

The Word Christian

Something has happened to the word Christian. When a coin has been long in use, and its impression has become effaced, it is not easy to recall what it was like when it came new from the mint. Nowadays, in the eyes of many, a Christian is a nice person who has an interest in religion. He may be a man who is very helpful and always ready to give a hand in time of need. My, what a lovely person! He is so Christian in character. Furthermore, a strange rumour is being spread that a Christian does not necessarily have to be a member of a church. You just do your Christian thing and you are on the way. Even a prominent churchman said: "The church is not confined to four walls, a pulpit and some hymn books, because a large number of extremely good Christians never go near a church even at Christmas . . . Many a man in a service club is doing his Christian stuff and doing it extremely well. We are becoming more of a Christian society because people are now concerned about social problems and they try to do something about them..." What a statement! I cannot see the difference between a humanist and this churchman.

Something has happened to the word Christian all right. It has so changed that it is hard to recognize its original meaning and intent.

In the early days of Christianity it was difficult to be a Christian. A Christian was a man who was in the world but not of the world. He was the follower of the Lord, who had said "Take up the cross and follow me." He knew that his home was not in this world. He was pilgrim and as a traveler through this world he had his responsibilities for the needs of his fellow man and the very structures of society.

He was a member of a community called the church. The fulfillment of the kingdom was eagerly awaited, but at the same time, the signposts of the kingdom were planted everywhere. He was involved in politics, education and in the arts.

An ancient letter gives this beautiful description of the early Christians. "The Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any 'singularity' . . . They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners: As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every.. land of their birth as a land of strangers . . . They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all . . . They are poor, yet make many rich . . . To sum up all in one word – what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world." (Letter to Diognetes, c.A.D. 150)

What is a Christian? Not all nice people are Christians. The improvement of human behaviour does not necessarily mean that a man has become a Christian. When you read Scriptures, you discover that God did not become man to make nice people nicer,

though redemption always improves a man here and now, and improves him in the end to such a degree that we cannot understand all of its consequences as yet. God became man not simply to produce better people of the same old kind. He came to the world to make from the old kind, new people. Even nice people and kind people have to go through the only door called Jesus Christ, the Saviour from sin, in order to become a Christian. There is no other way.

A Christian, therefore, is one who is related to Jesus Christ. He is a person who trusts in Christ alone for His salvation and satisfaction and in whom Christ lives for sanctification and service. The very life of Christ becomes the life of the Christian as he has been born again into the kingdom of God. The Bible is his sole guide for life. Christ is his King and Master. He knows no other. Christ is his pattern and hope for his life and the life to come. His word sounds foolish to the unbeliever but for the Christian it is wisdom unto salvation.

Who then is a Christian? Many nice and wonderful people are not Christian since they do not know Christ as Lord and Saviour. Humanism and Christianity should not become fused. A man busy in his service club may be a very fine person and doing great things, and doing it well, but unless he has become united with Christ through faith, he is not a Christian.

Johan D. Tangelder
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