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The ideal Christian life

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THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE .

The word Christian is used in quite a number of senses. Some think a person is a Christian because born in a land where the Religion of Jesus Christ prevails. It is a word used by them in contradistinction with the word heathern. Others think a Christian is one whose parents belong to some branch of the Christian Church, and have their children baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. Still others think, a Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh, nay, was God himself. Moreover, others think that a Christian is one who believes, and that quite firmly, in the Christian Church, in its work and worth, in this world of sin and injustice, and who attends its services, and, perchance, partakes of its Holy Sacraments. These are some of the definitions given to the word Christian. But none of these meanings, thus given to the word Christian, exactly define it. In anticipation of what is to follow, we give this as a definition of the word Christian; a Christian is one who takes Christ as example in all things. So it comes to pass that a person may be born in a Christian land; be the child of Christian parents; be a believer in the deity of Christ; a supporter and friend of the Christian Church; and yet not be a Christian. A Christian takes Christ as example in all things. It is stated in the New Testament as follows: "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked. I. John 2:6.

~~It means a faith baptized with intelligence and sobriety, pass~~

ing deep down into the heart, being firmly rooted and grounded in the deep seated affections of a man's soul, and revealing itself in such manifestations of life and conduct that the world will say, This man is a Christian. To be a living revelation in life and conduct is to be a Christian.

"The Ideal Christian Life" will be characterized by a public profession of saving faith in Christ. To be ashamed of ones belief in Christ is a proof of the spuriousness of the faith.

In Apostolic times, and in the early Christian centuries, men were Christians in real earnest. Every man tied himself up to the despised band whom the world branded as lawless and fanatical. He did it in a public way by being counted as among the number of the followers of Christ. It was known to his friends, and neighbors, and to the world, that he was a Christian. But things have changed since those early days. It is unpopular now not to be counted a Christian. And yet the number of those striving to live the ideal Christian life, and who become bold enough to say so, is rather small. If a mere nominal profession of faith in Jesus Christ was all that should characterize the ideal Christian life, then the world were full of ideal Christians. One great trouble with the church, to-day, is, that we have too many people in it that want to be secret Christians. If they could only be Christians and no one know anything about it, their happiness would be complete.

~~Well do I remember an elder brother of mine, after having~~

been away from home for some time, and during which time I had been granted an Exhorter's Licence to preach, speaking to me on his return about Religion. He declared that in his absence a wonderful experience had come to him. It occurred one night while listening to a Methodist Minister preach the Gospel. He made up his mind that night to lead a different life. And he said, as he told me of it - told me of it in a low tone of voice, - I am going to be a Christian, but I don't care to have any one to know it, for I want to be a Christian "in the quiet". Ah! poor fellow, he is dead and gone now, but he was laboring under the same mistake that thousands of others are laboring under, namely, that of living the real Christian life without making the Christian profession. - It is once and for all impossible, it seems to me, to live the ideal Christian life without making the Christian profession. Without the Christian profession, the Christian life is very unsatisfactory, indeed. And as a rule, the one who is trying to lead a Christian life, but is afraid some one will find it out, and who is so anxious to keep it to himself, is the one who really feels that this profession must be made, before he will be satisfied with his religious life.

If a man is a Christian, this implies a blessed union of the human and the Divine. Is it possible for a person, enjoying this union to desire to live the Christian life without making the profession? It doesn't seem possible. If a person is united to Christ the living Vine, he will, in some way, ~~make a public profession of the fact.~~

And this union of the Human and the Divine, in the "ideal Christian life", is not one of admiration, but deep sympathy - spirit touching spirit, in the exercise of faith - and a submission which is not a mere acknowledgement of Christ as a wonderful personage, a marvelous teacher, but which exclaims in words behind which are feelings that tingle in every part of the being, "My Lord and my God". By submission the Christian yields the character up to Christ to be moulded by him; sympathy determines the fashion of the moulding - into his own lovely likeness.

The ideal Christian life will be moulded by the model, Jesus Christ.

Every thinking man has, doubtless, formed some idea of the true life, but few only, are thoughtful enough and brave enough, to be ruled by their ideas. Truth in the abstract may delight the mind of the philosopher, whose mind is well trained, and who marches boldly along the exalted plains of mental exercise, and takes perfect delight in speculation; but truth in concrete form, is the thing the general make up of the race needs more than anything else. They are anxious to come in contact with truth in such simple manifestation, that by a little attention to the natural processes of human development, they will be greatly bettered by the truth. When great truths shine out in big, broad ideas, concentered in human character, they acquire a wonderful power over life and conduct. Such is the character which forms the model that must ever be kept before the mind of the one striving to live an ideal Christian life.

As the model was characterized by a definite burning

purpose, thus will be the ideal Christian life. Every life is lacking and incomplete, without a definite and fixed purpose. But what was Christ's purpose? -- His purpose was to bless and save others. -- It was a river of helpfulness, continually flowing to others. "And Jesus said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Luke 2:49. Jesus said unto them, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. John 4:34. No matter what part of his wonderful life we take into consideration, his teaching, his miracles, his death, all indicate this definite purpose.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, all of the number were baptized with fire and bore witness of Jesus and the Resurrection. From that time forward, all of the followers of Christ were to prophesy in the new meaning of that word, namely, to bear witness to the truth, assurance that God was no respecter of persons, that any man, in any part of the world, who feared God and worked righteousness was acceptable of him.

The Ideal Christian life must like the great Model be characterized by a burning purpose. He, too, like his Master, must be a good Samaritan, binding up the wounds which sin has made, and restoring the dead in sin and disobedience, to the life and smiles of God. Every Christian life that resembles Christ's is to that extent a Savior of men. The ideal Christian life is a ministry of mercy, and must in some way, show itself in teaching the world right ideas of God, of life, duty and destiny.

Again as the Model was characterized by a life of toil, so too will be the ideal Christian life. Jesus has taught us the dignity of labor. Nothing has done so much to equalize Capital and Labor as the system of truth that Jesus gave to the world. In a system that puts the emphasis on the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, lines of demarkation, between man and man, must be blotted out, sooner or later. Our blessed Christianity teaches us that there no difference between the employer and the employee if they are equally honest and upright in their life. Jesus Christ, the great Model, was not an aristocrat, not chairman of a self-constituted class called the cream of society, not a character like "John the gentleman's son", he was a true toiling man. In face of the pedigree of the Pharisees, and the boasted learning of the Saducees, and Herodian classes, people who thought themselves too nice to labor, he persevered, he announced that, He must work the works of the Father that sent him, while it was day. In like manner the ideal Christian life must be characterized by toil. The ideal christian life is not one of laziness. Nothing in our times, perhaps, so paralyzes the work of Christianity as the lamentable inactivity on the part of Christians. A little difficult endeavor seems to take all the sunshine out of too many Christian lives. The highest honor, in Christianity, comes to the ones that have the serving spirit. Christianity emphasizes that aristocracy which rises, step by step, into the true manhood of a majestic character, through each and all of the lawful processes that are possible in the divine and human constitutions.-

Still further, as the Model was characterized by self-sacrifice, so will be the ideal christian life. What greater proof do we need of the self-sacrificing spirit of Jesus Christ than the one which shines out in his incarnation? The Apostle says; "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might become rich. 2 Cor. 8:9. - The Master becomes a slave; the King becomes a servant; the Infinite God becomes a man, acquainted with grief and sorrow. It is told of Peter the Great, that he came down from the throne and robed himself in the garb of a peasant, and went into the shipyards of England and Holland, so that he might teach the rude people of his realm the arts of war, and start them out on the way to naval glory. It was a sacrifice that few rulers would have been willing to make for their subjects. And this sacrifice which Peter made helps keep him alive in the memory of the Russian people the world over. But in it was a vein of selfishness; it was made for the Russian people only. Not so, however, with the sacrifice of our Model. There was no root of selfishness, or unworthy ambition in his sacrifice. Pure love, and supreme sympathy for man, were the spring of all his activity. Had Christ been selfish, He would have forfeited his claim to the Messiahship. But Christ was not in any sense selfish. He sought not his own ease, glory or comfort. Every selfish aim and commercial desire were excluded from his life. Omnipotence, ^{science} itself, looking down into his soul, with a perfect survey, saw nothing there but pure excellency, Supreme beauty, and divine loveliness; a sun

without a spot; a splendor formed of mere diversities of light and glory; and such a spirit will characterize the ideal Christian life. Self-seeking is the bane of most lives, and should be replaced by devotion, implying self-sacrifice for Christ, and to man for Christ's sake. Yes, this spirit of self-sacrifice will shine out in a true Christian life. Oh, what craven hearts most of us carry in our bosoms. How we shrink back from a little self-denial for our Lord's sake. We talk about the self-sacrifice of the Model, but how slow we are to practice it. Nehemiah could give up the palace with all its attractions; Moses could turn away from the court of Pharaoh; Paul could give up his Hebrew position and prestige, and count them loss for Christ's sake; and yet we, many of us, cannot give up our sins for his Dear Sake. It would be hard to find a merchant who does not practice more self-denial, in order, to succeed in his business, than we do in our Christian life. You cannot find a scholar who does not deny himself more freely of ease and rest, for the sake of his studies, than most of us for the sake of Christ, and his Kingdom. Let us not come behind ~~of~~ even the worldly in the practice of our religion. If the world can deny themselves of so much for earthly objects, should we shrink back from self-denial for Christ's sake. Let us begin with our sins, first of all. Then let us go on till we come to our luxuries. If Need be, let us give up all for Christ.

Moreover, as the Model was characterized by meekness and patience, so will be the Ideal Christian life. Jesus Christ was the greatest example of meekness the world ever saw.

Meekness and patience were two flowers that bloomed in his disposition in a most beautiful manner. He was meek in the hour of greatest triumph. After doing wonderful things, instead of waiting for the plaudits of men, he retired into the wilderness to be alone with God. No proud ostentation found room in his most perfect soul. But now his meekness shone out during the trying scenes of the last few hours of his life. It is typified by that of the Lamb. How patient he was with Peter. Peter had followed Christ for three years with an unworthy motive throbbing in his heart, and when the time came was ready to deny him with curses. But Jesus looks at Peter and speaks not one word of reproof. Peter's rashness was followed by a manifestation of meekness, in the form of a sad look that broke Peter's heart. With Thomas, too, his patience is seen; and also in his treatment of all of the Apostles. And so amid the strange reverses and worry of life, "The Ideal Christian life" will be characterized by the same meekness and patience. A meek spirit is the condition of the presence of the great God in the heart of man. - If one would make the best of life, do the best he is capable of, there must be a childlike trust in God, and a firm faith in the power of Righteousness to conquer. This universe is so constituted that the meek and patient ones shall be blessed beyond measure. All of God's great, noble, epoch-making men, have been meek men. It is indeed the central truth of the Christian system.

But still further, as the Model was characterized by a close union of the human and the divine wills, so will be the

Ideal Christian life. Jesus Christ acknowledged the father's will in everything he did upon earth. The acknowledgement of the Father's will in regard to service explains the wonderful unity of his life, and with regard to suffering, its serene resignation. To do and to suffer the will of God, is all our business here below. The whole subject of a blessed Christian life is wrapped up in the relation of the human and the divine will. Christ's mission to this world was to so work upon man's heart and life and beget within him an immortal hope that would cause him to look up to heaven and see God's face and say; "Abba Father". But to do the will of God we must know it, and to suffer it we must have the spirit of union with it. Dogma, creed and ceremony, have hindered too many in the past. The explanation of the way a man becomes a Christian is not to be found in a strange flood-tide of emotion that makes the particular time, one of great interest to us, in being able to tell the part different persons, influences and powers, played in leading us to understand the great subject of conversion; it is not to be found in a mere joining of the Church; but in making a personal committal of ourselves to Christ. Jesus' prayer that the disciples might be one as He and the Father were one, shows that religion is getting two wills that are at right angles with each other to perfectly coincide. Being one with the Father is the Ideal Christian life.

But the last thing we desire to speak of that characterized the model and which will certainly be true in the ideal Christian life is, Communion. It was the habit of Jesus' soul. He re-

sorted to communion in the great crises of his life. Communion preceded his Baptism; choosing the apostles; the transfiguration; and the dark hour in Gethsemanie. So in our Christian life we should cultivate the habit of Communion. One cause of confusion and much uneasiness in the lives of Christians of to-day, is found in the manifest lack of communion. The material plays too great a part in too many Christian lives, in our times, simply because we loose sight of the spiritual through lack of communion. The ideal Christian life is the only one that the blessed Holy Spirit can use. The Holy Spirit is not doing his work, to-day, because Christians are not complying with the conditions. The end of the world advances or recedes, according to the number of ideal Christian lives. It doesn't seem as if we teach our people the great possibilities of themselves, to be ~~actualized~~ ^{actualized} ~~and~~ ^{known} through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Much waste is made in all our church work, because of a confused understanding of the work of the Spirit. Communion with God seems to be a thing relegated to the Church, for Sundays only. ~~God is consulted on the Sabbath day, and in the majority of~~ cases sincerely and earnestly, but the soul during the week is left without communion. But the ideal Christian life transmutes everything into power to hold communion with God all the time. Such Christian lives as we have tried to describe, will be the greatest proof of the Deity of our Lord. We must emphasize, more and more, the importance of Christians following the model with respect to Communion. It is by thus doing that ~~Jesus and heaven will be brought to men, and down to the earth~~

What Christians need is to get more Christlikeness through the increasing habit of communion. When this is done, the world will see what it is to be a true Christian. Then it will be that the definition of a Christian will be real and genuine. The Ideal Christian; a Christian is one who takes Christ as example in all things.