

Christian Individualism

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NO INTERMEDIARY BUT JESUS CHRIST, NO OTHER AUTHORITY SAVE THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

The God-inspired declaration of Paul the apostle tells us that all who determine to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (II Timothy 3:12). In most lands today, this persecution will usually take the form of dis-fellowshipping, ostracism, separation, and mis-representation and misunderstanding of one's high and holy purpose. Along these same lines, I would add that if anyone does determine to live godly in Christ Jesus, he will have to do it as an individual. The one who gives his time searching for some group or company that is living godly in Christ Jesus, and to which he may attach himself, is doomed in advance to failure and disappointment.

A most positive aspect of living godly in Christ Jesus is that the one who has so determined has "chosen the way of truth" (Psalm 119:30). He joins the Lord Jesus in saying, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). And once this choice has been made, the only question that can ever be asked concerning any teaching or practice is, "Is it the truth?" If it is, it must be embraced and declared; if not, it must be repudiated.

It should be understood in advance that the determination to live godly in Christ Jesus, and the choice of "the truth way" rather than "the church way" is not an easy road to travel. It could be a very lonesome road. So, if one cannot decide in advance that, through the help of Jesus Christ, he can accept the isolation, the ostracism, and the misunderstanding that may come from following such a course, he had better not start upon it. He would probably be happier if he simply cast his lot with some like-minded group of "food, fun, and fellowship" seekers. If one is going to be miserable living the life of a Christian individualist, he had better find some other way of life.

If, among those who read these lines, there are those who have had a true encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ; if they have judged themselves as sinners and received Him as their Saviour; if they have come face-to-face with the fact of God's Truth versus man's error; if they have chosen the way of Truth, and it has become their determination to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ – they will find it necessary to find a way of life in Christ Jesus that will allow them to live out to the limit the relationship which they now bear to God through Him. If Jesus Christ, rather than some sect or denomination, is to be the mold of their lives, I recommend to them Christian individualism as being the true and best way of life for the active believer in Christ Jesus.

The believer whose knowledge of the Bible is ever increasing, whose appreciation of the person and work of Jesus Christ is ever growing, with this resulting in a determination to give Him the preeminence in all things, will find that he quickly becomes persona non grata (an unacceptable person) in any "church" today. His unwillingness to go along with the popular schemes and make-work activities of today's religions will cause him to be branded as a divisive factor, and any protests he makes will bring the charge that he is a troublemaker.

The "churches" want bodies to help swell the attendance; they welcome purses that will help with the finances, but they insist that everything that means so much to the active believer in Christ must be forgotten and left at home. He can play and he can pay, but is allowed nothing to say. And if he insists in raising his voice in protest, he can expect a visit from the board of deacons who will insist that he keep quiet and conform or else face a more drastic action. This can be such a frightening prospect to many that they will seek to avoid it at any cost. So, they become amenable and complacent, usually giving as an excuse that they are doing it for the sake of their families.

However, for many others, such compromises are impossible. The truth as it is in Christ Jesus means more to them than any organization, and they cannot remain silent when grievous errors and practices are promulgated. Thus, the only course open to them is one of Christian individualism. This means a commitment to Christ and to His Word while standing apart from any commitment to any religious body.

"WITHOUT THE CHURCH THERE IS NO CHRISTIANITY"

These are the bold words posted on a "church" sign, a challenge to all who passed by. The one who was responsible for them being there probably believed what they said, and I suppose that many who read them nodded in assent, there being many who would never dare challenge anything written on a "church" sign. But I repudiate and reject them with all the strength of my being.

I am personally acquainted with hundreds who are Christians in every Biblical sense that can be given to this exalted word, yet they are Christians wholly apart from all institutions and organizations that are called "churches." In fact, they actually reject "the Christ of the 'churches'" in order that they may fully exalt and give the preeminence to the Christ of the Scriptures.

I claim to be one of these; therefore, I reject the intolerant and dogmatic declaration proclaimed by this “church” sign to all who passed by that without “the church” there is no Christianity.

If this were true it would make the institution called “the church” to be the mediator between man and Christ. It would mean that the life that He would have us live cannot be lived apart from a “church,” that he who receives and becomes a part of one must also receive and become a part of the other, and that only those who are identified with some “church” are identified with Christ. All this I repudiate as being contrary to the Word of God.

It has been my joy to recommend Christian individualism as a way of life to many believers in Christ. It is my belief and my experience that it is the privilege of any individual to establish relationship with Jesus Christ in which all that He can ever be to any man in this dispensation, His rich blessings, and fellowship can be enjoyed wholly apart from any institution called a “church.” Such things as nearness to God, likeness to Christ, devotedness to His Word, and separation from the world can all be attained and maintained by the individual believer in Jesus Christ without his being any part of an organized company. The believer can be attached to Christ, to His Name, to His Word, yes, even to His people, without being any part of any “church.” I offer my own life as proof of this.

These words may come as a shock to many who hold the popular conception that the chief expression of a man’s relationship to Christ is to attend a “church” on Sunday morning. Today as a rule men are classified under “those who go to church” and “those who do not go to church.” All who go to “church” are considered to be good, honest, moral Christians. And even though this may not be true, men persist in believing this lie. On the other hand all who do not go to “church” are considered to be heathen unbelievers whose morals are open to question. This is a greater falsehood than a fact.

While it is true that many sincere and true believers in Jesus Christ are found in the “churches,” there is no need for me to follow them there in order to have their friendship and enjoy their fellowship. To submit or defer to an organization where, as a rule, matters of great spiritual importance are settled by a majority vote is too high a price for me to pay for the friendship and fellowship of any man. The true believer in Jesus Christ should never deny friendship and fellowship to another believer just because he does not cast his lot with a “church” organization. The sectarian minded will do this, but the fellowship of such is hardly worth having if some surrender of principle must be made to gain it.

Most of my readers, I am sure, are quiet familiar with the pressure that in this day is brought upon people to join a “church.” It is much easier to yield to this pressure and join up than it is to withstand it and stay out. Vigorous programs of visitation evangelism are carried on in order that membership roles may show a gain, the Sunday services may be better attended, and the budget may be balanced. Men are pressured into putting on “the form of godliness” and becoming members of a “church.”

Christian individualism is not for those business and professional men who know the value of the contacts they can make in a “church” organization, nor is it for those who are seeking for

community or neighborhood acceptance and approval by belonging to the right organizations, one of which must be the right “church.” This is not for the status seekers, nor is it for those who value so highly the “country-club religion” provided by so many “churches” today.

Christian individualism is for the active believer in Jesus Christ who has discovered that his interest in God’s truth and his growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ has brought him into conflict with the status quo that is so fervently maintained by the organizations that call themselves “churches.”

By the term active believer I do not necessarily mean a believer who is an active worker. In fact the active believer may find it very difficult to do much work. One of the most difficult things he will face, and must accept as part of his lot in Christ, is the limitation which “living for Christ” is going to force upon him in regard to those activities which so many engage in under the guise of Christian service.

Since faith in Jesus Christ is belief in the record God has given of His Son, the active believer is one who is never satisfied with his knowledge and understanding of God’s record. Creedal statements concerning Christ may satisfy many, but they do not satisfy the active believer. “That I may know Him” is the motive behind his perpetual and progressive studies in the Word of God.

The word individualism and individualist have no fixed meaning until they are given a context. If any should turn these words against me and make them to mean egoism and egotist, they will have to ignore the prefix Christian which I always place before these words.

There are many egotists today who are motivated by an excessive love and thought for themselves with a complete disregard for the feelings and wishes of others. My individualism is something that is reserved almost entirely for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is for His glory, not mine.

The primary value of Christian individualism is that it permits a faithful presentation of Jesus Christ to others. It permits one’s eye to be single when he seeks to win men to Christ. There is no demand upon him to bring men to Christ and also into some “church.” He is able to plead God’s cause and feels no need of pleading the cause of any “church” or denomination.

Christian individualism lifts a man to a position of sublime independence of all the religions of this world. The Christian individualist knows that a man can be joined to God through Jesus Christ, and that he does not need to face or become involved in all the divergent issues created by religious organizations. He knows the satisfying value of having gone directly to God, knowing no intermediary but Jesus Christ, His Son, and no other authority save the written Word of God. He smilingly refuses the officious cries of churchmen who declare that he cannot have Christ as his Saviour until he has first acknowledged and received them.

The Christian faith was from the very first the personal faith of individuals. This is clearly seen in the declaration of Paul who tells us that after God’s dealings with him on the Damascus

road, he did not confer with any human being. Neither did he go up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before him; but he went into Arabia, then later came back to Damascus (see Galatians 1:15-19).

The believers of the Acts period were not always scattered; and wherever possible, they moved and acted as a fellowship of individuals. But when one of them found himself cut off from all others, he stood alone, finding his all in Christ.

Before determining to live godly in Christ Jesus, before choosing the way of truth, before starting out on the path of Christian individualism, the believer had better make sure that he can “go it alone” spiritually. It may be necessary for him to do this. Let him be determined in advance that he is able to say with godly Asaph of old: “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psalm 73:25).

Christian individualism is a way of life, not a way of escape. It consists of that which an active believer in Christ does, not what he does not do. Let no one take this high and holy position unless his life is to be lived for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Christian individualism does not mean that the believer stands alone. But it does mean that he knows how to stand alone, and that he will without complaint stand happily alone if he deems it to be a part of the worthy walk of his calling. He does not need to look to the right or to the left to see what someone else is going to do. He has a profound sense of his personal responsibility to God, therefore, he will put Him first and every other consideration must be subservient.

While he earnestly desires fellowship and community with others, he refuses to allow this desire to be the reigning influence of his life. He dislikes isolation and aloneness as much as anyone, yet he will not compromise in order to belong. He cannot yield allegiance to any organization, since all organizations are composed of human beings who err and whose judgments are always less than divine truth. ...

There are active believers in Jesus Christ who are members of “churches” and who have found a place of service within its membership. Some of these feel that they have solved the great problem of how an individual can also be a member of a group and secure all the benefits of both ways of life. This is their right as an individual. I neither commend this nor condemn it. A believer’s right to freedom certainly gives him the right to unite with a group. However, a difficulty arises when he begins to think that it is the duty of others to do the same. And it needs to be recognized that individualism has ceased when a man’s acceptance by a group is based upon his silence.

“HOW CAN ANYONE WORSHIP IF HE DOES NOT GO TO CHURCH?”

This is the question often asked. This query does nothing more than reveal the ignorance of the one who asks it concerning the meaning and character of true worship. Here is another quid pro quo which would make worship to be that which men do in “church” on Sunday,

therefore, he who does not attend church does not worship. This is denied.

True worship is always a personal and individual matter, which while it may be done with a company, it will not be at all unless it is done by an individual. True worship is heartfelt adoration of God because of who He is, what He is, and what He does. It is not dependent upon place or ritual. It needs no established forms or ceremonies. Whenever because of revealed truth a heart responds with adoration and gratitude because of what God is or what He has done, that is worship.

Quite a few believers who have considered Christian individualism as a way of life have asked about fellowship with other believers. And to this there is only one answer – fellowship with others to the very limit. Christian individualism is not an anti-social way of life.

So, after all has been said, and all arguments pro and con have been exhausted, there is only one method of dealing with God in this dispensation; and that method is personally and individually. This is the way we must start, and this is the way we should continue. In this way of life, we can best fulfill our position as believers in an unbelieving world as students of God's Word in a world that is Biblically illiterate.

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