



Front Cover

THE VALUE OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

Back in 1920, a new record of 805,000 immigrants from all over the world poured into the United States. Since the founding of our nation, citizens of all other countries have looked longingly to the day they could come to America, the land of freedom and opportunity. They could realize the value of being an American.

We all desire to place our talents, energies, and abilities in worthwhile endeavors. No man in his right mind wants to engage in unprofitable activities. I wish to affirm that the most valuable way of life is the Christian life. Yes, the most profitable way that we can spend our sojourn here below is to become a Christian, live as a Christian— and die with the hope of a Christian.

It is true that some question the value of being a Christian. They believe in the doctrine of the Epicureans (Acts 17; Luke 12). "...Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"(I Corinthians 15:32). Hence, they see no value in the principles of Christianity.

Other men who pose as brilliant scholars cannot or do not humble themselves to embrace the simple truths of the Christian life. I honestly believe that all mankind would give New Testament Christianity more serious consideration if they were constantly reminded of The Value of Being A Christian. Therefore, we present this lesson.

Why should a man want to be a Christian? First, because a Christian is one who has been saved from past sins. Just think of it—all the burden of guilt is removed from a person's past life when he becomes a Christian. And, if he continues to walk uprightly, he can be saved eternally one day.

We read in Acts 2:41–47, that those who obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost were saved from past sins and added to the church. In Ephesians 5:23, we read that Christ is the Savior of the church. Therefore, it follows that since a Christian is a member of the church, and Christ will save the church, that a Christian is a saved individual as long as he lives faithfully in the church of the Lord. This is one value of being a Christian.

Second, we should desire to be a Christian because that would mean that we are children of God. Just think of it—a child of a King. In writing to Christians, Paul stated, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (Romans 8:16), and the beloved John exclaimed, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God ...” (I John 3:1).

In writing to the young Timothy, Paul likens the church to the family or household of God. Notice the reading of I Timothy 3:15: “but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Those of us who claim to be Christian should ponder well the expression that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God. Yes, as children of the King, we must realize there are things we cannot do that the children of the world engage in, and there are things we must do in service to our Master that are not required of other children. Why? Because we are members of a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9) and must conduct ourselves properly.

Third, we should realize that only as a Christian can we glorify God. In a stirring passage, Peter tells us to glorify the name of Jehovah by wearing the name Christian (I Peter 4:14–16). Christ Himself told the disciples of the Lord to “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Certainly we can understand how valuable it is to be a Christian, for a Christian glorifies God.

Fourth, another tremendous asset of the Christian is the fact that he has the highest moral standard and the most far reaching influence on earth. In the Sermon on the Mount, we are reminded by Jesus of the higher code of living that characterizes a child of God. In II Corinthians 5:17, we read that when a person becomes a Christian “... old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” We are, as God's elect, to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1–3), and “... not love the world or the things in the world ...” (I John 2:15).

If we truly live as Christians should, our influence will be a grand commentary on Christianity. Our lives as God's children

should be the best sermon ever preached. But are they? Do we conduct our lives in such a way that when we cross over the river of death our influence for good will continue to live on? In Hebrews 11:4, we read of Abel, a righteous man of God, who "...being dead still speaks." The poet said:

"Lives of great men all remind us,
we can make our lives sublime,
and in departing leave behind us,
footprints on the sands of time."

The footprints of a Christian are found following the footsteps of Jesus, thus exhibiting the highest moral standard known to man. To a young infidel who was scoffing at Christianity because of the misconduct of its professors, the late Dr. Mason said: "Did you ever know an uproar to be made because an infidel went astray from the paths of morality?" The infidel admitted that he had not. "Then, don't you see," said Dr. Mason, "that by expecting the professors of Christianity to be holy, you admit it to be a holy religion, and thus pay it the highest compliment in your power." The young man was silent. As Christians, we must realize the serious responsibility that is ours—that of exalting Christ in our daily life. In speaking of the Christian, someone has well written:

We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel, we are the scoffer's creed,
We are the Lord's last message
Given in word and deed
What if the line is crooked
What if the line is blurred?

Indeed, Christ has no hands but ours to do His work today!

Yes, we must remember, that we cannot be channels of blessings if our lives are not free from all sin, we will barriers be and a hindrance to those we are trying to win. "...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ..." (II Corinthians 7:1).

Possibly the greatest advantage of the Christian's life is his optimistic approach toward death. Yes, the child of God does not fear the chilly tide of death, but he can say calmly: "Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me ..." (Psalm 23:4). Of the Christian, John wrote: "... Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ..." (Revelation 14:13), and the apostle Paul stated: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Contrariwise, I have heard of Oscar Levant, a famous pianist of the last decade, who was so afraid of death he would not allow the word to be spoken in his presence. The only explanation for the Christian's attitude toward death is the fact that he has hope of the greatest joy and contentment. Paul was inspired to say: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

In explaining the faithful life of Abraham, the writer of Hebrews stated: "for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). To the loyal follower of the Lord, Jesus Himself has said: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). This is the hope of a Christian. The unbeliever has nothing to lean upon.

From a selfish standpoint, we should want to be Christians because "...all things work together for good to those who love God ..." (Romans 8:28). Yes, it is valuable to be a Christian in this life. To those who diligently put the kingdom first, God has promised food, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:31-33). The Psalmist, David, exclaimed: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). The Hebrew writer tells us that the Heavenly Father will never leave us nor forsake us if we give our lives in His service (Hebrews 13:5).

We hear the commentators speak a lot about security these days. Friends, the greatest security is than of a Christian. As a Christian, I can hold to God's unchanging hand in a world of insecurity and turmoil. In Romans 8:35, 38-39, the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave us these comforting and challenging words: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Now notice the answer: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Such precious promises as these should make us all see the value of being a Christian.

Now that we have discussed the values of Christianity, it is only proper that we give what the Bible teaches concerning who is a Christian and how to become one. There are many erroneous concepts concerning this important question. Let us see what God's word teaches on the subject.

We learn in Acts 11:26, who a Christian is. That passage states: "... And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Webster's Dictionary has this to say about the word disciple. "Through the influence of its Biblical sense, [disciple] has ceased to be an exact synonym for pupil or scholar; it always implies personal adherence to the views of one's master or teacher." This view is certainly borne out by the words of Christ as recorded in John 8:31: "...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." In John 15:8, we hear Christ as He speaks again concerning His disciples: "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples."

Thus far, we have learned that a Christian is a disciple and a disciple is one who continues in the Word of the Lord and bears much fruit as a follower of Christ. But, how do we become a Christian? In John 15:4, Jesus said, " Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." So, a disciple or Christian is one that bears fruit for Christ because he abides in Christ. But, before we can abide in Christ, we must be in Christ.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:27, that we are baptized into Christ. Therefore, we conclude that a Christian is a disciple of Christ—one that has heard the Word of the Lord, believed it, and obeyed it, culminating his obedience by being buried with his Lord in baptism (Colossians 2:12). Then, as a Christian, he abides in Christ and bears much fruit for the Master's cause. Are you a Christian? You cannot afford to pass up the values of a life with Christ.

WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS

The most rewarding life is Christianity. It truly pays to serve Jesus—now and eternally. The challenge of loyalty before God is exacting and exciting. To follow the Shepherd "...wherever He goes ..." (Revelation 14:4) will take us into many demanding regions and even the shadow of death. But, to those who bring even their thoughts into captivity unto Christ (II Corinthians 10:5), it is a journey that always eventuates in triumph (II Corinthians 2:14). As the songwriter aptly stated, "The toils of the road will seem nothing when we get to the end of the way."

Serving the Lord means self-denial (Luke 9:23); a pilgrim journey in a foreign land (I Peter 2:11); a devotion that never looks back to yesterday (Luke 9:62); and the sacrifice of all that mundane interests hold dear (Luke 14:33). In fact, children of God dare not even love family ties and the bonds of kinship to the extent of hindering full allegiance to the Lord (Matthew 10:37; Mark 3:35). However, in view of such unstinting devotion, we have a redeemer who shall never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6) and a promise of abundant blessing in this present time, and in the age to come (Luke 18:30).

A closer walk with God often brings earthly rebuffs and human reprisals. Paul learned that lesson vividly. Nonetheless, he gladly counted past achievements as worthless in order to gain Christ (Philippians 3:4–9). Stephen gave his life for a cause deeper than physical existence (Acts 7:60). James and John learned the lesson of walking hand in hand with the Master in the tribulation that attends the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). Some saints in the early days of Christianity were willing to be burned at the stake or sawn asunder rather than deny the Lord that bought them. Their fidelity, even in the face of death (Revelation 2:10), is a tribute to the rich, glorious, and eternal joy of devotion and duty.

God's tomorrow shall certainly be brighter than today! As Jesus cogently affirmed, so we earnestly believe, "Great is your reward in heaven." In spite of having the sentence of death to contend with daily (I Corinthians 15:30; II Corinthians 1:9), Christians of the first century looked forward to the glory yet to be revealed (I Peter 4:13).

In the ten-point outline which follows, we learn of the blessings awaiting those who serve the Savior. Following Jesus means:

1. We surrender, yet win the battle
(Romans 12:1–2; James 4:7–10; II Peter 1:11).
2. We are humbled, yet always victorious
(II Corinthians 2:14; Luke 14:11; I John 5:4).
3. We die daily, yet live abundantly
(II Corinthians 5:1; John 10:10; Ephesians 3:20).
4. We long for heaven, yet live better lives on earth
(Philippians 3:20; Revelation 14:13; Jude 21).
5. We are crucified with Christ, yet we never die
(Galatians 2:20; John 11:25–26; Ephesians 2:6).
6. Buried with Christ, but walk in new life
(Colossians 2:12; Romans 8:1–2; Ephesians 4:20–24).
7. Past sins forgiven, yet pressing onward
(Acts 3:19; Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 6:1).
8. Sojourners on earth, but mansions waiting in heaven
(I Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:10–13; Hebrews 9:24).
9. Content with blessings, never satisfied with attainments
(Philippians 4:11; Romans 8:31; Psalm 116:12; Revelation 3:21)/
10. Deep in debt, yet free in Christ
(Romans 1:14, 13:8; Psalm 46:1; John 8:36; Galatians 5:1).

Surely, all of these attendant joys of Christian service encourage a spontaneous response of devotion in our hearts. Indeed, the love of Christ compels us to loyalty and total commitment (II Corinthians 5:14).

It is likewise important to realize what following Jesus does not mean. Some people have fallen easy prey to the devil due to a misconception on this subject. When we follow Christ, it does not mean we will have no difficulties. It simply means God will

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supply, by His grace, sufficient strength to meet the problems (II Corinthians 12:9; I Peter 5:7). To be a servant of the Lord does not mean we are perfect. But the Savior does provide us an avenue of cleansing and encouragement (I John 1:7–2:2). This gives us an incentive to press on to higher ground and a closer walk with God (Psalm 26:4).

To be a disciple of the Master does not mean that Satan forgets us. To the contrary, he diligently seeks to devour us through cunning devices (I Peter 5:8; II Corinthians 2:11). Only by steadfast faith and resolute conviction can we withstand such power from "the deceiver of the whole world" (Ephesians 6:10-12; Revelation 12:9). Serving Jesus does not produce unhappiness either. To the contrary, "... Happy are the people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). They can sing praises to the Father from a prison cell at midnight (Acts 16:25). Such songs in the night bespeak a devotion and joy unfathomed by the world. Even overt persecution produces rejoicing (James 1:2).

Following Christ does not mean wealth and ease. In fact, one gets an entirely new set of values as he walks the road of righteousness with the Redeemer. The unsearchable riches of the Lord (Ephesians 3:8) tower high above the fleeting vanities of earth. Know that this land is not our home, we gladly serve in view of our heavenly citizenship (Hebrews 6:19-20).

Conversely, the sincere follower of the Lord fully understands that he does not wait for heaven as the only reward of devotion. This life becomes more meaningful with every passing scene because God gives us perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3) and access to the throne of grace that supplies mercy in every time of need (Hebrews 4:16). The Psalmist gives us a tremendous thought that captures the serene blessings of following Christ: "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

The songwriter, J.R. Baxter, was thinking along this line when he wrote:

"I hold to the hand that is steadfast and sure,
No other foundation is ever secure,
I look for the home that will ever endure;
I hold to the hand of my Lord.

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I hold to the hand of my Savior and King,
'Till safe in that city where angels now sing;
He leads me so gently where still waters flow,
And tells me of heaven, where I long to go."

BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

The most vivid contrast I can find in the Bible is that of Christ's words to Laodicea and Paul's sublime writing in the eighth chapter of Romans. It is manifestly true that the lukewarm Laodiceans had everything but the Lord. That tragic truth becomes even sadder when one realizes they were heirs to all spiritual blessings. Living beneath their privileges caused them to be spiritually blind, miserable, naked, and wretched.

To the contrary, Romans 8 tells us that in the fullness of Christ there can be found no desolation, hesitation, separation, exasperation, condemnation, or desperation!

It is true, of course, that externally persecution and oppression can come to the Christian. But, to the loyal follower of Jesus, none of these things move us (Acts 20:24). In fact, I Peter 1:7–9 indicates that these matters actually draw us nearer to the Lord of Glory; “that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found in praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

Is it any wonder that the inspired apostle thus wrote in Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Truly, the gem of the grand treatise known as Romans—if not indeed the choice section of the entire Bible—is Romans 8. Sublime, profound, spiritual, stirring, sweet, inspirational, enthralling, captivating—all these descriptive terms, and more, set forth the beauty, scope, and grandeur of this provocative section of Holy Writ.

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This passage begins with the phrase, “In Christ Jesus” and ends with the same expression. In between these opening and closing verses, one can find at least 13 specific blessings which belong to all those who are faithfully serving the Redeemer. We can now understand better Isaiah's enthusiasm for the coming Messiah as found in Isaiah 25:9: “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’ ”

Let us now give notice to the privileges, joys, and blessings found for Christians in Romans 8:

1. No condemnation
2. Freedom
3. Life and peace
4. Christ in us
5. Glorious resurrection anticipated
6. Being led by the Spirit
7. Children of God
8. Joint heirs with Christ
9. Help in prayer
10. All things for our good
11. Conformation to Christ's image
12. Nothing to separate us from the Lord
13. We are more than conquerors.

Such grand and glorious benefits ought to make us fully aware of the rich heritage that belongs to the disciples of the Galilean. As we contemplate the abundant joys of the religion our Lord made possible, we must exclaim with songwriter: "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how he could love me a sinner, condemned, unclean."

Truly, the love of God cannot be fathomed by us (Romans 11:33-34), but it can be so deeply appreciated that we will rejoice in the language of the Psalmist: "...from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2).

This great section of God's Word in the very heart of the book of Romans tells us of consecration and dedication on our part; of intercession and salvation on God's part; and of inspiration, expectation, and eager anticipation. These words typify the

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power-packed nature of the chapter. One of the key words is hope. It would seem that the poet, Phoebe Cary, captured the essential statement of this setting in a poem called Nearer Home:

"One sweetly solemn though
Comes to me o'er and o'er:
I am nearer my home today

Than I ever have been before—

Father, perfect my trust;
Let my spirit feel in death,
That her feet are firmly set
On the rock of a living faith!”

As Romans 8 rushes to its graphic, swelling close, one cannot keep back the exuberant spirit of gratitude for the Lord of Glory. Truly, the way of the cross leads home and the Christ of that cross, in His compelling love, will grant us the victory. For “... He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4), and “... this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (I John 5:4). Christ Jesus, in His resplendent beauty, and the power of a righteous faith form an unbeatable combination. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us!

“Christ with me His aid afford, Never to Fall,
never to fall,
While I find my precious Lord Sweeter than all,
sweeter than all.
Jesus is now, and ever will be, Sweeter than all
sweeter than all,
Since I heard His loving call, Sweeter than all,
sweeter than all.”

Let the book of Revelation have the last say—the Son of Man has passed through the clouds unto the Ancient of Days and now a great multitude extols His powerful presence: “... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12)!

When nothing can separate us from such a Savior Divine, we are truly more than conquerors!



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