

## **On Being Led by the Spirit**

### **Part IV - Not Practicing Christianity, but Living with Christ**

Christianity has become, over the centuries, a rather highly specialized system—quite a far cry from the simplistic fellowship with Christ enjoyed by the early disciples. In fact, the very term, “Christianity,” is itself a label, which irrevocably classifies the follower of Christ with sectarian, or cultic groups.

*But were not the followers of Christ called “Christians” in the book of Acts?*

Yes, indeed. That is true. However, the term, “Christianity,” differs from the term, “Christian,” in the same sense that the term, “Americanism,” differs from the word, “American.” The name, “American,” is applied, *de facto*, to anyone who is a citizen of the United States of America, regardless of one’s application to the promoting of American interests. “Americanism,” on the other hand, describes a particular category of American interest, that carries with it certain fundamental concepts, or principles, relative to the American nation, that are held in common by a segment of the citizenry which has a special focus on the promotion of national interests. Obviously, not all Americans are “Americanists,” or proponents of “Americanism.” The terms are not synonymous. That is not to say whether or not all Americans should be promoting the national interest, but rather to make the point that there is a difference. Similarly, the term “Christianity” would, technically, denote a special category of the followers of Christ, who have formulated a given set of principles and regulations pertaining to life as a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ. It is not necessarily true that all who identify with Christ must be, *de facto*, engaged in the religious pursuit of so-called Christianity.

This may seem like quibbling over terminologies, but the fact of the matter is that the Church has been monstrosly savaged and divided by the pursuit of Christianity, instead of being primarily involved in the personal experience of life with Christ. Christianity is a matter of theological concepts. Life with Christ is a familial matter. It goes back to the simple principle expressed by my friend and colleague, Dr Harold Ellens: “The *fact* of salvation does not necessarily include the *content* of salvation.”

That is, one is saved by virtue of the new life given through the Holy Spirit within, but the knowledge of the meaning of that life within is a matter for theology, just as one born with natural life does not automatically possess the meaning of that life. Herein is the root of much confusion and division in the church. One assumes that because one is saved, one automatically understands the theology of salvation. In another figure, marriage is a living relationship. To assume that one must be a sociologist to be married is absurd. By the same token, one who assumes that being married automatically qualifies one to be a marriage counselor, is equally absurd.

As there are many different approaches to marriage, and many disagreements among sociologists, so there are many variables in the theological approach to salvation, or Christianity. The sociologist sees marriage as an institution. The theologian may, in the same vein, see the new birth as a theological system called Christianity. But, as the institution of marriage has little to do with the experience of living with a mate, so the religion of Christianity has little to do with the experience of living with Christ.

It is not that there is no value to the consideration of all the theological aspects of Christianity, any more than it could be said that there would be no value to the pursuit of the knowledge of the institution of marriage. Rather, we must understand there is a limit to the possibilities of ultimate, or absolute veracity in the conclusions of such pursuits.

In summary, it is vital that we see our salvation as a new birth, with entrance into the family of Christ, rather than as the joining of a religious institution, or sect called "Christianity." If salvation be seen as joining Christianity, our lives will be subservient to the regimentations of a religious institution, and guidance will be a matter of conformity to certain humanly proscribed patterns; but if salvation be understood as being identified with the family of Christ, then our lives will be lived as members of His family, whether or not we conform to specific regulations, and guidance will be a matter of getting counsel and direction from God, as our Father.

In the above respects, one may possess the Spirit of Christ within and thus be a member of the family, and yet still hold questionable theological views, or have unresolved conflicts in one's personal life. The criterion is not the theological correctness of one's views, nor the perfection of one's life, but rather the interest in being identified with Christ.

And thus, guidance is really a matter of working together with Christ to achieve a sound life on the earth, for one's personal benefit, and not a matter of maintaining favor with God by not making mistakes, or as some have put it—"being always in the center of God's will." If making mistakes puts one in disfavor with God, "who would be able to stand?"

In conclusion, one ought to work with Christ in terms of one's decisions and plans. Don't be a prisoner of omens and tokens and signs. Share with Christ your decisions. Express your willingness to do what he wants. Come to Him as a child to a father, and not as a slave to a master, trembling in fear, lest one make a mistake. Christ is the Master of the universe, but He has made it quite clear in His revelation to us, that as far as His relationship to us is concerned, He is the Father. Trust Him, then, to be able and willing to overcome your human inadequacy, and to see to it, in one way or another that you have His will.

A final word of caution. If you make a mistake, for some reason, even willfulness, remember that while you may have consequences to suffer, Christ does not cut you off, anymore than a good parent cuts off an erring or foolish child. In the words of Edgar Guest, "It takes a heap o' livin' in a house to make a home." It takes a "heap o' livin'" with Christ to learn how to relate to Him and to be sensitive to His guidance. Fully aware of this, Christ relates to His family, with infinite grace and patience. Trust Him for that.

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*Next month "Part V - The Place of Counsel"*  
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