

## PROVING YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

Each of us has been told that "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." No matter what the ingredients, or how good the recipe, we never fully enjoy the product of the culinary art by its appearance; but only by its taste. So, the mark of a genuine Christian experience is the difference it makes in the life. "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). You identify yourself as a Christian by the difference between what you used to be and what you are. You also identify yourself as a Christian by the difference between yourself and those who are not saved.

Identify is not by name alone. Calling a person a Christian does not make that person a Christian.

In all probability you, like myself, have been assigned a room on the fourteenth floor in a hotel. After a few trips on the elevator, you noticed that the distance between the twelfth and fourteenth floors was not very great, and you soon discovered that the fourteenth floor was really the thirteenth. The attempt at subterfuge was to allay the fears of superstitious people. But calling the thirteenth floor the fourteenth did not make it such. Architecturally and structurally it was not changed. The floor was only different in name.

We sometimes arbitrarily put the name Christian on a person. But this does not effect any change. The change must be an inward one, and one that marks the person as a "new creature." A true Christian is possessed of intrinsic characteristics of life which give him his distinguishing mark.

How can you prove that you are a Christian?

### I. By What You Are.

Of His disciples, who were Christians, Christ said: "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), and "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:17). Here are two very common things, a substance and an energy; one is emblematic of the Christian's human condition, and the other of his divine origin. Salt and light are universal things. Salt is the only article of food common to every nation and used in every stage of civilization since the beginning. Light is the universal necessity of all men everywhere. These are given as characteristics of the Christian. They speak of the influence and power of his life.

Salt, which is one of the necessities of life, does its work by being brought into close contact with the substances upon which it is to work. 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. It exists for others, and it does its work gradually, silently, and inconspicuously. Salt is something that 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. Sometimes its presence is exceedingly welcome. At other times it is keenly resented, but always it must be recognized. Like salt, Christians are positive, pungent, and strengthful. You may like or dislike them, but you cannot ignore them.

When salt has lost its saltiness, it is not of any use, and you get rid of it. When a Christian ceases to represent the spirit and character of Christ, the world does not have any use for him. It repudiates him, scorns him, despises him, and will not have anything to do with him. As salt, a Christian is meant to season and to preserve, or prevent the world from becoming more corrupt.

In one of His most astounding statements, Christ referred to the Christian as "the light of the world." This extraordinary statement should cause you to realize what a glorious thing it is to be a Christian. As a Christian, you are to shine freely, fully, and conspicuously. There is no thought here of proud or selfish display. Light does not shout about itself; it just shines. Wherever it shines, it is going to be seen.

Light exposes darkness. Just by being a Christian one exposes the other kind of life. Just by being what he is, a Christian, one makes others uncomfortable in what they are doing and ashamed of it. He brings out the error and the failure of their way of thinking and living. Light is a positive something. We glorify God by living so that His light shines out through our conduct. As light, you are meant to cast His radiance abroad upon the lives of men. In this capacity, you are not to be hid under the bed of leisure or the bushel of business, but to shine where you can be seen by all.

## II. By What You Believe.

We become Christians by grace through faith or belief in Christ. Faith is the channel through which salvation comes from the Saviour to us, but it is also the way of continuing what we begin. Faith is both the way to life and a way of life. We know that you are a Christian when you have exercised a saving faith in Christ, and not by any religious label that you have placed upon yourself. 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). The infallible determination of this possession is an inward assurance, for God's Holy Spirit "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

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). A Christian 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. No one can be a Christian apart from this experience. "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). A Christian will not be antagonistic to these truths which brought his new life into existence.

## III. By What You Think.

Solomon said, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Thinking is the most valuable trait with which you are endowed. God endowed you with the ability to think, and He expects you to use your mind aright. There is nothing, whether good or evil, true or false, that was not, first of all, a conception in the mind. Today a thought, tomorrow a building; today a thought,

tomorrow a machine; today a thought, tomorrow an advance in civilization. So it goes. Thought is the seed from which the affairs of life spring. A man is what his thinking is. As his thoughts are, so his life will be, happy or sad.

Your personality is bound up with your thought life. What you do has its source in what you think. Can you say that the unseen parts of your life are as clean and wholesome as those parts which are seen? In other words, does your character match your reputation? We are careful about germs that infect the body, but careless about ideas that ruin the mind. Your religion and conduct cannot be right if your thinking is wrong. Perhaps you have heard somebody say, "Let a man think anything he pleases, so long as he behaves decently. It does not matter what a man thinks; it is what he does that counts." What nonsense! There is always hope for a man if you get him to think right. If a man thinks right, he will act right. Unkind thoughts cause one to be unkind. Selfish thinking results in selfish living. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." A man is as his thoughts. He has control over his thoughts. God helps in the exercise of that control. Yield your thoughts to the Lord and He will enable you to say the right words and to do the right deeds.

#### IV. By What You Say.

What you say is an index to what you think. It vocalizes thought. It gives a verbal photograph of the mind. Your speech gives evidence of your spiritual make-up. It tells your spiritual age. By your words you reveal the maturity, or immaturity, of your thoughts and character.

A Christian is identified by what he says because he has a new set of words in his vocabulary. He acquires a vocabulary that is Christ-centered and Bible-nurtured. He speaks of God, Christ, the Bible, righteousness, love, and grace.

#### V. By What You Do.

Christ challenged the religionists of His day to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." In other words, He was asking them to prove the reality of their faith by the regularity of their lives. When Christ instructed His own disciples in the standards and techniques of Christian behavior, He said, "What do ye more than others?" He intimates here that the saved person would do more than the unsaved person. In other words, he would reflect the new standards of grace by the magnanimity and generosity of his behavior toward others. He would "do more." He would go further. He would be more gracious and more gentle. He would demonstrate that he possessed Christ by his Christlikeness.

The measure of our Christian faith will be known by the character of our conduct and by the extent of our devotion. The great composer Bach was prompted to write across every piece of music he composed these words, "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 is a preventive against the sins of pride, jealousy, envy, selfishness, and vain glory. To live for God's glory gives highmindedness and exalted purpose to life. It will save life from cheapness. It will preserve life from the temporary. He who lives for God's glory lives for the best and the highest.

How will the extent of our devotion to God be reflected? Will we go to church only when it doesn't rain? Will we sacrifice only that which costs us nothing?

Will we give to God only that which we can spare, and only what is left over after we have taken care of everything else? Or will we express what a recent writer called "devotion beyond the call of duty"? Will we shun to give the best we have and thus reveal the extent of our devotion to God?

#### VI. By What You Produce.

Christ said: "By their fruits ye shall know them." He taught that the character of the tree determines the character of the fruit. He queried, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The kind and abundance of your fruit will reveal the nature of your life. It is by your fruit that men will know you. Your fruits are evidences of your inner nature. A Christian life will bear Christian fruit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness faith, Meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23).

You produce fruit by doing the things that Christ would do. If you are a new creature, you will live a new life and do new things. You will do the things He would do.

If you are going to bear Christian fruit, you must live in the spiritual environment in which this fruit can be produced. If a tree is going to bear its seasonal fruit, it must abide in its environment of soil, sun, and rain. For the life of the Christian this environment is prayer, worship, and the study of the Word of God. Abiding in this environment, you can manifest the characteristics of a Christian. You can prove that you are a Christian by what you are, what you believe, what you think, what you say, what you do, and what you produce.