



The Reflector

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About Being a Christian

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The popular concept of being a Christian is that of being a person who has “accepted Christ as his personal savior” with emphasis on forgiveness of sin with very little attention to the avoidance of sin. Often celebrities are extolled in both the secular and religious press as “born again Christians” – along with reports, in the same papers, of the typical worldly lifestyles of these same people. It is not only among celebrities. We see it often in our day by day observation of people in general. The idea of so many seems to be that since “no one is perfect” that doing our best to avoid sin is futile. So, we need to relax and quit fretting about the sinful actions of ourselves and our friends – just rejoice in the forgiving grace of God. If one uses bad language, participates in sinful activities, dresses or undresses in a shameful manner, seldom attends worship services, or misses the mark in other ways – so what? – he is covered by God’s forgiving grace. This is not the concept of a Christian and the grace of God taught by the writers of the New Testament.

In Acts 11:23, Barnabas was able to **see** the grace of God at Antioch. He saw a people who had believed and turned to the Lord (v. 12). He could see it in the behavior of the people. It was more than their having access to forgiveness of sin – it was a life changing grace.

1 John 1:7-10 tells Christians how to maintain fellowship with Deity. It is by freely acknowledging and confessing sins. Twice he warns against denying our sins (vv. 8, 10). Then immediately after these warnings, with an admonition to confess sins sandwiched in between, he says he is writing that they

avoid sin (2:1) – but if despite their efforts to avoid sin they did sin then they had access to forgiveness through Christ. All of this is a part of the grace of God.

Grace not only forgives (saves), it teaches. In Titus 2:11, grace brings salvation (forgiveness), but it also teaches a godly life style on our part. Not only did Jesus give himself to “redeem us” from sin, but to purify us to be his special people zealous of good works. All this by his grace.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11-14 NKJV)

The Hebrew writer warns against insulting the Spirit of grace. A Christians who goes on sinning (10:26 NASV) after receiving a knowledge of the truth “insults” the Spirit of grace. As long as he continues in that state, he has nothing to look forward to but certain damnation. He cannot look forward to another sacrifice for his sins – the only sacrifice available to him is that of Jesus Christ. Having rejected him by turning to wilful sinning, he has rejected that sacrifice. There will be no other. His only option to avoid eternal punishment is to give up his wilful sinning and turn back to God’s last and perfect sacrifice for his sins. But, that sacrifice does not allow for one to wilfully continue in sin.

Some seem to have the idea that if we try, to the

best of our abilities, to keep all the commands of God in order to go to heaven that we are somehow dishonoring God and his grace and exalting ourselves. In fact, the opposite is true. By not doing our best to obey all his commands, given by his grace for our good, we are flying in the face of the teaching of the grace of God. Jesus said, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:10 KJV)

"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid..." (Romans 6:1-2). ■

Selling "Our" Church

Kris Brewer

Sometimes, in our zeal for evangelism, we attempt to sell people on "our church." This approach not only fosters the un-biblical denominational concept of the church, but takes the emphasis of the church of God and places it on man's desires. While this has become the de facto approach for most denominations, is it really the manner in which God would have us to evangelize? Are we simply trying to get people to come to "our church" or are we supposed to be accomplishing something far more important than that with the work God has given us to do?

The predominant idea in the denominational world is that one church is just as good as another. Because so many people believe this, churches are built in such a way as to attract people with the amenities they offer. These amenities are not a reflection of what God wants in His church, but rather of what men desire. And the various churches seek to out-do one another, adding more programs and perks than their neighbors. Often, advertisements for churches fail to mention any kind of spiritual message at all, and are consumed with the various physical functions that are available. Sports teams, drama presentations, musical concerts, and the like are the new normal for these churches. Actual Bible study is a rarity. Even at functions labeled Vacation Bible School, most of the activities are nothing more than entertainment for children. Try as we might, we can find no such effort put forth by the church in the first

century. We never read of the Apostle Paul organizing a youth team to take to the games. Peter never advertised a young men's choir. John never had auditions for his Passion Play. If we do not see these things as a part of the first century church, what do we see? What are we supposed to be doing as a part of our work in the church today?

We convert people to Christ, not the church... Rather than trying to draw people to "our church," we should be drawing them to Christ. When people are converted to the church, they are loyal to the church, regardless of whether the church is doing what it is supposed to be doing or not! On the other hand, if people are converted to Christ, they will be loyal to Him and conform their practices (individually and collectively) to His will. Throughout the New Testament, all of the emphasis concerning conversion is upon Christ, not the church. The message is always centered upon the gospel, not the activities of the church. Consider a few passages of scripture to help drive home the point:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

When men today use some function of the church to draw others into their church, they are showing that they do not have confidence in the power of the gospel. Some insist that we must draw people in with some type of gimmick, but once they are there we will teach them the gospel. This approach does not trust in the power of the gospel alone! In the end, it is not the gospel that holds people in these churches, but rather the amenities that attracted them in the first place.

Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die.(John

12:30–33).

As Jesus spoke of His death, He made it clear that He would be the one who would draw people. It would not be the church, or its entertaining functions (those things devised by men) that would cause people to be drawn to God and saved from sin. True Christians should be pointing the way to Jesus, rather than putting the confidence of our salvation in the church. There is an interesting account in John's gospel which relates the story of some Gentiles who wanted to hear the message that Jesus was preaching:

Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus (John 12:20–22).

These men came because they wanted to see Jesus! Philip and Andrew took them to see Jesus. They did not try to provide some form of entertainment. They did not try to figure out a pleasing message. They did not even try to give an answer based upon what they thought Jesus would say. They simply took these men to see Jesus.

This is what our job today should be as well. We are not going to be able to improve upon what Jesus' own apostles were able to do in the first century. Instead of thinking that the times have so drastically changed that we must find some new and better way to bring people to salvation, we should simply return to the practices of the first century and point people today toward Christ.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a

helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8–12).

If we understand that our goal is to bring people to Christ, and not to "our church," our approach and our focus will be significantly different. If we are seeking to bring people to Christ, then the amenities that so many people put their faith and confidence in become insignificant. We become concerned only with what Christ wants, not with what pleases us!

The church must please Christ. Seeing the need to lead people to Christ instead of to a local church does not relieve the local church of being what Christ wants. The church is the bride of Christ, and as such has a responsibility of being all that He expects. That is the very figure that is used by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:22–33. After giving the instruction that wives are to be submissive to their husbands, and husbands are to be the heads of their wives, Paul revealed that he was speaking about the relationship between Christ and the church:

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32).

If we are going to be the church of the Lord, we must be willing to submit to His headship in everything. That means that we do not have the freedom to determine for ourselves what is pleasing and what is not pleasing to Him. He has revealed His mind to us, so that we can know what is right.

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep

things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:10–12).

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power (Ephesians 3:1–7).

These passages make it clear that God has revealed His mind through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles who wrote it down in what has been compiled into our Bible. In this way, we can know what God wants of us. It is quite presumptuous of men to add to what God has given, determining that He must accept whatever they choose to offer to Him. If we can find no evidence of His approval of a particular practice (sports teams, entertainment shows, drama or musical recitals, etc...) in scripture, then we should not be making it a part of the work or worship of the church!

Go and teach... Instead of trying to develop a local church in such a way as to draw people to it, we should be going out into the world and teaching the gospel message. That is what the disciples of Jesus were tasked with in the first century, and it is our task today as well.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen (Matthew 28:19–20).

Those that are willing to heed the message of the gospel are not drawn by the church, but are rather added to it by the Lord Himself:

..And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

Only after being converted to Christ, and having been added to the Lord's church (in the general sense) would one seek to join himself to a local body of believers who were doing what God wanted them to do. After returning to Jerusalem from Damascus following his conversion, we see Saul (later called Paul) attempt to join himself to the local work in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28).

So, rather than trying to attract people to “our church,” we should be busy about teaching only the gospel of Christ. When people are converted to Christ, they will not need all of the man-made additions to the work and worship of the church that attract those who are not really spiritually minded. They will be very happy to find a group of Christians who are merely continuing in the example of the New Testament church, believers working together to edify one another in the ways that God has approved, and teaching the gospel message to the lost around them. There is plenty of work to be done in the Lord's kingdom, without seeking to improve upon what He has prescribed!

Via In Season and Out