

The Cost for Being a Christian

If T.S. Eliot is right in saying that "the great proof for Christianity for others, is not how far a man can logically analyze his reasons for believing, but how far in practice he will stake his life on his belief," then the Christian church in the Western world must do some soul searching.

According to a survey taken some years ago in one of the larger denominations in the U.S., 20 per cent of the "church members" never read the Bible; 30 per cent never attend divine worship services; 40 per cent never give through the church; 90 per cent never have family worship; 95 per cent never witness about Christ.

In view of such facts a leading churchman said that only about 5 per cent of our church members in America seem to have any grasp of what being a Christian really means. This survey taken some time ago in the U.S. has also relevance for Canada. Surely, we too need a revival within the churches across our nation.

Jesus made it abundantly clear that being a Christian is not easy. He has never promised a life of ease to anyone of His followers.

In Jesus' instructions to the twelve disciples just before sending them out to work on their own He said:

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:37-40).

These words of Jesus struck home to the disciples. They knew what Jesus meant. They could vividly recall how hundreds of peasants had died on crosses in revolts ruthlessly put down by the Romans. They had seen hills studded with crosses of those who suffered crucifixion. Therefore the call to take up the cross was a most vivid picture of the ultimate conditions of true discipleship, for the cross was not so much a burden to bear as a scaffold on which to die.

What does it mean to take up the cross and follow Jesus? It means making a drastic redirection of every part of our life. God rather than ourselves must be at the center of everything that we do.

As Christians we are not our own. We are the Lord's and our lives are to be lived according to the directions the Bible does give. Of course this way of living draws out conflict.

The teaching of the Bible often clashes with the opinions of secular man. To take up the cross daily requires also the habit of sacrifice.

In the midst of his work for Christ in Africa, the great missionary David Livingstone once declared, "I never made a sacrifice." He meant that only the sinless Son of God could ever give Himself as the Redeemer for sin.

So we Christians all believe; still, our Lord speaks about the cross of the Christian. The cross is a call to sacrificial living. It has nothing to do with trying to work for our salvation. Yet it is a sure proof of our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

It also costs and far more than many church members are willing to pay. The cost of being a Christian consists of doing the will of God, day after day, gladly and well, even though the work may appear to be far from spectacular.

Jesus said that being a Christian costs much in every day living. But the church will become strong and grow again when she puts into practice this teaching of Jesus: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

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