

Why are you a Christian?

II Corinthians 5:14, 15

Some become a Christian just to escape eternal judgment. But God saves us and forgives our sins "for His name's sake"(Psalms 25:11; 106:8). Then there are those who become Christians in order to gain health and prosperity, believing that faith in a "secret kingdom" and its power will grant their reward. How sad! The height of Christian concern should not be "what can God do for me" but rather "what can I do to glorify God." Remember the words of Psalms 31:3—"For thy name's sake lead me and guide me."

Self-centered vs. Christ-centered Christians

Evidently the church at Corinth included many self-centered Christians. Paul had to chide them in I Corinthians 4:8-14.

"You are already filled, you have already become rich, you reign as kings without us; and I would that you indeed had become kings so that we also might reign with you... We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak but you are strong, you are distinguished, but we are despised. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even unto now. I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children." (NAS)

The Apostle Paul expressed the essence of the Christ-centered life in II Timothy 2:11,12, "It is a faithful saying: if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." The Apostle Peter said, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (I Peter 4:12). In Matthew 10, Jesus enumerates the trials, hardships and persecutions that his faithful followers would suffer; then he says, "But he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

The Secret Kingdom???

The time in which the Kingdom of God shall "rule from the rivers to the ends of the earth" is, of course, future. Yet, at Jesus' first advent it was declared, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Some use Luke 17:21, "The Kingdom of God is within you" as proof of the secret kingdom concept. However, the Greek text literally means, "The King is in your midst." Since the faithful followers of Jesus are to reign with him (Revelation 20:4,6), Jesus also called them the "Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13). Matthew 11:12 shows that "the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence." Jesus and his church are to be the kings (Revelation 20:6) in God's future Kingdom. The sufferings of the Christian walk are the training grounds for reigning in this future Kingdom (Hebrews 5:8,9; II Timothy 2:11,12).

Unknown to the world, Christ-centered Christians are now being trained for their future work of reigning with Christ in his Kingdom. They are not using prayer selfishly for physical and material prosperity. Like the Apostles, they pray for strength to endure privation knowing "that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried in the fire" (I Peter 1:7). By bitter experiences they are developing Christ-like love. "Love your enemies, bless them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:44

The Purpose of the Kingdom

Most Christians have overlooked the main purpose of the Kingdom. Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, born-again Christians, Mormons, etc., believe that all who do not accept Christ and/or the Gospel before "The Great Tribulation" is over are lost eternally.

How sad that Christians try to give God's love a narrowness that He will not own. God has not been trying to convert the world. In Mark 4:11,12, Jesus showed that he purposely hid the Gospel from many "lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven." John 1:9 speaks of Jesus as the "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Yet millions died before the time of Christ never hearing the only "name (Jesus Christ) under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Despite all the missionary efforts since the time of Christ, other millions died not hearing the message of salvation. God is not trying to convert the world during the Christian Age. He is only selecting a little flock (Luke 12:32).

Acts 15:14-17 shows that "God for the first time did visit the Gentiles to take out of (not convert) them a people for his name (Christ-centered Christians, His Church)... After this I will return (second advent) and build

after the Lord." Jesus said in John 5:28,29, "The hour is coming,

coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life (to reign with Christ—Revelation 20:6); and they that have done evil (the vast majority of mankind), unto the resurrection of krisis" (Greek for judgment or trial). Christ and his church will enlighten the "remainder of men" in the Kingdom—their crisis or probation, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

This is the great "restitution" (restoration) project foretold by all the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:19-21). This restoration of the willing of "the remainder of men" (Acts 15:17; Revelation 22:17) to mental, moral and physical perfection of life that was lost in Eden will not be completed until the end of the 1000-year Kingdom of Christ. For this reason Revelation 20:5 states, "The rest of the dead*" ("the remainder of men" of Acts 15:17) lived not again until the 1000 years were finished." All not mentally, morally and physically perfect are dead in God's sight. Thus Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22). It will require the balance of the 1000 years to bring the willing up the highway of holiness (Isaiah 35:8) to perfect human life.

*Some ancient manuscripts do not contain the words "the rest of the dead."

The School of Christ

How do Christians develop the love, justice, sympathy, understanding, etc., to qualify for a share with Christ as kings, priests (blessers), judges (Revelation 20:6; I Corinthians 6:2) in His Kingdom? Christ-centered Christians learn Christ-like love through their sufferings and privations (I Peter 1:7; II Peter 1:5,6; I Corinthians 13:5,6). In that way, they will know just how to help "the remainder of men" in their trial time for eternal life. If you are a Christ-centered Christian, you might be interested in the following ad:

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Not necessarily wise or noble, successful or socially accepted. Physical infirmities and heavy personal burdens can be an asset. The training for this position requires a commitment of all your time, all your effort for the rest of your life. Your instructor will insist upon absolute obedience while causing you to lose friends, reputation and personal fortune. These will be replaced by friends not of your choosing, reputation not esteemed by society and personal fortune not negotiable.

Your success or failure will be measured by how carefully you follow the instruction manual—a book which the greatest minds in the world cannot understand and have dismissed as "foolishness." Your course will inspire many hatreds, for which you will be obliged to offer a sacrificing love in

return; and the more of this love you master, the more of its servant you will become. Wages offered during the training period consist of a few promises—considered by most as highly doubtful of fulfillment.

Anyone who faithfully completes this course is guaranteed a position as an administrator in the Kingdom of Christ which by Divine intervention will shortly bless all the families of the earth.

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