were not filled with the Spirit: today it is a surprise to meet one who is.

In the New Testament, wine and the Holy Spirit are connected in three different passages.

John the Baptist was not to drink wine but be filled with the Spirit (Luke 1: 15). The early Christians at Pentecost were accused of being drunk on new wine (Acts 2: 13). And in Ephesians 5: 18 we are told, “**Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.**”

There is a close parallel between the physical effect of wine and the spiritual effect of the Holy Ghost. Wine changes the face; so does the Spirit. The women of the country need their hearts lifted; not their faces.

Wine changes the talk; the Spirit-filled man may not speak in an unknown tongue, but he will speak in a different tongue in that his conversation will be edifying and full of grace.

Wine changes the walk; the Spirit-filled man walks a godly walk, worthy of his heavenly vocation.

A man filled with wine creates a stir, and so does a Spirit-filled man follow in the steps of those early Christians who upset a world. The power of the Spirit is a stimulant, not a sedative.

VII. *Finally, a Bible Christian is a singing Christian.*

The same passage that tells us to be filled with the Spirit tells us to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5: 19). God's statutes should be our songs in the house of our pilgrimage (Psalm 119: 54).

The hallelujahs have gone from our churches. A popular prejudice against emotion has crowded our feelings out the back-door of our spiritual experiences. Emotions may be dangerous, but so is anything worth having. Man has intelligence, will, and emotions, and a genuine experience of grace will affect all three. We "sit on the lid" today and smother our joy until "amens" would not be scarcer if they cost ten dollars apiece. Finney said that there was no revival when Mr. Amen and Mr. Wet-Eyes could not be found in the audience.

I have read of a man who went to a coal-mine looking for a miner friend. They told him, "He's a singing Methodist, and if you hear somebody singing down there in the dark it will likely be your friend." Down into the earth he went, thinking, "If anybody is singing down here his song must be,

Down in a gulf of dark despair
We wretched sinners lie."

But presently he heard a voice, and the song was:

I've reached the land of corn and wine,
And all its riches freely mine;
Here shines undimmed one blissful day,
And all my night has passed away!

Yes, indeed; the grace of God puts a new song in our mouths, even praise unto our God!

These are the marks of a real Bible Christian: Saved, Sure, Sound, Surrendered, Separated, Spirit-filled, Singing. How many of the marks do you bear?

Dr. Pace, the Christian cartoonist, spells it well when he makes it read: C-H-R-I-S-T- and I-A-N stands for I Am Nothing. "To live is Christ!"

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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