

Are you a True Christian?

Col. 3:5 – 4:1

(Ps. 100:1-5)

It as been said, “We are born an original but die a copy.” There are those that are worthy of imitation and there are those who are not worthy. We may imitate the wrong model and remain in confusion. Did not the Jews in Jesus’ day have an unhealthy devotion to the “tradition of the elders”? When the tradition of men contradict the word of God, the traditions of men must be rejected and God’s Word replace them, Matt. 15:1-9.

There are some that would point us to Alexander Campbell or John Calvin, to Martin Luther, to a given Pope or even to Mother Teresa for our models in religion. While any one of these may offer some moral attribute or quality that is worth imitation we need a higher standard than those I have mention, if we are to be sure it is a trait that would make us better. None of the individuals mentioned nor do the collective works of those mentioned provide us with this “higher standard.” Church of Christ members are to be the light of the world, but church of Christ members are not perfect. We must have a higher standard than one another if we are to be pleasing to God.

The Apostle Paul is set forth to be a model. The Bible teaches us that God selected him as an example for all to follow. Paul calls upon men to follow him as he followed Christ. 1Cor. 11:1. It is not simply to follow him, but to follow him as he followed Christ. Paul recognized that an Apostle could become unworthy of imitation. Judas did, and Peter had difficulties that needed correcting. (Gal. 2:11-14; 1:6-9). Paul is not only a servant of the Lord but he is also one who received a special call and was sent by the Lord. Not only is he called and sent but time and again it is explicitly stated that he is to be our example for imitation.

Let us look just for a moment at the person Paul. The first time we meet the apostle Paul, whom Luke had introduced to us as Saul, was at the execution of Stephen, Acts 7:58. Paul was an accomplice in the assassination. Luke tells us that those who were stoning Stephen brought their clothes and laid them at a young man’s feet. The name of that young man was Saul. We then come across Paul again, this time he was giving his approval to the death of Stephen, Acts 8:1. Also, he was making havoc of the Church, Acts 8:3. This was the same man whom we call Saul, the same man later in his life would become the greatest witness for Christ. Paul changed his religion to the religion of Jesus Christ. It is extremely difficult to ponder in our minds what the almighty God can do with us, if we are willing to surrender our lives totally to Him.

We must also realize that at whatever point in our lives that we are, and faced with truth that will demand the changing of our religion, we must make haste to do so without hesitation.

Whenever we find ourselves going the opposite direction on a one way street, we must make the necessary steps to correct that situation, we must correct head-on collision with the devil. Otherwise, as far as religion is concerned we will be eternally lost. However when we make changes, it must be according to knowledge. We should at no point base our change on feelings. Nor should we base it on what we dreamed or some vision we might think we had after a late meal that sends our minds working overtime.

If we are going to please God, it demands that we give up any false religion. This also includes self and anything else that will stand in the way of serving God in spirit and in truth. We then must take up what God wants us to do. Paul acted that out vividly for us when he changed his life after finding the truth. Paul did not make a change when it pleased man. He did not make change when it pleased his father or his mother. He made the change with it pleased God. Paul in Gal. 1:15-16 makes sure we understand the God under consideration. He makes that distinction for you; it was the same God that separated him from his mother's womb. He went on to let us know in the same breath that it was the same God that called him by His grace. Now we come to a very important element when talking about God, religion and being saved. That element is **GRACE**. God called him by His grace. A question that comes to our mind, what is grace? The obvious and most favorable answer is grace is God's unmerited favor to man. Yes, but grace is much more than that. Grace is favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that same person deserves. We read in the Bible that grace is one of God's many attributes. The Lord God, merciful and gracious longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth. Exod. 34:6. Therefore grace is usually associated with mercy, love, compassion and patience as the source of help and with deliverance from distress. I heard a man once say that G.R.A.C.E. is **God's Redemption At Christ's Expense**. It was the love of God combined with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that brought grace to save somebody like Paul. It will take that same grace to save you and me today. Another question that comes to mind, how can God call people by His grace? We like Paul, must realize that grace can only be found in the religion that God instituted. This He did by the death of His only Son on the cross of Calvary. The apostle Paul displays the work of grace in his life. He knew what he deserved there and then was instant death. However, God extended grace to Paul and because God extended grace to him, God saved Paul from what was awaiting him, if he had continued the same road. Grace is the effect of God's good pleasure toward man. It was not because of the good that Paul had done or was doing that made God extend His grace to him. It was a result of who God is. God's character plays a very important part in His grace that He handed down to us human beings. God is at this very moment extending that same grace to us today that He extended to Paul.

We observe that when God extended His grace to Paul, he did not confer with flesh and blood, but he immediately sought the way he could lay hold on this grace. We notice that Paul did not change automatically because of the incident on the road to Damascus. The responsibility was upon him to make that change. For him to make that change he had to comply with what Jesus said. That same responsibility is on us today. Paul encourages us to “Be ye followers of me, even a I also am of Christ”.

We are to be careful whom we follow. If they are not leading in the direction that Christ has led, we are not to follow them. We are not to consider anybody for the fact that they have a degree or for the position that they hold.

Paul changed religions, could you?

1. Put Off

Paul writing to the Church at Colossians telling them that they need to live like a new men and women. Brethren we have said good-bye to our old life. You have died with Christ, therefore act and speak and think so as to make it plain that this “death” is no mere figure of speech, but a real event, which has severed the links which bound you to the dominion of sin. Col. 2:6 reads, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” Make Jesus your treasure. Where your treasure is, where your desire is, there will be your heart also.

In Col. 3:8-9 we see six unworthy garments, which we need to put off. “ 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.” Paul says that we need to put them off, all those old habits, just as you would discard an outworn suit, which no longer fitted you. Let us look at this six sin which we are to strip off.

- A) There is the sin of anger. We all get angry sometimes. There are times when anger is called for, but we are to guard against sinning when we become angry. Eph.4:26. Anger is cast against many. Too often hurt feelings exist between those who are supposed to be closest. Husband and wife, parent and child, Church members with each other. The Lord is clear about the matter: we must never allow anger to take hold of us without just cause.
- B) Next there is the sin of wrath: When anger is allowed to stew and fume until it boils up with a view toward revenge. Jams 1:19-20 reads; ”Wherefore. My beloved brethren let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”
- C) Than we have the sin of malice: deep-seated feelings against a person, hatred that lasts on and on, intense and long-lasting bitterness against a person. 1Pt. 2:1 reads, ”Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speaking.”

- D) Next there is the sin blasphemy: It is to rail against, to speak words with the intent of harm. To speak so as to destroy another's character.
- E) Then we have the sin of filthy communication: If a believer is to follow and imitate God. He has to be pure in speech and conversation: he has to keep his mouth or tongue clean. He cannot let his mouth become foul and polluted, filthy and vile. We are never, not once to be engaged in filthiness or foolish taking. Using the mouth in obscene, shameful, foul, polluted, immoral conduct and conversation. Our mouths are not to be busy with gossip but busy talking the word of God. How polluted and foul-mouthed so many have become, so much so that society could easily be known as a second Sodom and Gomorrah.
- F) And last there is the sin of lying: A lie is an untruth that is told to another. How can untruths be reconciled with a life founded on the One who is Himself the truth? A half-truth or a full truth told with the intent to deceive is still a lie.

Unchecked anger can lead to full-blown wrath. Soon wrath develops into malice and we begin to speak against another. If continued, that develops into abusive language and we begin to tell lies about them. Like a runaway train one leads to the other. When we were baptized into Christ the old man was put to death and buried. His cloths of anger, wrath malice, blasphemy, filthy language and lying were supposed to be buried with him.

So our Question is: Are you a true Christian?

2. Put On

Once a person has accepted Christ he has a new life. As we just saw, the believer is to strip off the clothing of his old life, for the garments of his old life are unbecoming to his new life. Back in Colossians 3:12-14 we read that there are some garments that are becoming to the new life in Christ. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you. So also do ye. And above all these things put on Love which is the bond of perfectness."

- A) So first we must put on the garments of Mercy: Mercy means compassion, pity, tenderheartedness. God has had so much mercy upon us, the one thing we should do is to show mercy to others. Compassion and pity should flood our hearts for the – lost, lonely, hurting, poor, aged, brothers and sisters and of course the list could go on and on. The point is that we no longer have the right to overlook the need of the world. We are to be clothed with mercy.

- B) Next in line we must put on the garment of kindness: It is being kind and good, useful and helpful, gentle and sweet, considerate and gracious through all situation no matter the circumstances. A person who is gentle does not act – hard, harsh, unconcerned, bitter or too busy. Kindness cares for the feelings of others and feels with them.
- C) Next we must put the garments of humility: To have an attitude that considers others before one’s self. To offer oneself as lowly and submissive, to walk in a spirit of lowliness, to present oneself as lowly and low-lying in mind, to be of low degree and low rank; not to be high-minded, proud, haughty or arrogant.
- D) We also need to put on the garments of meekness: the attitude that causes me to submit my will to God. The meek person controls his spirit and mind. He controls the lust of his flesh. The meek person dies to himself, to what his flesh would like to do, and he does the right thing – exactly what God wants done.
- E) There is the garment of longsuffering: the attitude that enables me to suffer long with the weaknesses of others. Longsuffering never gives in; it is never broken no matter what attacks it. Pressure and hard work may fall upon us, but the spirit of God helps us to suffer long under it. Discouragement and disappointment may attack us, but the spirit of God helps us to suffer long under it. Men may do us wrong, abuse, slander, and injure us, but the spirit of God helps us to suffer long under it. This is patience for the long pull.
- F) Then we have the garment of Forbearance: The ability to help another bear his burden. Something is often forgotten; there are many things about every one of us that people have to forbear. People have to put up with a great deal of things when dealing with us. Every one of us is guilty of – some weakness some wrong behavior some failure some bad habit and some irritating behavior. There are some things about every one of us that just turn some people off. None of us escapes the fact. In addition every one of us does things that irritate some people. Again there is no escaping the fact. Any person can be looked at and have his flaws and weaknesses picked out. But this is not what the scripture says to do. The scripture says that we are to put on the clothing of forbearance. We are to forbear the flaws of others. He is to put up with and bear with the weaknesses of others. Ro. 15:1 reads, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.”
- G) Next is the garment of forgiveness: The attitude of not counting the wrongs committed against us and then forgetting those wrongs. A person has hurt us and brought pain to us. No matter what they have done, we are to have a forgiving spirit clothing us. Why? Because Christ has forgiven us. No matter how much wrong a person has done against us, it cannot match the wrong we have done against Jesus Christ. Yet, Christ has forgiven us. Therefore, we are to forgive those who have done wrong against us – no matter how great the wrong is.

H) Above all we must put on the garment of Love: Love is to be the main garment in our new life. It is called the bond of perfection. That is, love binds all the clothing or great qualities of our life together. If we put on love, if we really love people, then he is always clothed with mercy, kindness humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and forgiveness.

We must put these things on to be a true Christian. So are you a true Christian?

Finally we must be willing to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We can only do so in the religion of Jesus Christ. In Phil.3:14. Paul after finding and changing religions was now in the pressing business; he was pressing toward the mark. Before he changed religions, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. After he changed religions, he was on his way to Damascus to strengthen Christians. Paul before changed, was fighting against Jesus Christ. After he changed he was fighting for and with Christ. Paul before he changed was a citizen of Rome. After he changed his citizenship was in Heaven. Before Paul changed religions he was a Jew. After he changed religions, he informed us that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all one in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:28.

If you are willing to be obedient to the will of God. If you are willing to give up the traditions of man, willing put off the old man and put on the new man, only then can we like Paul say these words. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing. 2Tim. 4:7-8.

Paul realized that a change of religion brought him gain. Paul also knew that all spiritual blessings are in Christ Jesus, Eph.1:3, and for him to be a partaker of these spiritual blessings, he must be in the Church that Christ built. Paul also realized that there was only one true religion; he wrote in Eph.4:4-5, among other things that there is only one body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Paul changed religions could you? Are you a true Christian?

God's grace is still available. If you are willing to conform to God's will, you can change.