

The Authentic Christian

by
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“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:10-13).

WE do not live in a make-believe, fantasy world. The responsibilities of life are often heavy—and sometimes harsh. The sorrows and disappointments we face frequently expand to mountain-size loads to carry. Consequently, we should not accept cheap imitations of real values. We must not be swayed by deceptive counterfeits and charlatans. Life is too serious to squander on a plastic religion which breaks when the lightest pressure is placed upon it. We must seek only the true, the genuine.

In 1 John 3:10-13, John gives some telling characteristics of the “real-thing” Christian. This passage does not contain an exhaustive list of the authentic marks of a Christian, but the marks mentioned are of grave importance.

Someone has asked, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would you be convicted?” As John gives these characteristics of a Christian, ask yourself, “If someone came to me with this list, would he recognize me as a Christian?”

I. BY HIS REFLECTION OF GOD (1 John 3:10)

John says others should be able to identify us as Christians through our righteous reflection of God. The Christian is a little replica of God. John puts it in the negative. He says, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God” (3:10). Even the world

expects the children of God to evince the characteristics of their Father.

One can divide Christians into two broad classes: theoretical Christians and practical Christians. The theoretical Christian has obeyed the gospel and wears the name of Christ, but he does not live like God. He is a Christian in theory only. The practical Christian reminds others of God. He is a reflection of God. John writes concerning the second kind of Christian. He says whether or not we are children of God is determined by the way we live. The true child of God lives a righteous life.

As a soldier walked down a street in a war-torn town during one of the great wars, he came upon a little boy who was looking with longing eyes into a bakery as fresh, hot rolls were being placed on the display counter. Touched by the sight, the big soldier, with a gentle hand and a sympathetic heart, led the little fellow inside. Buying three or four rolls, he put them into his hands and said with a smile, “Have a good day!” The boy trailed along behind as the soldier left the bakery and continued his walk. When the soldier turned for his last good-bye, the boy looked up at him and said, “Mister, are you God?” Something in that soldier’s spirit, sympathy, and service reminded the boy of what he had been taught about God. Do we remind others of God? Has anyone ever said to us after witnessing our attitudes and deeds, “You must be a child of God”?

After surrendering to Christ in loving obedience, we are to live like God. Paul said, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). Such imitation involves a conscious effort of thinking and acting like God. Hold before you the biblical picture of God. Whittle and fashion your life into the likeness of that picture. Remember, the concrete picture of God is Jesus. He came to show us the Father. Also remember, we are the only picture of God many will ever see.

II. BY HIS REGARD FOR HIS BRETHREN (1 John 3:10-13)

John also says others should be able to recognize us as Christians by our loving regard for one another. He tersely declares that the Christian who does not love his brother is "not of God" (3:10). The new birth creates a new family and, thus, a new family love. Love for God ties one to all of God's children in family warmth and togetherness.

Brotherly love, then, is an essential characteristic of a Christian. The Holy Spirit stresses the importance of this virtue in two pointed ways: by a declaration and a demonstration.

In His declaration He refers to the antiquity of the brotherly-love command. He says, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (3:11). The sheer age of this command should impress us. From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another.

In His demonstration the Holy Spirit holds before us the blood-soaked example of Cain. Cain is an illustration of love's opposite—hatred. John says, "Not as Cain who was of the evil one, and slew his brother" (3:12). Hatred is born of the devil. The Christian can have no part of hatred because of its father and fruits.

Love is the bedrock foundation of Christian living. Jesus brought a new life, a life molded and motivated by love. A Christian without love is like noodle soup without noodles!

A traditional story about John the apostle illustrates the beauty and practicality of brotherly love. According to Eusebius, a third-century church historian, John left a young Christian man under the care of an older Christian leader in the church. When John returned on a later

visit, he asked the mature Christian to give an account concerning his charge. John was told that the young man had defected from the faith and had become a robber. The apostle immediately acquired a horse and took off in pursuit of the young man. He courageously approached the hideout of the robbers without giving a thought to the safety of his own life. Seeing John, the young man ran for cover. John followed him and overtook him. Through his earnest pleadings and tears, John convinced the young man to be restored to the faith. Although we cannot be confident of the reliability of this story, it does summarize the action and compassion of love.

The word *love* used by the Holy Spirit has to do with the will. It is not sentimentalism. We are to will good will toward all men, especially our brothers in Christ. The highest good of others is to be sought even at the expense of our own lives. The loving spirit manifests compassion and acceptance toward our brother while drawing our brother to a closer walk with Jesus.

Ask yourself: Am I a loving person? Do I possess and radiate brotherly love?

III. BY HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD (1 John 3:12, 13)

Furthermore, John implies that others should be able to recognize us as Christians by our distinctive relationship with the world. The Christian is different from the world. This difference inspires some and irritates others. John says, "Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you" (3:13).

A righteous life will not only indict the world but will often infuriate it. Abel's righteousness filled the darkened mind of Cain with envy. John says, "And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (3:12). The world's reaction to truth and holiness is mixed. While the truth softens some hearts, it hardens others.

An evil heart may even become violent in its resistance to righteousness. I have often been asked, "Why did they crucify Jesus?" After studying the sinless life of our Lord, we confidently believe that everyone will love and follow Him. Who would reject Him? Who could possibly mistreat Him? But evil will fight to live in a life. Evil is persistent and vicious. Jesus and Abel

were put to death by evil. In each case righteousness and evil met head on. Something had to give. It was either conversion or calamity. The good heart will gravitate to righteousness and conversion results; the bad heart leans toward evil and calamity occurs.

Brace, then, for the reaction of the world to your righteous life. Prepare for persecution. It could come in one form or another. Pray for those around you that their hearts may be receptive to the convicting power of a righteous influence. But, above all, resolve to persevere in your life for God regardless of the response that comes. The Christian is *in* the world, but not *of* the world; he is sharply distinct from the world, though deeply dedicated to helping the world.

CONCLUSION

The authentic Christian will manifest the authentic marks of righteousness. He will be a righteous reflection of God before the world. He will have a loving regard for his brothers. He will sustain a unique relationship with the world. How about you? Are you genuine or make-believe?

The crisis will indicate our character. The story is told of a building contractor who was asked by a wise and wealthy man to build a stately mansion. The contractor was given free use of a large sum of money for the expense of

the building project. The project was placed totally within his hands, for the owner would be traveling abroad during the construction. During the construction the contractor substituted shoddy materials for strong, dependable materials and put the difference in the price in his pocket. His true character surfaced! His secret was well hidden behind paneling and paint. When the owner returned the house was ready. From the outside the house was beautiful and inviting, but behind the superficial fronts were inadequate, inexpensive boards and beams which could not withstand the pressure of time and use. How utterly amazed and disappointed the contractor must have been when the owner handed him the key and said, "You may have it as your very own house!"

In the outcome the contractor actually cheated himself. The man who substitutes the shoddy for the sure, whether in building a house or a life, always cheats himself! Others may encourage us to build; some may even finance our building. But we are the ones who will live in the house!

For the Christian life to mean anything it must be authentic! Victorious living can only spring from authentic living. Jesus did not come to give a flimsy, brittle life which breaks when exposed to the slightest breeze. The life which flows from Him is true, transparent, and triumphant.

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Illustrations

How Do You Treat Your Child?

The congregation took in a stray dog last winter. He came to our door on one of our colder days and we just couldn't go home and leave him to the elements.

We discovered that although just a part German Shepherd pup, he had been trained, as he heeded the commands we gave to sit, stay, heel and roll over. He also loved to shake hands. Before we left in an evening of snow, we fixed him a warm bed in the furnace room, and then my family brought him a nice supper of leftovers from our table.

The next day, with the help of the local radio station, we located the owner, who was worried almost out of her mind. She immediately came to the church, rushed into the office, fell to her knees in tears, and took the puppy in her arms. It was quite a reunion!

I couldn't help but think back to a similar reunion that took place on a beastly hot day at the

Ozark Empire District Fair. While his mother was engrossed in a musical show, a preschooler attempted to make his way alone to the restroom. On the way back he became lost and tearful. A kind policeman looked after him while they paged his mother to come to the box office. The mother returned to the grandstand with the youth, shouting threats of violence at him and shaking him until his arms almost came out of their sockets.

Now here are two women. One had a dog she treated like a child; the other a child she treated like a dog.

Michael McGinnis,
The Disciple
(September 16, 1979)

Word Choice

In the Middle Ages, the chapel or the monastery became a place of "sanctuary." Here a person could seek physical refuge, even from a battle or an assassin. Hence, the origin of the word.

Peace With God

A. W. Tozer said, "To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men."

Living Together

Schopenhauer has a fable about a number of hedge-hogs who decided to live together so that they could keep warm. But as soon as they were in close quarters their pricklers proved so troublesome that they quickly would go apart only to be driven together again by the cold. And so it went on. Life was anything but easy.

The Bravest Soldier

"It takes more courage to be a preacher than to be a gladiator, or a stormer of fortresses, because the preacher's battle is ever on, never ceases, and lacks the tonic of visible conquest."