

Check-Out Your Christianity

In society many people, after several decades of relative material wealth, compared to our grandparents, are finding that their lifestyle based on physical possessions is **not** giving them complete satisfaction.

Many are seeking to add a spiritual dimension to their lives.

The way many are trying to fill this void in their lives through mind expanding drugs, seeking to contact the spirit world through spiritual mediums, psychic exploration, even devil worship and witchcraft.

This invariably ends up tragically.

Most, if not all of these, attempts to enlighten the mind are linked with mind changing effects.

They promise much but those who indulge in such things always end up the losers.

This growing trend places great responsibility on us as Christians, for we are the people who have knowledge of the only way of life that can fill this spiritual void without any painful or dangerous “kick-backs”.

According to the editorial in a recent survey of twenty-somethings in the USA, finding spiritual fulfilment was ranked more important than achieving financial success.

We are also living in a time in which the church is seeking to re-discover and re-define its mission.

One thing that is emerging is a ministry of all believers in which evangelistic work is not left to the full time paid ministry but is the responsibility of *all* believers.

This evangelism is mainly accomplished by example through Christian love and service to others.

Matthew 5:13-16 *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

We have been called by God not just to receive salvation through the sacrifice of the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, but as a group of people to bring light into the lives of others and salt to savour the lives of all who come in contact with us.

We cannot do either of these things if we are hidden from the rest of society, our lives need to be exposed to others, that they may see our good deeds and in the end praise and worship God.

We have to ask ourselves the painful question, *‘are others going to be convinced about God’s way of life by what they see in our lives as they see us in day-to-day situations?’*

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Does this love of God dwell in us?

Is this love expressed visibly to others in the way Christians love each other?

Any non-Christians will judge Christ by what he or she sees in the lives of Christians.

We are, by our lifestyle, to give credibility to the teachings of Christ.

We have something fantastic to give to others; we have the ability to show others how Christ would live if He were still a physical human being on earth today.

The future of many people will depend greatly on how much God can serve them through us.

Our ability to be that vehicle in God's Hands will depend totally on how much we are living God's way of life right now.

Romans 5:5 *“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into [through] our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”*

Here we see that God is limiting Himself at this time by only loving this world through us, who profess to be Christians.

What a great privilege but also a tremendous responsibility.

Was our best Christian attitude at the time of our initial conversion and baptism and ever since it has been a gradual downhill path back into the ways of this godless society?

While I was preparing this study I took a look at my ordination certificate as a minister and read it once again.

What was written in it must apply to all Christians as part of the *“ministry of all believers”*, if we are to be used by God for the job of work He called us to do!

I asked myself, *‘does this still apply to me as much or, better, still more than it did when I received it 29 years ago?’*

*“He shall hold this office so long as he, as determined by those over him in the church, continues to meet the spiritual and scriptural qualifications holding fast the faith, teaching sound doctrine as he has been taught, **and living by the Word of God in his own life.**”*

The specific purpose of this study is to remind you of the great responsibility we all have and to show you “keys” to re-dedicate yourselves to the job we all have personally been called by our Creator God to do right now.

First a warning

Luke 13:6-9 *“Then he told this parable: **“A man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’** “‘Sir,’ the man replied, **‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”***

This passage of scripture tells us very clearly three things.

a) Fruit in our lives is something that God rightly expects.

The fruit that is referred to must be spiritual fruit for it is a spiritual god that we are accountable to.

These spiritual fruits are clearly defined in **Galatians 5:22-23** and as they are spiritual they can only come from work done with and through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

b) A time factor is involved: three years is mentioned in this scripture for end of a period when fruit was expected and an additional one year when extra stimulation for growth and fruition was provided.

The maximum is our lifetime but who knows if we will see tomorrow!

c) The end for those who do not promise spiritual fruit in their lives is not pleasant, to say the least, to be cut off from the only source of life.

We need to take good heed of this sombre warning for all of us are subject to the “*law of inertia*” [resistance to change] in our lives.

Sometimes the only way to tackle a stubborn problem is to have what I call an “*inspired blitz*” with a dash of “*stick-to-it-ness*”.

I have to apply this to my office desk at times, to literally take time off to sort and organise it, and not allow procrastination to put it off for yet another day.

Now let us consider what is expected of each of us as Christians

1. Our part in the work that God is doing on earth.

Romans 10:17 [King James] “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”

When we read this passage of scripture in context we can see that it is **not** about our faith but the faith of others who are being witnessed to.

“*Faith*” – What is understood by faith in the scriptures?

The Greek word translated “*faith*” in this scripture is “*pistis*” used to express persuasion, conviction or credence [credibility]; from the same root of this word in the Greek comes “*pistos*” which **expresses trustworthiness, faithfulness, and one who is sure and truthful.**

As we see from the above the major use of this word is **not what we believe** but how what we believe causes us to live our lives day-to-day.

We give this message by the way we live.

“*Hearing*” – the Greek word “*akoe*”. This word has two distinct meanings, and I feel that when a word is repeated as it is here that both meanings should be considered.

a) What has come to the ear – by preaching or reporting. It is also translated “*fame*” [King James] or “*news*” [NIV] in **Matthew 4:24** and **Mark 1:28** [NIV] “*reports*” [NIV] in **Matthew 14:1**.

No message is accepted or believed unless you have respect for the messenger.

We then are to be those who have to give the credibility to message God is bringing to mankind through the Words of Christ.

b) What is heard being understood, and this received from the Words of Christ.

The Word of Christ [God] **is** the basis of the message we are expressing in our lives and proclaiming with our tongue.

“Don’t believe me, believe what you read in The Christian Bible” should be the basis of everything we say or express.

We should be lights pointing others to God’s Words and Jesus Christ the Living Word of God.

“So then” Greek word *“ara”* – meaning you see, as a result of, the conclusion drawn.

Now we can understand more clearly why God is so insistent on our bearing much fruit, godly character.

John 15:1-2, 8 *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

It is only when we are joined to Jesus Christ that we can bear fruit of the type that will bring glory to our Creator God. How are we joined to Jesus Christ?

Philippians 2:5 *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”*

The King James translation we find *“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”*.

The word in the Greek translated *“attitude”* or *“mind”* is *“phronema”* denotes what one has in the mind, the thoughts, or the object of our thoughts.

The more we devour the words and lifestyle of Jesus Christ the more we will think and live like He did and does.

Jesus Christ described Himself as the living bread that came down from Heaven.

John 6:33-35 *“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”*

For bread or any other food to give us nourishment that is essential for sustaining life, we have to eat it, then digest it within us.

Our bodies [physically] or the spirit within us [spiritually] turns this food into energy, life, power and growth.

Our physical parents have great pleasure to see us, their children, grow physically and mentally.

Likewise, our Spiritual Father has great pleasure in seeing us grow spiritually as we eat and digest the spiritual food He provides for us through Jesus Christ.

I repeat my earlier statement; *“The future of many people depends greatly on how much God can serve them through us.”*

There is a very true saying that the scriptures we have just studied expound.

“We cannot give it until we live it.”

If you do not remember anything else about this study, please remember this fact.

Matthew 5:48 *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

At first reading this is a very daunting command from Christ, especially when we read it in context where Christ is making very far-reaching statements such as *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* [v 44].

But don't let our misunderstanding of the word *“perfect”* deceive us into inaction saying *“Oh! I will never be perfect.”*

You can and you will if you follow a simple formula.

“Perfect” The Greek word is *“teleios”* and expresses completeness, maturity or the obtaining of the goal aimed for.

This can be in the area of labouring at a task, attaining certain growth – mentally or morally – in character.

When we reach that goal we are *“perfect”*.

We are in a society that accepts *“less than the best”*.

Most of us have never experienced real quality; we live among wood veneers, hollow doors, paper and plastic shoes, synthetic so-called foods, even plastic organs and implants being placed in our bodies.

God wants us to aim for the best, nothing less.

God's Word shows us the plan and process by which we can obtain this goal.

Hebrews 6:1-3 *“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement. And God permitting, we will do so.”*

“Go on to maturity [teleios]” It is a process that we have a part in with our Creator God.

The Greek word translated *“permit”* [King James] or *“permitting”* [NIV] gives us a key as to how this is done – *“epitropo”* composed of two separate words *“epi”* a Greek preposition that implies moving towards and resting upon and *“trepo”* to turn towards an object or person in a trusting attitude.

This is how we mature or become perfect.

Turn trustingly toward and rest upon God.

The Bible in many scriptures describes just what our Christian life should be like.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

A life that experiences peace of mind in whatever circumstances the Christian may find themselves involved in.

Paul linked this with contentment.

Philippians 4:11 *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”*

Note it was something he had to learn, it did not come naturally.

It came as he experienced the Hand of God working in his life on a day-to-day basis.

John 15:11 *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and **that your joy may be complete.**”*

Complete joy in our lives.

Note it is in the context of fruit being produced in our lives, and we will come to understand as time passes that fruit is often produced in the context of trials in our lives.

We find that James links joy with trials.

James 1:2-4 *“**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**”*

Here is that Greek word “*teleios*” again translated “*perfect*” [King James] and “*mature*” [NIV], showing us that trials are part of the course that God uses to bring us to the ultimate goal He has set for us.

Jesus Christ condenses all this into nine words.

Matthew 11:29 *“**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**”*

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me”.

When we understand what Christ was saying by these words we are at the right starting point for our journey towards perfection, the goal of every true Christian.

To the agricultural based society that first heard these words they had great meaning.

Christ is offering us a place next to Him in the job He is doing by joining Him under His yoke.

This yoke was a wooden frame that was placed over the shoulders of two working animals.

The shoulder is the strongest part of the animal so that the greatest power is available through the yoke for any work performed.

When the owner of a young inexperienced animal wanted to train this animal for work, he would yoke it with a more mature and experienced animal who would take the lead for the younger animal to follow.

For any animal to give of its full strength the yoke had to be moulded to its shoulders, so that it would not rub against the skin and cause painful sores.

A good master would ensure his animals were well cared for in this way.

If such care would build up a trusting relationship between the animals and the master they worked for.

When we lift this to the spiritual level, we have a good illustration of the working relationship God the Father wants, through Christ, with us.

There are two keys or attitudes that are essential for us if this working relationship with God is to be successful.

1. **Psalm 37:4-5** *“**Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this.**”*

The Hebrew word translated “*delight*” is “*anag*” describing a soft and pliable attitude in a feminine way [as a woman can be but not all wives are, ladies if it works with God it is sure to work with your husbands and is well worth a try].

Notice the result of such an approach to God.

“*Commit*” the Hebrew word “*galal*” meaning to transmit or to turn over towards.

Romans 6:13 “*Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*”

Paul is suggesting a similar attitude to the church at Rome.

“*Offer*” Greek word “*paristano*” meaning to stand beside, to be at hand ready to aid.

This is the attitude that God has desired in a wife from the creation of Eve and is also the attitude many scriptures show should be seen in a Servant [minister] of God.

“*Parts*” Greek word “*melos*” referring to our limbs or other parts of our body but by extension includes our mind and our talents.

Romans 12:1-2 “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

“*Offer*” the same Greek word as used in **Romans 6:13**.

Paul is showing us here that our bodies belong as much to God as our mind or spirit.

Paul is saying take your body and with it all the tasks you have to do every day.

Take the ordinary work you do in the shop, office, factory, or your kitchen and garden and offer them as an act of worship to God.

The Greek word translated here “*worship*” or “*service*” [King James] is “*lateria*”.

Originally this word was used of the labouring man who volunteered his strength and skills to another who in return gave payment for the work done.

It was never used for the work done by a slave.

The word then came to mean that to which a man gave his whole life.

What then does this tell us?

True worship is **not** the offering of elaborate prayers, or liturgy to God however noble, or a ritual however magnificent it may be.

Real worship is the offering of our every day life to God.

Real worship is **not** something that is limited to a church building.

Real worship takes place in real world seeing the whole earth as the Temple of God in which we can worship Him.

What we should say is **not** “*I am going to church to worship God*”, but “*I am going to the factory, shop, office, school, garage, mine, field or garden to worship God.*”

Paul then tells us that a radical change has to take place in our lives for us to be able to worship God in the true fashion.

“*Conform*” Greek word “*suschematizo*” to be fashioned like, to take on the same pattern.

This is just like a Christian which changes its colour to fit in with its surroundings.

“*Transform*” Greek word “*metamorphoo*” to change dramatically, transfigure, metamorphosis.

The same word can be applied to what happens when a rather ugly chrysalis changes into a beautiful butterfly.

Paul is saying then to worship and to serve God we have to undergo a change, not of our outward appearance but of our inward personality.

A change of the very essence of our being, from being self-centred to become Christ-centred.

“*Renewing*” Greek word “*anakainosis*” to make new in point of character or nature.

The adjustment of the moral and spiritual vision and thinking to the mind of God, which will then have this transforming effect upon our lives.

Paul then follows this with a very practical list of ways in which this new mind will react in its relationship with other people.

A mind now motivated by the Love of God dwelling in us.

We need to read, digest and then act on **verses 3-12**.

Isaiah 6:5-8 “*Woe to me!*” I cried. *I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.*’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘*See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘**Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?**’ And I said, ‘**Here am I. Send me!**’”

Here we see the perfect response of one who has experienced the Grace of God having taken away the guilt and the death penalty that our sins have earned us. “Here am I. Send me!”

The true Christian will constantly be listening and looking for opportunities to be sent by God to perform some loving task.

2. **Matthew 22:36-38** “‘*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?*’ Jesus replied: ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Put God first in our lives both physically and mentally.

We may claim that we do this but we need to examine ourselves very carefully to be sure we are not “*kidding*” ourselves.

Matthew 6:33 “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”

“Seek” the Greek word “zeto” to strive after, to the extent of coveting for ourselves.

“Zeteo” is an ongoing verb [present continuous tense] something which will never end.

God demands, for our own God, as everything He commands, first place in our lives.

What personal checks can we make to see if we really are putting God first in our lives?

1 Corinthians 3:9-10, 13 *“For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. **But each one should be careful how he builds.**”* *“his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.”*

Paul likes our lives to the construction of a building, one brick at a time.

Our life is broken up into so many days and we could liken each day to a brick.

[Notice **Matthew 6:11** *“Daily bread”* or **2 Corinthians 4:16** *“inwardly we are being renewed day by day”*] The

Holy Spirit could be likened to the cement that binds the daily bricks one to another.

Every bricklayer knows you cannot use yesterday’s cement to bind today’s bricks.

Any good bricklayer will also tell you that preparation is most important for the producing of a quality job.

We also need to use the right tools: plumb line, spirit level, bolster chisel and gauge rod.

Each of these tools seem to me to have spiritual overtones.

What about our preparations for each day?

Physical preparation

Genesis 1:5 *“God called the light “day”, and the darkness he called “night”. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the first day.”*

God begins His day the previous evening, whereas most of us use the night to recover from the toil of the day.

What does this mean?

Get to bed on time.

It has been scientifically proven [whenever I say that people seem to take more notice than if I say *“it is written”* reference to God’s Word.

I wonder why!!

Well scientists say we need 7-8 hours sleep to function effectively.

So we should count back 7-8 hours from the time we need to get up for work to know when we should start our day by getting enough sleep.

Spiritual preparation

Psalm 119:147 *“I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.”*

Psalm 5:3 *“In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.”*

Mark 1:35 *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*

These and many other scriptures say the same thing; we need to start the waking part of the day contacting our Creator.

I know what some of you are thinking at this moment: *“He does not understand my position, my metabolism must be different to his. My best time is the evening.”*

Let me remind you, your assignment is not with me but with God’s Word and Christ’s personal example.

I would also like to remind you of the *“jingle”*:- *“you cannot give it until you live it.”*

The schedule I have just recommended is based on God’s Word, and therefore is the perfect example.

But what is essential and what we all need is to set up a daily time in our lives where we literally put God first, look on that time as His not ours.

So that we feel guilty if we use that time for anything else than study and worshipful prayer.

“How long should we set aside each day for study and prayer?” you may ask.

Well, how long do you spend preparing and eating your physical food each day!

I personally study God’s Word first as I find study prepares my mind for effective prayer.

Sometimes I pray with my Bible open before me.

My study is only pre-empted by a brief request for God to open my mind to understanding His Word.

What I’m suggesting is not going to be easy.

Satan will put as many things as he can in our way to stop us from scheduling our day to put God first in our lives.

But these two *“keys”* are essential if we are to be used by God as *“light”* in this spiritually darkened world and *“salt”* to savour this degenerate society.