

Defining Christianity

By R.T. Nusbaum

We need to be restored to the New Testament definition of Christianity. In reality, there is no "Christian life" or, at least there isn't supposed to be. Nor is there supposed to be a Christian religion or a Christian culture. We were not born again into some new religion that was newly formed by Jesus. No one doubts that Jesus wants to give life to us. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life and more abundantly." It is how we define Jesus' words here that will determine our definition of the "life" that we think Christians should live.

To many, the Christian life consists of living our lives for Christ in return for what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us on the Cross. I travel to many foreign countries, and many places I go this seems to be a common theme. Christianity is seen as a process of devoting our lives to Christ in some sort of an attempt to pay Him back for the great salvation He has given us. Were this the case, then Christianity is the title given to carrying out the duty and obligation we owe Him for His love and grace. Also included in this concept is serving Him because He is the Master and Creator, and we owe Him all honor on that basis. To be honest, this sounds like only a slightly different version of what the Old Covenant was where we must do works to be saved. Never mistake the fact that I am eternally grateful to Jesus for what He has done for me but I am a fool if I think that I can in any way pay Him back for it.

For others, Christianity is basically the same as Judaism except that instead of keeping Moses' commandments, now we keep Jesus'. What Jesus primarily represents in this view is one who has set the example for attaining the goal of holy living and sinlessness. This is where the concept of "WWJD" came from. The primary goal of this understanding is to do what Jesus would do. For those that hold to this understanding, the word that best describes Christianity is found in the word "obedience."

Another definition of Christianity is to understand that God has a specific will for your life, and the goal is to define it and then follow it. To miss finding and following this personal plan would mean to miss living according to Christianity in any real way. Another part of this view surrounds making Jesus the Lord of our lives, or, to put it another way, giving Him control of our lives. Here the goal is to put Jesus in the position of Lord and for us to take our place as servants and followers. This involves the term "discipleship".

It is clear that the terms "obedience, Lord, discipleship, holiness, etc." are used in the scriptures and that they all have a place, but is it possible that all these concepts concerning Christianity actually hide the real definition of what Christianity is supposed to be? The biggest problem with all of the terms we have presented is that the main emphasis is upon us and our life as related to Him, instead of His life as related to us.

Jesus came to give us life and this life is in the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said, "I am the Way, I am the Truth, and *I am the LIFE!!* Jesus is the Life of the Christian! "I have come that you might have Life, and that you might have it to the full," (John. 10:10). Jesus Christ is the only One who can give the Christian life, because He is THAT LIFE!

The Christian life, then, is Jesus living His life through me. Jesus said, "I am the Vine, you are the branch, without me you can do nothing" (John. 15:5). A branch does not choose what fruit to bear, how much to bear, or when to bear it. The Vine does everything. The life is in the Vine, and it brings life into the branch, and then the fruit appears on the branch. All this happens because of the Vine, not because of the branch. If the life of the Vine is not the life resident in the branch than he has no hope of ever bringing forth exactly what it is that the Husbandman is after in the first place. The best this branch can ever hope to do is to copy the actions of the Vine instead of letting the Vine be in himself.

Jesus said these words; "Without me you can do nothing." So many Christians attempt to please God in their own strength and abilities. They unconsciously view Jesus as a *helper* in the Christian's life but not as the source and foundation of the Christian life. The foundational misunderstanding is that we should try to be like Jesus, and have Jesus help us. But the Christian life is not found in simply obeying commands but by totally yielding through full surrender to the indwelling Christ. Every attempt to simply rededicate *my* life can only result in temporary changes that will soon fall back into the old ways. There are too many readers out there that know what I just stated is true. It is because we have not relied on the Life of Christ why we have so much failure and backsliding in the churches today.

If we believe not only the scriptures concerning being holy and obedient but the scriptures such as Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:6 as well, then we must conclude that the first set of scriptures is not relating to us for the second set of scriptures declares that we are crucified and that Christ is now the life of the believer. That is a much different relationship with Him than what most think Christianity is. "*I have been crucified with Christ...*" "...we know that *our old self was crucified with Christ.*" It is only as the Holy Spirit makes that truth real in our experience, and as the believer allows that truth to be operative in him moment by moment, that Jesus Christ can live the Christian Life in us. This will absolutely require a constant relationship with Jesus because, if that is not maintained, then we are cut off from the Vine and are no longer fruitful.

Sure, there are wonderful truths concerning being saved by Christ, but long after Paul had been saved, he had a desire to know the Lord beyond these ways. He said he wanted to "know Christ and the power of His resurrection LIFE, becoming like Him in His death so as to somehow attain to the resurrection from our dead selves," (Phil. 3:10-11). To try to find out and do what Jesus would do in a particular situation is positively futile unless we are operating by the same Life that did them in the first place.

Too many have entered into the "Christian culture". They have watched how people act in church, listened to Christian phrases and tones and mimicked the responses. But appearing as a successful Christian gets you very little. Many are so steeped in Christianity that God will have to bring them through a whole new set of crises just to break them from these things. Christianity has replaced Christ and God is not happy with it!

Before Christianity will ever discover Life again, it will have to go back to the Cross. No revival in the world can accomplish what the "power of an endless life" can do. The work of the Cross brings about more than just a fresh breaking in our lives. It demolishes our life, thought patterns and carnal demonstrations and brings in a whole new creation.

When will we discover that all our self-help books and programs, at best, can only HELP SELF? Jesus didn't come to be the greatest self-help instrument ever known to man. He came to crucify self and impart to man His very own divine nature that is unselfish. When John the Baptist came he had men repent for their evil deeds. This is fine but the evil deeds are only the result of the evil man. John's hope for mankind was not found in him preaching repentance but in him pointing to Jesus. He said of Jesus, "When he comes He will lay the axe to the root". We can repent of bad fruit all day long but until the bad roots are severed, we will continue to produce evil deeds with no real relief in sight. But Jesus not only lays the axe to our roots but then He grafts us into Himself. As we give THIS GOSPEL place in us then the very life of Jesus in us begins to be our definition of what Christianity truly is. ***