

What Makes A Person A Christian?



**By
Willie Martin**

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SOMEONE ASKED A VERY GOOD QUESTION. So you call yourself a Christian. A lot of people consider themselves to be Christians. But clearly, God declares that not all those who may think they are Christians are, in fact, Christians. (Matthew 7:21-23)

If you believe you are a Christian, and you believe in a life hereafter, no doubt you consider being a Christian a very important matter; the most important matter in life. Am I right about this?

Well, if you consider this the most important matter in life, it ought to clearly be evident in how you live how you think, remote, act, eat, drink, sleep, and breathe. Is this also correct? I mean, you either are a Christian or you are not; you can't be just partly a Christian; you can't be a Christian part of the time, or just in certain ways; it's all or nothing. Would you not agree? (And honestly, whether you agree or not, this is what God's Word tells us)

Just what do you think makes a person a Christian? What gives you reason to believe you are a Christian? Let us briefly look at how some people might answer these questions.

Some accuse others of not being a Christian because they don't think the way they do; some think that if one does not care to associate with the other races and peoples of the world that they can't be Christians because the Bible teaches that all men can be saved. But there is nothing in the Bible that substantiated this belief.

In fact, there are a people, not a race, but a people who simply cannot be saved no matter what they do. Even though they seek it with many tears and words of mourning, just as Esau did when the birthright was given to Jacob instead of him. He had rejected and despised the birthright and sold it to Jacob, and therefore was unworthy to receive it; therefore, Jacob

received it as God intended. For God hated Esau and that is stated twice in the scriptures. That people are the Jews.

Because the adherents to the Christian Identity message point this out, many self-righteous Judeo-Christian pastors will wring their hands and shout that if you say such things then you can't be a Christian because the Bible says all can become Christian. And as the old saying goes That just isn't so.

First of all, the average, unchurched (That is, people who have for the most part, lived only secular lives: they went to public (or private, secular) schools; rarely or never attended church or weekly revival meetings, Bible Conferences, vacation Bible school, summer Christian camp, Bible College or Christian college; they listen to secular music, and read secular literature; basically, the only thing about them which has any relation to Christianity is that they for some reason call themselves Christian; even though they do not even know what makes a person a Christian, and even though there is no physical, tangible proof that they are Christians.

To them, more than anyone else, applies the old saying, If it were a crime to be a Christian would there be any evidence to convict you? Many Christians might answer this question, Well, I have always been a Christian.

Unfortunately for such an individual, this is merely a confession that he is not a Christian; for being a Christian is not something with which one is born, and it is not something which transforms a person unknowingly sometime during his formative (That is, very early childhood, in the critical stages of growth and development) years of development. Christianity is not like a disease people catch, or some type of spiritual fever that overcomes a person without their realizing it.

It is not just something which happens to a person sometime early in his life, to cause him to think he is or has always been a Christian. Can a person really be a Christian without even knowing he made this choice somewhere along the way? Without even knowing when or how? Without even knowing what it is that makes him a Christian? Of course, these are rhetorical questions and the answers are clearly and emphatically **No!**

Christianity is not something you passively inherit from your parents, or some environmental factor which gradually qualifies you to the state of being a Christian.

So we see that being a Christian is not a passive occurrence which transpires in a nondescript fashion in some vague period of time. A person **Becomes** a Christian at one distinct, specific time in his life when being drawn by God's Holy Spirit he has **Chosen** to forsake the world's and his own ways, to take upon him instead God's ways through coming into a personal, covenantal relationship with Christ Jesus (YeHoShua) (From here on, when speaking of **Jesus Christ**, we will be speaking precisely, by referring to Christ YeHoShua. Christ is a title like PRESIDENT, which precedes a name; therefore, it should always be first. Secondly, Jesus is a weak translation from the Greek.

The Greek word used in the New Testament is revealed in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to be the Greek version of the Hebrew name YeHoShua. As vowels were not written in Hebrew, but supplied by the reader, we have capitalized the consonants, leaving the appropriate vowels in lower case: YeHoShua. God tells us His Name is holy. It ought to be revered by distinction and by proper interpretation) in response to the atoning work Christ performed on the Cross for His people.

Secondly, no doubt, the **Average Catholic** (as well as many of the average unchurched Christians) would probably say that he considers himself a Christian because **I Try to Live a Good Life**. However, though superficially this SOUNDS much more admirable and realistic, sadly, this type of person is no more a Christian, than the **Unchurched Christian**, because he does not even know the SIMPLE instruction from Scripture, which tells a person what it takes to be a Christian.

By way of a simple comparison, what makes a doctor a doctor or a lawyer a lawyer? Is a doctor a doctor because he **Tries** to do good surgery or because he **Tries** to make good diagnoses and implement good therapies? Is a lawyer a lawyer because he **Tries** to win cases and argue points of law? No, obviously, doctors and lawyers are doctors and lawyers **Not** because of what they do, but because of what **They Are** as a result of

What They Have Done at some specific point of time in the past: They studied to become doctors and lawyers; their **Practicing** these professions does not **Make** them what they are; rather, they practice such **Because** they are.

Since this is not a perfect analogy and lest the reader become confused, let me offer a more precise analogy: If a man who was convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison was granted a full pardon and released from prison, what is it that makes him a free man? Does his **Good Behaviour** after having left prison make him a free man? Certainly not! It was his failure at this which landed him in prison from the start. Does his attempt at **Acting like** a free man, make him a free man? Certainly not! People can **Pretend** and **Act like** anything they want, but this does not make them those things. I can bark like a dog and chase a cat, but that does not make me a dog. So what makes the convict a free man? Obviously, the merciful judge granting that man a pardon is what makes that man free.

Some people may think that it is not **Just** the judge's ruling which makes the man free, but also the man's accepting the judge's gracious offer and leaving prison is what makes him free. But this is not true. The judge's ruling is what makes the man free; and the judge's ruling alone.

Valid authority alone has power to make such determinations. If the man chooses not to leave the prison, that does not cause him to still be a prisoner, because he chose to stay of his own free will, and thus he is free where he chooses to remain. The man's leaving does not make him any more free; he is free regardless of what he does. He is free because of what the judge did.

How would the typical Catholic or unchurched **Christian** reply if I were to challenge the answer **I Am a Christian Because I Try to Live a Good Life**, by asking him the following, direct questions: **How Well** do you actually **Try** to live a good life? What constitutes **Your Trying? By Whose Rules** do you base your behaviour and trust it to be acceptable? And acceptable **to Whom? What Is It**, which actually makes a person **Good?** What specific things are **Good Things** to do, if a person wanted **to Try** and live a **Good Life?** More precisely: **What Are the Standards**

or Requirements for Goodness, and Who Determines Them? (God's Word sets forth these standards known as God's Law; contained in both the Old and New Testaments, none of which has ever been cancelled)

Now, please note: we am **Not** asking such pointed and revealing questions to humiliate, insult, or upset anyone. I am simply asking these questions, because I, like you, feel this is the most important matter which could ever command our attention in life; and since it is the matter of supreme importance, it behoves us that we are actually reaching that goal which we consider so important.

Would it not be an eternal shame, for us to have been so well intentioned, yet in vain lived in such a fashion which did not usher us to our desired destination? Would it not be a dreadful shame for us to have been wrong in thinking we were Christians, when in reality we were not, because we neglected the simple truth of what God requires? True justice, though not unsympathetic, cannot bend the rules. Right is right and wrong is wrong. There is no middle ground. Good intentions or simple mistakes do not change the nature and demands of reality. A holy and perfect God cannot go against His Own Nature.

These questions are **Not** asked, and this book is **Not** written to insult, denigrate, or shame a person; but to cause a person to actually see where they are, in terms of where they would like to be, and to reveal the simple requirements for them to reach this goal free of toil, strife, fear, confusion, uncertainty, or equivocation. (That is, being mistranslated) And since it is understood that truly being a Christian is important to the reader, it is the purpose of this book to point out doctrinal errors which keep the reader from knowing what God truly requires.

The **THIRD** type of person who would call himself a **Christian Is the Mainstream Protestant** (Which is itself also classified into two main groups: Fundamentalists (Baptists, New Testament, Independent, and Bible Churches, and a few others) and Evangelicals (Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians and Anglicans, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Churches of God and Christ, Pentecostals, and others) There may be some overlapping of these groups, or a few individuals of those as listed above,

who would think their particular church belongs in the other category, as they may differ in some respects to the main representation of their denominational label) **Denominational Churchgoer**.

This type of person seems more confident in his belief of being a Christian. If asked what makes him a Christian, he might say, **Because I Have Been Born Again; I Asked Jesus to Come into My Heart, or Because I Accepted Jesus Christ as My Savior**.

Now, for certain, this type of person **Seems** to have a greater mental grasp on the topic, but this answer is not complete nor fully valid; and **Sadly, the Average Denominational Christian** for the most part, lives no differently than the unchurched **Nominal Christian** or the typical Catholic; except that he goes to church on a regular or semi-regular basis, and maybe talks a better talk.

However, for the most part, the average mainstream Protestant churchgoing Christian lives a secular life; keeping Christianity separate from his daily routine, as if he were only role-playing the part of being a **Christian** a few times a week when he is in a church service (or when he must uncomfortably try to step into the role of being a Christian in an impromptu fashion, should he inadvertently bump into a real Christian outside of church).

Sadly, the average Christian, as mentioned, lives a secular life. God is not a part of any area of his life, unless it is specifically designated as a religious area. Consider a house where there are many different rooms, but God is only allowed to be in one room. The door of that room is kept tightly shut, and God is forced to stay in that room alone, until the homeowner decides to pay God a short visit ritualistically at a specific time each week, or in cases of emergency. God is not allowed into any other rooms of the house: They are off limits to Him.

However, the house that God has built looks much different, for He is an integral part of every room. God is not only in each room, but He is an integral part of each room; and actually, He is the homeowner who is in charge, being the one who makes the decisions and rules.

Now, no doubt, the average mainstream denominational Christian, (even more than the unchurched nominal and Catholic Christians) will seem confused about this matter. For he, more than those in the other two groups, seems to understand the matter of being a Christian a little more clearly, and perhaps grasps it a little stronger.

How then can it be that I thus challenge the average mainstream denominational Christian, that he possibly is not really a Christian, even though he says that he has accepted Jesus Christ, has asked Him into his heart, and has been born again?

Before I address this confusion, some very simple groundwork must be briefly laid; and I am certain most everyone will agree with this presupposition. I purport that what makes a person a Christian, is what God determines makes a person a Christian; **Not** that which each particular person individually reasons in his own mind, makes him a Christian. Would anybody disagree with this? If someone believes in the true God, then God's Word is the only and final authority. The Bible says God cannot lie or change His mind; and He cannot change His Nature or go against His Own standards of holiness. God's Word is final and eternal.

Now, the Bible says that **Faith** comes by—the Word of God. (Romans 10:17) Faith does **Not** come by human reasoning, human emotion, human well-wishing, human opinions or human endeavours. Faith is a gift from God; God's self-revelation. Faith is the vehicle of Grace which is a prerequisite essential for salvation. (Necessary for being a Christian)

Scripture itself tells us that true faith (by which we are to believe and live) comes **Solely from the Facts Revealed in God's Word**. In order for any doctrine of faith to be true or valid, it must be in perfect accord with the Word of God. Sadly, most people are not in possession of true or valid faith.

Most people base their belief system on their feelings, their personal rationalization, their well-wishing, or the beliefs of their parents, pastor, church denominational convention, or some other form of ancestor worship or following of >the traditions of men.'

Note this clearly: Such is **Not** faith; it is **Superstition**. Again, this is not faith; it is superstition.

Those who base their belief-system on such phenomena are no different than primitive Indians who worship rocks and trees and wind and rain according to their fears, lusts, and ignorance; theirs and their ancestors. In **True Faith** (If one has actually had a confrontation with the truth) one will not believe in something just because it feels good; or because that is the way his church believes; or because that is the way his family believes; or because that is the way he has always believed; or because it seems fair or nice to believe that way, no; if one has genuinely had an encounter with the truth, he will believe in something solely because it is right, because it is true, Because God's Word says so;

Regardless of the opposition or the cost. To believe otherwise is not genuine faith or commitment; it is merely the luxury of complacent convenience: a self-serving, hedonistic, (The worship of pleasure), humanistic, (man-centred; the worship of man directly or indirectly {by projecting worship onto some other object, while man himself is on the throne of the soul as the determiner of worship protocol; a false piety professing to worship another, while ultimately worshiping self through choosing the dictates of worship via pseudo-altruism}), socialistic, and utterly pagan religion of superstition and the basest of human urges.

So what does God say about the matter? What makes a person a Christian? Well, the Protestant denominational churchgoer will quickly parrot the verse,, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:21) While this may be true at face value, it must be understood in context. This whosoever is **Not a Universal, All Inclusive, Every Last One, All the Time Whatsoever**.

Now, no doubt, there will be some who will be very upset by this statement; and the reason they will be upset is because they are allowing their emotions to control them, rather than allowing the Holy Spirit of God to guide their thinking according to the Divine Will of God to guide their thinking according to the Divine Will of God as set forth in the Holy Scriptures: the Word of Truth.

Before we go any further, such a person must pause here, ask himself the following question and honestly answer it to himself: If this is what God's Word really says, am I willing to lay aside my own personal feelings, opinions, prejudices, preconceived ideas and erroneous conclusions regardless of who taught them to me; (regardless of how long I have held them) submitting myself to the Sovereignty of God, and accept the clear Truth of God's Word?

Please Pause and Pray...

First of all, this is what the Bible has to say in regard to this and every other question: Let God be true, and every man a liar. (Romans 3:4) This is NOT an exhortation (for man to lie), but a statement of reality. Of course, in this verse the phrase, Let God be true, means God will always remain true, or God will always be found to have always been true. It obviously is not a matter of our exercising control over God and thus permitting Him to be true. The let is a personification of Nature, as God Himself, bearing testimony to this perfection of faithfulness to God's own nature.

Thus, it is the Record of History and Eternity that is bearing this witness that: God has always remained true, though every man has been untrue. Thus, whom shall we believe in this matter? Shall we believe god's Very Own Testimony in Scripture? Or will we stoop so low as to accept man's word over God's? And thus exercise dishonesty in that very choice.

Okay, so let us return to the question of the whosoever in Acts 2:21 not being universal. The most powerful testimony comes from the lips of our Savior Himself. Christ YeHoShua declared, Not all who saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who doeth the Will of My Father which is in Heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

How much more clear can it get? Further, for an even more shocking denunciation, continue reading the passage: Christ then relates that on that Day (that day when some people find out they are not allowed into the Kingdom) many will in shock declare, but Lord, Lord have we not—in Thy Name done many wonderful works?(**Matthew 7:22**)

However, Christ will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Further, in another passage Christ says Why do you keep calling me Lord, Lord and do not the things I have told you? (Luke 6:46) Again, the remainder of this passage relates the sad tale of those who thought they were Christians, but found out they were not. We need to also remember the fact that: **No Man Can Come Unto Christ, except the Father's (Spirit) Draw Him.** (John 6:44) God's spirit **Does Not Draw Everyone.** This matter is clear in Scripture. (Matthew 13:24-30; 15:24; John 8:47; 10:26; Romans 9:11-23) Regardless of blind, well-wishing people or evil people who say otherwise (regardless of their reasons).

So how can we tell if we are truly Christians? Well, the key is clearly found in both of the verses we just saw, revealed by Christ's own lips:—those who do the Will of My Father which is in Heaven—do—the things I say.

We are told that we will know we are Christians by our love, in keeping God's Commandments. (1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 1:6) Unfortunately, most people misinterpret this verse, because they do not know what love is. Christ defined love for us as obedience when He admonished us, **If You Love Me, Keep My Commandments.** (John 14:15) Christ also told us that **He Knows Who His Sheep Are: They Who Hear His Voice and Obey Him.** (John 10:27)

1 Corinthians 13 describes true love for us, and it is clear that in order to qualify as love, a lot is required; and unless one is totally without the Spirit of Truth, there can be no denial that these enumerated requirements of love point to total submission and obedience to the Father, through both His Revealed Word, and His guiding Spirit of Truth. Scripture is clear, that in order to truly be recognized as Christians, we must be in obedience to God's Commandments. (1 John 2:5; 3:18) Jesus said if we are truly in Him, we will bring forth fruit (obedience) (John 15) unto which we were called. **(Ephesians 2:10)**

Scripture tells us that God is love, (1 John 4:8, 16) and God's love is revealed through His self-sacrificing, (1 John 4:9-12) in which He set the

example for us. We know that Christ YeHoShua died for us because He loves us; and Scripture reveals that this life was obedience. (Philippine 2:5-8); And again, in His obedience, He set the example for us) Part of God's Nature is His constancy; His never-changing faithfulness (or obedience) to His Own Nature, maintaining His Own Standards of Holiness, Perfection, Righteousness, and Order. We, the true sons of Adam were created in God's Image. We are His light-bearers in this world; reflectors of His Image. Thus, if we are truly of God, we will mirror this faithfulness (obedience) to Divine Constancy, by keeping His Law (His Standards).

We are also told that perfect love (obedience) casts out fear. (1 John 4:18) Obviously, one who is in perfect obedience has nothing to fear, while those who are in disobedience have great and just cause to fear. (**Romans 8:1; Hebrews 10:26-31**)

Finally, under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived uttered the most profound, yet concise answer to this question: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His Commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**)

It should be noted that the latter (keeping God's Commandments) is the fruitful evidence of the reality of the former (fearing God). One who does not keep God's Commandments cannot possibly fear God; for he does not even understand the basic elements of God's Holiness or Justice.

It needs to be noted that the concept of fearing God is not the typical fear we understand in the world today; such as fearing evil people. In fearing God, we are to be sober in understanding that although God loves us (for God is Love), God is also Holy and Just, if we sin, He must punish us.

Those who have come under Covenant through the atoning blood of Christ, need not fear punishment (eternal judgment), for Christ bore this for us; however, we still need to fear God's chastening when we sin: for if we do not receive God's correction when we sin, it is proof we are not His children. (**Hebrew 12:6-8**)

Bless YaHWeH, O my soul: and all that is within me bless His Holy **NAME**—Who forgiveth all thine iniquities—He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. YaHWeH is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy—

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded according to our iniquities. For as the Heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward **Them That Fear Him**. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so Yahweh pitieth **Them That Fear Him**—But the mercy of YaHWeH is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and His righteousness upon children's children; **to Such as Keep His Covenant and to Those That Remember His Commandments to Do Them.**(Psalm 103:1,3,7-8,10-13,17,18)

Clearly, fearing God is **Not** possible apart from **Keeping His Covenant, and His Commandments** which He made with our fathers.

When the above has been fully fulfilled then a Christian must show his faith by his works. It is a subject of controversy in Christendom for decades and that is the subject of **Faith versus Works**. In the first place, it is absolutely essential to learn to walk by faith, for faith is requisite to finding favour with God.

This is impossible where there is disbelief. To approach His Written Word in an attitude of skepticism has the immediate effect of erecting a roadblock in the way of understanding. Paul expressed it in well-put words when he said:

Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (**Hebrews 11:6**)

A Christian believes God without reservation. The old maxim states it concisely: God said it; I believe it; that settles it! On the other hand, those who manifest the faith will demonstrate their faith by their works. James had this thought in mind when he said:

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without (apart from) thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is on God; that doest well: ***the Devils Also Believe, and Tremble***. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified (shown to be righteous) by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works has faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. **(James 2:18-24)**

The essence of faith simply stated, faith is the belief that engenders conviction and conviction energizes the believer into action. If a man insists that he has faith, but his conduct belies this claim, it becomes obvious that there is no strong spiritual persuasion engendering within him a fixed belief that motivates his actions irrespective of the burden of consequences. Paul stated:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. **(Hebrews 11:1)**

The apostle was starting, in effect, that faith is **Substance** and faith is **Evidence**. In fact, a marginal rendering gives this translation: Now faith is the **Substantiating of Things Hoped for**. To substantiate is to establish the existence or truth of something by proof or competent evidence. Evidence in court is that which ascertains the truth in order to decide the case. All of these characteristics define what faith is.

A man of faith must act upon his convictions. If one truly believes, he cannot refrain from behaving accordingly, for the absence of works brings his faith into question.

Let us, therefore, focus our attention upon the relationship between faith and works. We obtain the salvation of our souls by faith, relying upon Jesus Christ as our Savior. We are not justified (i.e., made righteous) by works alone, but through faith in our Lord, whose righteousness is imputed

to all those who have put their trust in Him, accepting the atonement He made for sin. As the result of His sacrifice, we are rescued from the penalty of sin, which is death, having the promise of eternal life. He has provided this for all those who believe in Him. Paul sums it up:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

Having taken this step, and having become convinced that Jesus Christ can do all that He has promised to do, the next step follows. The believer will then make every effort to obey all of His commandments and be obedient in regard to what is expected of him. Christ Himself said:

If ye love me, keep my commandments. **(John 14:15)**

This constitutes action on the believer's part and this growth in grace inspires him to strive to overcome and gain the victory over self and the world. What, then, are the results flowing from faith and what is accomplished by works? Is faith opposed to works or is the opposite; works against faith, true? The rendering of James' discussion by J. B. Phillips is very clear in answer to this question:

To the man who thinks that faith by itself is enough I feel inclined to say, So you believe that there is one God. That's fine. So do all the devils in hell, and shudder in terror! [For my dear shortsighted man, can't you see far enough to realize that faith without the right actions is dead and useless? Think of Abraham, our ancestor. Wasn't it his action which really justified him in God's sight when his faith led him to offer his son Isaac on the altar? Can't you see that his faith and his actions were, so to speak, partners; that his faith was implemented by his deed?

It must not be overlooked that, when we have by faith accepted Jesus Christ (After God has called us) as our Savior and obtained the assurance of eternal life, we have entered **the Way**. The road the believer is then called upon to travel is a way of self-denial in conformity with the test of discipleship given by our Lord: He said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. **(Luke 9:23)**

Paul stated: And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections (passions) and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (**Galatians 5:24-25**)

This is the way in which the over comer must walk. First, the believer reiterates Paul's affirmation:

I know whom I have believed (trusted), and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (**2 Timothy 1:12**)

Then, because he who would truly overcome must also strive to attain the higher calling, he must, along with Paul, be able to say:

But I keep my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (**1 Corinthians 9:27**)

The Phillips translation is: I run the race then with determination. I am no shadow boxer; I really fight! I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified.

Paul was not fearful of being a castaway as far as eternal life is concerned; he knew he had that promise as the result of his reliance upon Christ as his Savior.

He was greatly concerned, nevertheless, lest he fall short of being counted worthy of the higher calling of immortality. This is the prize set before every Christian for, having the assurance of eternal life, **He Must Labour Unceasingly to Overcome the World and Its Temptations**. Paul explained in the 8th chapter of Romans that those who overcome may look forward to being joint-heirs with Christ, but there is a stringent qualification: If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (**Romans 8:17**)

Christ said: In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (**John 16:33**)

We can do no less than emulate to the best of our ability as Christians the example our Lord gave us as He walked among men upon the earth and became the greatest Over comer of all time. Rewards, then, will be according to the outcome of the conflict as we earnestly contend for our faith and substantiate it in our lives by our works. Paul recognized the necessity to run the race and strive to gain the prize. Prefacing his statement concerning the need to keep his body under subjection, he said:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I not as one that breatheth the air. **(1 Corinthians 9:24-26)**

The incorruptible crown to which Paul alludes is the prerogative to reign with Christ and not many, comparatively speaking, will win this greatest of all gifts. We find that this was uppermost in Paul's mind at all times as he devoted all of his faculties toward the attainment of perfection:

Not that I have secured it yet, or already reached perfection, but I am pressing on to see if I can capture it, because I have been captured by Jesus Christ. Brothers, I do not consider that I have captured it yet, only, forgetting what is behind me, and straining toward what lies ahead, I am pressing toward the goal, for the prize to which God through Christ Jesus calls us upward. **(Philippians 3:12-14, Smith & Goodspeed Translation)**

The King James version renders the fourteenth verse of this quotation:

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The Scriptures make it very clear that we do not have to struggle to obtain eternal life; it is the free gift of God to all who put their trust in their Savior. However, above and beyond eternal life is the higher plane of immortality, which is a state of being reserved for those who gain the victory and reach the goal of the over comer. It is nevertheless true that no one may enter the contest for the highest of all callings until he has taken the first step

and received salvation through Christ. This is the foundation upon which the Christian can build and grow in spiritual living. Therefore, Paul said:

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **(1 Corinthians 3:10-11)**

Having laid the foundation; salvation through Christ, our building is the result of our labours and works. Paul pointed out:

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. **(1 Corinthians 3:12)**

The kind of building erected is determined by the individual's selection of materials; that is, his works. The value of our labours in serving the Lord may be small or great, for this will be according to the choices made by the Christian. Are we growing in grace and spiritual understanding, moulding character in conformity with the requirements of His Written Word or are we catering to worldly pleasures, pursuing fun and games? Are we yielding to the pressures and temptations around us and succumbing to the cares of this life? Our Lord's warning words were never more germane than they are today:

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:34-36)

Paul went on to explain:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire (tribulation); and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. **(1 Corinthians 3:13-15)**

Then Paul issued the following admonition:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. **(1 Corinthians 3:16-17)**

The way to salvation is so simple that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err in finding it. (Isaiah 35:8) However, after taking our stand as a Christian, it is immediately essential to put on the full armor of God. The reason is stated:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

The J. B. Phillips translation is extremely thought-provoking:

For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organizations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.

Again; and it is unfortunate that this is so, multitudes of Christians have only put on the helmet of salvation and have undertaken no training in order to be able to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Is it any wonder that they fail again and again in the conflict as Satan doubles and redoubles his attacks against them?

The way of the over comer is not easy; it demands **Maximum Efforts** and the one who would win the proffered prize must indeed on the **Whole** armour of God. Then, when the victory is won and the goal attained, he will exchange his battle-worn armour for the bright garments the Lord has already made arrangements for those to wear who will be chosen to be in His retinue in the coming New Order of the Ages.

As published in the pamphlet, By the Renewal of Your Mind:

The words of the Prophet Daniel come to mind, for he was referring to the resurrection to come when he prophesied: Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' **(Daniel 12:2)**

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. **(Daniel 12:3)**

Daniel was referring to the main to the exalted position that will be occupied by the wise and the righteous, but the degree of brightness in the clothing, or uniform, worn in the service of the King of Glory is also implied here. The question arises: will the extent of the color and brightness of the light in which each will be clothed reveal the rank of the official position of the one so attired?...It goes without saying that grade and rank in that army (Revelation 19:11-14) will be distinguished as readily by the type of uniform worn as is true in any earthly army. The radiant display, as this August company wends its way to earth, will be beyond description.

When Paul came to the conclusion of his presentation of the fact of the Lord's resurrection and the order and method of the coming phenomena called the First Resurrection, he made this unequivocal pronouncement:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

To inherit means to become an heir and the inheritance is possession of the Kingdom of God (an attainment that comprises far more than entrance alone into the Kingdom as a citizen).

Those who receive the crown of rulership will be directly associated with Jesus Christ in His reign over the restored Kingdom. Paul defined the change that will bring immortality to those who qualify. They will then know what the Apostle John meant by his statement: Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see

him as he is. (1 John 3:2) While Paul was very positive in his declaration that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of god, he was just as decisive in suggesting conversely that flesh and bone will inherit the Kingdom, for his very next statements were:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. **(1 Corinthians 15:51-54)**

When we turn to the Book of Revelation, John informs us:

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of god and of Christ, and shall reign with hi a thousand years. **(Revelation 20:6)**

In the previous chapter it is shown that a special blessing is pronounced upon those privileged ones who are invited to be present at the Marriage Supper:

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. (Revelation 19:9)

Our Lord confirmed to John that it is the overcomers who will inherit all things:

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. **(Revelation 21:6-7)**

The race that is entered by the overcome requires unstinted work; it requires wholehearted effort; it requires self-denial without reservation in order to win through to victory. James said:

For as the body without the spirit (breath) is dead, **so Faith without Words Is Dead Also** ...Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation (behaviour) his works with meekness of wisdom. **(James 2:26; 3:13)**

Salvation is free, with its gift of eternal life, or life everlasting, but a price must be paid in spiritual toil, sweat and tears if one is to gain the crown of immortality. It is not a reward that is promiscuously given; it is reserved for the few. Only those whose works have kept pace with their faith can finally say with Paul:

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. **(2 Timothy 4:7-8)**

(Taken, in part, from Faith Without Works Is Dead, by Howard B. Rand)



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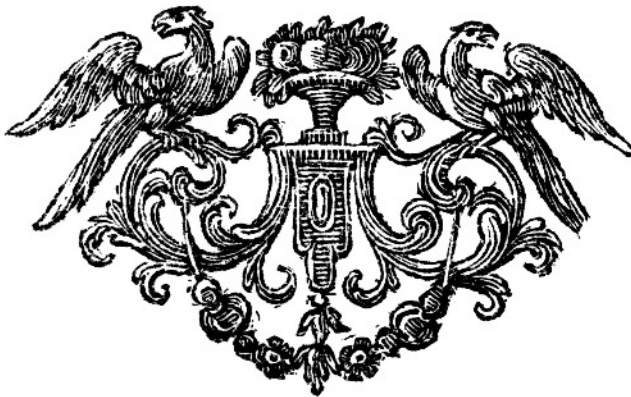
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