

Jesus Describes the Christian Life

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Introduction

Jesus is the great pattern for every man's life, according to scripture: "And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23); "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . ." (Phi. 2:5); "Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). It is correctly argued that the church, as the figurative body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), should do and say only what is in harmony with what Jesus did and said in his physical body.

By sheer logic, Jesus should be the pattern for every man's life. He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22). He was "...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf "(2 Cor. 5:21). "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46). He is the "...lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). The only sinlessly perfect one ever to live on earth is alone qualified to be man's exclusive model and pattern in all things.

It may have become an overworked and abused word, but I know of no one term to summarize better the life that our Lord lived and the life He desires all of us to live than "love." This is the one fountain from which all the words and deeds of His Life flowed. I hasten to warn that the love which characterized our Lord is almost totally contradicted by what the world considers love to be. The love which compelled Christ was not selfish, but selfless. It did not produce weakness and effeminacy but strength and virility. It was not physical or sexual (although Christ fully sanctioned such in the setting of Scriptural marriage). We must discover this same love and ever strive to make it the well-spring of our lives.

His was an active, living, demonstrable love. Verily, there is no other "kind" of love worthy of the name. I now suggest some ways in which the love of Christ is demonstrated and, therefore, as our perfect pattern, in which the Christian life is described.

The Service He Rendered

The love of Christ is demonstrated in the service he rendered. Above all things our Lord was a servant. Primarily, Jesus understood that His aim in this world was to serve God. The prophets depicted the Savior as a servant (Isa. 53:11; Zec. 3:8). At the tender age of twelve the

Lord understood that He must “be about His Father’s business” (Luke 2:49-KJV). At Jacob’s well He told His disciples that it was His “food” to do the will of His Father and to accomplish His work (John 4:34). He was a faithful and willing servant of God because He neither sought nor did His own will, but the Father’s (John 5:30; 6:38). This was prophesied by David in the fortieth Psalm and was perfectly fulfilled by Christ (Heb. 10:5-9). Even the agony of His trials and crucifixion did not deter Him from His settled purpose: ... not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). He was God’s servant to the bitter end.

The concepts of serving God and obeying God cannot be separated in the life of Christ. As with men in general, so with Christ: “his servants ye are whom ye obey” (Rom. 6:16). Christ’s servanthood and humble obedience are linked: “...taking the form of a servant, ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:7-8). Christ was a perfect servant of God because He perfectly obeyed God. Thus, every passage which depicts Christ as a faithful servant actually speaks of Him as an obedient Son. He sometimes speaks plainly of his obedience: “...I know Him and keep His word” (John 8:55). He reminded the apostles that He had kept His Father’s commandments and therefore abode in His love (John 15:10). Clearly, careful adherence to the will of God was the measure and proof of Jesus’ service to God.

The perfect pattern of Jesus describes the Christian life as a life of service to God, vouchsafed by unqualified obedience. However, there is an added dimension in man’s service to God. It includes serving and obeying His Son and His perfect will, for it is now He through whom the Father speaks to man (Mat. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-2). Therefore, it is impossible to serve and obey God without serving and obeying Christ through His New Testament.

God has always required man’s service, but not until Christ had anyone ever done it perfectly. Jesus reminded Satan that God alone was to be worshiped and served and He quoted it from Moses, written 1,500 years before (Mat. 4:10). It is the Christian’s responsibility to serve God, not mammon (Mat. 6:24), the Creator, not some creature (Rom. 1:25). Serving God means serving Christ, which, in turn, means following Christ (John 12:26).

Just as the consummate love of Jesus resulted in His obedient service to God, so will our lives, if patterned after His, be marked by obedient service. Jesus said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments,” and, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my words” (John 14:15, 24). It is mockery to claim to be a servant of Christ while living in disobedience to Him: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Surely, the very

beginning point for the Christian life as Christ described it by word and deed is a spirit of loving, obedient service.

Jesus was not only a servant of God, but also of men. In fact, He could not have been a faithful servant of God had he not been the servant of men. To serve mankind in a way that it could not serve itself was the purpose for which God gave His Son (John 3:16). This was likewise the reason why Christ gave His life: “Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:28). When a contention arose among the apostles as to who was greatest, Jesus rebuked their erring egotism by reminding them that He was among them as a servant (Luke 22:27). He graphically emphasized this lesson by washing their feet and then told them He had done it as an example of the serving spirit they were to manifest (John 13:12-16). Jesus showed himself a servant of men in every miracle He performed, every word he uttered, every tear He shed, every sleepless night He spent in prayer, every step He took, finally led Him to Calvary.

It must follow that the Christian life is one to be marked by service to mankind and to our brethren in particular. When Jesus reminded the apostles of His own service to others, He used it as an example of their service toward others (Mat. 20:27). He taught them that true greatness lay not in being served, but in serving (Luke 22:26). He taught the lesson of going the second mile (Mat. 5:41), of giving to others (Luke 6:38), and of treating others as we wish them to treat us (Mat. 7:12).

The Devil has so much gained control of the hearts of men today that “servant” and “service” are all but forgotten. Our world is “I,” “Me,” “My,” and “Mine” centered. Jesus’ description of the rich, foolish farmer (Luke 12:15-21) could well be that of millions of people now living. The merchant and his employees know little of service anymore — the consumer is often treated as more of an inconvenience than an asset. The mood and climate of the day is one of rudeness, self-assertiveness, I-don’t-care-about-anybody-else-ness. It is a delightful surprise to find one who will go even part of the first mile of service anymore, and you may as well forget about the second mile.

The famine of the serving spirit in the church has turned preachers and elders into beggars. The percentage of members who willingly serve in any local church is so small as to be pitiful. The Lord’s church surely must be a Divine institution — otherwise it would have died long ago for lack of workers. No secular enterprise could long survive with the level of service evident in most local churches.

Sadly, those churches that have a high percentage of their members involved in some kind of activity are frequently found emphasizing things that relate more to the flesh than to the Spirit. If a church has 90% of its members “involved” but much of that involvement has to do with the use of its \$500,000 gymnasium and frequent practice and competition on one of the church’s volleyball, basketball, or softball teams, or participation in a church-sponsored golf tournament or exercise class, then what is the gain of such involvement? For what is a church profited if it should gain 100% participation from its members, but lose its own God-given aim in the process? Or what shall a church give in exchange for its “growth” and “membership involvement”? Take away the trinkets, the gimmicks, the gymnasiums, the entertainment angle and the highly structured programs geared more to social than to spiritual ends and you will soon see what the real attraction is.

About all that can be said for such a carnally oriented approach to religion is that it will relieve many of the surrounding congregations of some of their carnally minded members by attracting them. This is where many of the larger churches are getting most of their rapid “growth” – not from conversions, but from membership transfers who have been lured by the siren-song of a country club with some religious overtones. If this is what it takes to provoke a high percentage of involvement in the local church, we’re better off operating with only 20% or 30% of the members while keeping faith with the Lord’s purpose and work for His church. Given a choice between 50 people who know the Book, love the church, and are not ashamed of either, and 5,000 country club types that cannot bear more than 20 minutes of pulpit pablum every Sunday that sends the grossest sinner out feeling good about himself, the 50 will be the better choice every time.

Elders and preachers should not have to beg Christians to study, visit, try to convert others, give generously, attend a Gospel meeting series, and even assemble regularly. True servants do not have to be begged. It is the non-servant spirit that causes us to place our own conveniences, plans, and desires above the duties that Christ has placed upon us. It is this same syndrome that produces murmuring hearts from those who must constantly be served, but who never think of serving others.

Because of the deadly selfishness gripping our age, a growing number of Christians are demanding that things be done their way, or else. We see it in those who want to continually change the order of worship. We see it in those who come into a church and demand rigid adherence to their humanly devised programs of work under the guise of “total commitment.”

We see it in those who have rejected and rebelled against the God-given decision-making authority of elders in the local church. We see it in those who thrive on the unorthodox, constantly accusing faithful brethren of being “tradition-bound” and who are quick to jump to the defense of unsound teachers. We see it in those who delight in shocking brethren with their alleged spiritual insights and in propounding foolish questions that gender unnecessary strife. We see it in those who grow weary of faithful Gospel preachers and who will use any ruthless, unscrupulous, dishonest, and ungodly tactic to discredit them. These serve not the Christ and their fellowman, but their own carnal ambitions.

We must not only restore *service* to our vocabularies, but to our way of life—to live the life Christ showed us and taught us to live. This service must first be directed toward God. Loyal service to God will always result in service to men (Mat. 22:37–40).

One Thing He Hated

Perhaps it seems strange to speak of hatred in our Lord toward anything. If so, it only shows how widespread the popular misconception of Him and what He was really is. The image of Christ which most seem to have is of One who never frowned, never spoke unkindly, never raised his voice, never became angry, never uttered a negative word and, surely, never hated anything. However, the person we read of in the Gospel accounts did all these things. Particularly, I wish to emphasize the fact that He hated, despised, loathed some things.

If we think correctly, we understand that one cannot love something without hating its opposite. The scriptures duly honor this axiom: “O ye that love Jehovah, hate evil” (Psa. 97:10); “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other” (Mat. 6:24). It is not wrong to have strong feelings of hate, depending, of course, on the object of our hate. Solomon listed seven specific things which God hates (Pro. 6:16). We can discover the things Christ hated by observing the things which He loved. From the many things that could be shown to be on Jesus’ “hate list,” limited space allows discussion of only one.

Our Lord loved truth as an entity, a principle. Contrary to those blasphemous philosophers who avow there is no such thing as absolute, objective truth, Christ knew that there is and ever taught so. The Word that became flesh was “full of grace and truth” (John 14:6). He identified the Truth as His Word which makes men free (John 8:31–32). He sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles to guide them into all the Truth (John 16:13). *Truth* as used by Jesus

refers to that which is perfectly factual, right, or correct. Truth is always objective—it is independent of man and his subjective opinions, desires, and emotions. It is not altered by circumstances, times, locations, or what anyone may think about it.

With such a burning love for truth, He necessarily despised that which was false and erroneous. He warned, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7:15). He cautioned the apostles: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” explaining that He referred to their teachings (16:6, 11–12). Christ lashed out against the doctrinal errors of the Pharisees: “Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition” “In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (15:6, 8).

Christ expressed His hatred for error through His works as well as His words. His life of teaching was almost one continuous debate with, and refutation of, the religious errorists of His day. Scribes, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees—they all attacked Him and sought to ensnare and discredit Him. He did not shrink from the battle. He did not feel that He had “more important things to do.” He was the greatest controversialist and debater that ever lived. He faithfully fought the battle against error because He knew its end was damnation: “If the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit (Mat. 15:14). He styled false prophets as “ravening wolves” (7:15), referring to their rapacious, destructive work. When He said, “[T]he truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), He was just as forcefully saying “error will make you slaves to sin and guilt.” No preacher or prophet ever worked more tirelessly or boldly against error.

If our Lord so despised error, can His followers do less? Consider the following implications of Jesus’ hatred of error:

- **First**, there is such a thing as “truth” and “error”—there is a distinction. It may seem superfluous even to emphasize this. Yet, many of our preachers, elders, college administrators and professors, and editors now appear to believe that error is not so bad after all. Judging by the men and churches of unsound doctrine some of them continue to endorse and use, they are saying, “Error is just as good as truth.” Let it never be forgotten that Christ died for the difference between truth and error. Those who take Christ as their pattern must honor that distinction.
- **Second**, it is not “unloving” to expose, to preach against, and to refute error. Nor is it “unloving” to expose those who promote error. Christ never refused this duty, even though He offended the Pharisees and lost some disciples in the process (Mat. 15:12–14; John 6:66). Admittedly, this can be done in an unloving attitude, but such an abuse is no valid argument against the practice itself.
- **Third**, the Truth needs defending when under attack; otherwise, the Lord would not have

consistently defended it. He was not like some of our sickeningly-sweet pulpiteers and writers who have tried to convince an entire generation in the church that “the Truth doesn’t need defending – it can defend itself; it just needs proclaiming.” Poor Jesus, Stephen, John, and Paul – they suffered unnecessarily for defending the Faith. If the Truth can defend itself, can it also proclaim itself? If not, I can’t see why. From Jesus’ own example it is clear enough for those who care to see that the Truth can no more defend itself than it can proclaim itself. Therefore, we are commanded to contend earnestly for the Faith (Jude 3). It is both right and necessary, to defend the Truth.

- **Fourth**, the Lord’s church would be much stronger if we would follow the example and teachings of Jesus instead of the principles of Dale Carnegie in dealing with religious error. Carnegie has some wholesome and helpful principles, but he also has some that contradict the principles of our Lord and His apostles. Carnegie advocates that the wrong doer should always be allowed to “save face,” be spared guilt feelings, and that direct confrontation and argument is to be avoided at all costs. He is a champion of the “positive only” and “tact at all costs” approach to all human relations. It is evident that many brethren have become addicted to this philosophy. At least one has followed this philosophy carefully in a popular men’s leadership training course that hundreds of churches have used. This spirit so dominates some churches and elderships that they will allow no popular sins or errors to be exposed, nor will they tolerate anything “negative” or “guilt-causing” to be spoken in their pulpits. Instead, they openly invite to their pulpits men who have a reputation for softness and unorthodoxy, if not outright error. I suppose a preacher like Jesus or Paul would not last more than one Sunday with them!

How sad that our Lord and the apostles didn’t have the advantage of this philosophy! They would have been so sweet and nice that they would never have stooped to debating anybody or exposing any error. The Lord would never have been crucified because He would never have stirred any opposition. Stephen would have lived longer if he could have attended a men’s leadership training class and learned never, under any circumstances, argue with anybody. It is surely more than a mere coincidence that the rapid growth the Lord’s church enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s began to decrease at the very time that the “positive only” and the “man, not the plan” manipulators among us began to wield their influence. I suggest that the church will start experiencing real growth again when we become wise enough to forsake the tactics of Carnegie and Willingham and return to those of Christ and the apostles. Those principles may serve well in salesmanship and commerce, but they spell compromise in the religion of Christ.

No man has a clear concept of the Christian life if he does not understand his duty to despise and oppose error. For sure, one’s love for the truth is suspect if he hates not error.

The Concern He Had for the Lost

Nothing so completely sums up the life of Christ as does His concern for the lost. None are lost unless sin is a reality. Sin is introduced in the third chapter of the Bible and is continuously threaded throughout the sacred volume as one of its dominant themes. Sin is the transgression of God's perfect will (1 John 3:4; 5:7). God, Who is sinlessly perfect, cannot tolerate sin in His presence; therefore, sin alienates men from God. Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with God in Eden until they disobeyed God's Law; then they had to be banished (Gen. 3: 9-24). As with apostate Judah, so with all men: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa. 59:2).

From the record of the first sin through the end of God's Revelation, the story of God's plan for man's forgiveness and reconciliation is unfolded. All of this plan has ever been centered in Christ (Eph. 3:9-11). Christ "...was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world ..." as the redeeming Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

The very appearance of Christ on earth was predicated on the reality of sin in all men, its destructive consequences, and man's helplessness to overcome it without a Savior. This conclusion answers certain blasphemous babblers:

- **First**, there are those who deny the existence of sin or who seek to mitigate its awfulness by calling it less than sin. It's hard to find a drunkard anymore, but we have millions of "alcoholics" who are merely unfortunate victims of disease. The fornicator is not so bad; he's merely opting for an "alternate lifestyle." The abomination of homosexuality has been upgraded to the "Gay Movement." People who rob, kill and rape can't be blamed, for they are only victims of their deprived childhood environments. Perhaps worse, we now have elders and preachers who practically deny sin's existence. Such just ignore sin and false doctrine in the church while it eats away at the vitals of Christ's body, refusing to expose it and condemn it, lest they lose some of their members they would be better off without anyway. To deny, laugh at, or ignore sin is to make a mockery of Christ's death to free us from it. I must be just as serious about sin as Christ was and face its reality in my life and in the lives of others.
- **Second**, there are those who carelessly say that God could have solved the problem of sin in some other way besides sending Christ. Such usually argue that He merely chose to do it through the death of His Son for reasons unknown to us. Such a doctrine depicts God as a Divine sadist who inertly sat by and let his Son be nailed to the cross unnecessarily. If sin could have been conquered any other way, then God must be judged cruel and unfeeling to have allowed it to happen, despite the agonizing prayers of His Son. The prayers of Gethsemane, followed by the crucifixion, are fully convincing that there was no other way to accomplish man's redemption.

Despite the plainness of the singularity of His purpose on earth—to save mankind from sin—it is still misunderstood. His purpose has been set forth as such things as political revolution, social reform, and physical healing, but all of these miss the mark seriously.

The true purpose of all of his miraculous activity is made clear: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house” (Mark 2:10–11); “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name” (John 20:30–31).

None ever lived with a clearer grasp of His aim or purpose: “For the Son of man also came ... to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45); “For the Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10); “For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28). Men may claim some secondary purpose for His coming, but they do so falsely. We can only honor His own stated purpose—to take away sins by offering Himself once for all (Heb. 9:26).

No wonder Jesus was so concerned for the lost that He worked and taught in every possible way to reach them. His brief earthly life was spent traveling, teaching, healing, and helping—all to one end: to redeem lost men. Many of his teachings are direct appeals to the lost, including the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son (Luke 15:3–32), the great invitation (Mat. 11:28–30), and His weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44). Truly, all that He said and did focused on saving man from the curse of sin. If you yet remain unconvinced that Jesus’ chief concern was for the lost, then follow Him as he struggles up the hill of Calvary and willingly lays Himself upon a cross.

Men cannot claim to be serious about serving Christ and not be seriously concerned about lost souls. His never-ending concern caused Him to order His followers to go into all the world with the Gospel so men might believe, be baptized, and be saved (Mat. 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16). His followers are commanded to “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). An active, genuine concern for men and women who are lost in sin is an indelible part of every Christian’s life as described by Christ himself. This means that the church’s primary work must be the spread of the Gospel. The church is not primarily a benevolent or edifying institution, but a Gospel preaching and teaching one. It is most certainly not an entertainment enterprise, as many

brethren would have it. It is not enough merely to marvel at Jesus' concern for the lost and forget to follow Him in that concern. If we have a true concern for the lost, we will find some way or ways to spread the Gospel message.

Conclusion

My purpose has been to choose some areas of the Lord's life and teaching that I believe are representative of His aim and direction for Himself and for His followers. If we follow Him in the service He rendered, the things that He hated, and the concern He had for the lost, we will never be far away from the totality of His example and doctrine.

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