

HOW TO PROVE THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." II Corinthians 5:17.

Truly the proof of the pudding is in the eating. No matter what the ingredients or how good the recipe, we never fully enjoy the fruit of our culinary art by its appearance; only by its taste. Even so, the mark of a genuine Christian experience is in its difference. A Christian can be identified by the difference between what he used to be and what he is. Also he can be identified by the difference between him and those who are not Christians.

Identity is not by name alone. Calling a person a Christian does not make that person a Christian. If you have ever stayed in a room on the fourteenth floor of a hotel, perhaps you noticed that there was not much distance between the twelfth and the fourteenth floors. Upon a close observation you discovered that the fourteenth floor was really the thirteenth floor. The attempt at subterfuge was merely to allay the fears of superstitious people. But calling the thirteenth floor the fourteenth floor did not make it that. Architecturally and structurally it was not such. The floor was only different in name.

We sometimes arbitrarily put the name Christian on a person. But this effects no change. The change must be an inward one, and one that marks the individual as a "new creature." A true Christian possesses certain intrinsic characteristics which distinguish him.

How can you prove that you are a Christian?

1. By what you are.

Christ said that His disciples were "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." Here are two very common things, a substance and an energy; one is emblematic of the Christian's human condition, and the other his divine origin. Salt and light are universal things. Salt is one of the necessities of life. It is the only article of food common to every nation and used in every stage of civilization. Salt serves a number of purposes -- it keeps things sweet and fresh, it imparts a portion of its taste to the food with which it is mixed thus making it palatable, it whets the appetite, it creates a thirst, it serves as an aseptic, and it preserves from corruption and decay that with which it is mingled. Salt has three outstanding properties -- penetration, purification, and preservation. Salt has two functions -- to season and to preserve. Salt cannot be ignored. It is a positive quantity. If it is present, one must recognize it. If it is absent, it is certain to be missed. Christians are not mere minus signs, but they are positive, pungent, strengthful folks. You may like them or dislike them, but you cannot ignore them.

The Christian functions as the salt of the earth by being just the person that he is in every sphere in which he moves. Frequently people are talking with each other in an unworthy manner. Suddenly a Christian enters the circle, and without saying a word he has an immediate effect, and the language is modified. He is acting as salt in controlling the tendency to pollution.

Christ referred to His followers as "the light of the world." As light Christians are not to be hidden under the bushel of business or the bed of leisure, but they are to be placed where they can be seen by others. We are to shine freely, fully and conspicuously. Just by being a Christian one exposes the other kind of life, makes others feel ashamed of the way in which they are living. Light is a positive thing. Wherever it shines it is going to be seen. It is something that cannot be ignored. Christ's light burns within His followers, shines forth in their looks, their words and their deeds. God has given Christians the ability to glow, to radiate light, or to shine.

2. By what you believe.

We become Christians by grace and through faith. Faith is both a way to life and a way of life. A Christian is judged by whether or not he has exercised a saving faith in Christ, and not by any religious label he has placed on himself. The infallible test is possession, for "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12).

What does a Christian believe that distinguishes him from a non-Christian? He believes in the deity of Christ. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). He believes in the Bible as the Word of God. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:23). He believes in the experience of the new birth. Apart from this experience no one can be a Christian. Christ said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

3. By what you think.

Concerning man Solomon said: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). The child of God discovers a new harmony of thought in which he "thinks God's thoughts after Him." The inner world of your thinking becomes the outer world of your acting. Discover the formula set forth by Paul in the words: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Your personality is bound up with your thought-life. What you do has its source in what you think. The conscious acts out of the subconscious. If you are a new creature, you are going to reveal the character of the change which has come within you by the character of your thought-life. The character of your actions is determined by your thoughts. If you think right, you will act right. A person is as his thoughts. He has control over his thoughts. God helps him in the exercise of that control. Let Christ control your thoughts and He will direct you to say the right words and to do the right deeds.

4. By what you say.

Language indicates many things. It indicates age for one thing. Teenagers have a language expressive of a state of mind which is in the process of development. Age has a language which reflects experience and maturity of judgment. It is seasoned with the salt of wisdom. It has been tempered by the fires of adversity. By his language one betrays his geographical origin. When someone says, "You all," you know that he did not come from north of the Ohio River. In Peter's defection at the betrayal of Christ, the maid at the palace said to him: "Thou art a Galilean, thy speech betrayeth thee."

What you say is an index to what you think. Your speech vocalizes your thoughts. Your speech gives a verbal photograph of the mind. Speech is an evidence of your spiritual make-up. You reveal by your speech the maturity, or immaturity, of your thoughts and character. A Christian is identified by what he says.

5. By what you do.

John the Baptist challenged the religionists of his day to "bring forth fruit meet for repentance." He was asking them to prove the reality of their repentance toward

God and faith toward Christ by the godliness of their lives. When talking to His own disciples about the standards and techniques of Christian behavior, He asked, "What do ye more than others?" He implied that the saved person would do more than the unsaved person. In other words, he would reflect the new standards of grace by the generosity and magnanimity of his behavior toward others. He would do more. He would go further. He would be more gracious and gentle.

You prove that you are a Christian by the extent of your devotion as well as the character of your conduct. The great composer Bach was prompted to write across every piece of music he composed, "Dedicated to the glory of God alone." This is an evidence of devotion's extent and depth. There is no higher motive for life and labor than God's glory. It prevents the sins of pride, jealousy, envy, selfishness, and vainglory. To live for the glory of God gives highmindedness and exalted purpose to life. It will save life from cheapness. He who lives for God's glory lives for the highest and the best.

How will the extent of your devotion to God be reflected? Will you go to church only when it doesn't rain? Will you sacrifice only that which costs you nothing? Will you give to God only that which you can spare, and only what is left after you have taken care of everything else? Or will you express what is meant by a "devotion beyond the call of duty." Will you shun to give the best you have to God and thereby reveal the extent of your devotion to God? What you do will be a reflection of what you are. You simply prove what you are by what you do.

6. By what you produce.

Christ said that the character of the tree determines the character of the fruit. He asked, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The kind and the quantity of your fruit will reveal the nature of your life. It is by your fruit that others will know you. These fruits are the evidence of your inner nature. Christian fruits means that there is a Christian tree. Our Lord said: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

The deeper aspect of this fruit-bearing is found in the "fruit of the Spirit." This fruit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23). These are the qualities of the divine nature which were exemplified by Christ and which are reproduced in Christians through the Holy Spirit. If we are Christ's new creatures, we will do the things He would do.

7. By how you love.

This is the most significant mark by which the Christian proves to others the reality of his Christianity. Christ said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

Christian love is not merely kindness or philanthropy. It is that divine quality which is part of the Christian's new nature. But while love is part of the new nature, it may or may not be manifest in the Christian's relations. This is ours to determine. This is our responsibility, and it ought to be our concern that we prove that we are Christians by the manifestation of love in our lives. Christian love is the absence of selfishness. Love is also the absence of jealousy, envy, and pride. Love is the absence of censoriousness. Christian love looks for the best in others, and does not magnify minor faults until they become major sins. Christians who love are kind, thoughtful of and gracious to others. This was the virtue of Christ and should be ours also. This makes one willing to take the lesser place. It is the absence of that forwardness that always wants first place.

Love is patience extended to its uttermost reach. Forbearance is active love. It is the presence of unity. Love is attractive and cohesive. It draws and unites. Whenever you see divisions among Christians, it is evident that love has not had its way. There can be no division where there is love. "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder" is just as true of Christian relations as it is of marriage. Love is the presence of forgiveness. This is the complete unwillingness to hold grudges, hatreds and angers against those who have wronged us.

These are some of the ways you can prove that you are a Christian, namely, by what you are, by what you believe, by what you think, by what you say, by what you do, by what you produce, and by how you love. To demonstrate these characteristics is not something which results automatically or unconsciously without any effort or aid. These evidences of Christianity are the result of the application of God's means of grace. If you are going to bear Christian fruit, you must live in the spiritual environment which produces this fruit. If a tree is going to bear its fruit seasonally, it must abide in its environment of soil, sun, and rain. For the life of the Christian this environment is the Word of God, prayer, and public worship. As we abide in this atmosphere we prove to others that we really are Christians.