



BE A REAL CHRISTIAN

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Many times over the years, I've heard it said, "Be a real Christian." Raised in a Christian home with strict legalistic standards, I wasn't quite sure what that meant. We didn't smoke or chew, dance or attend movies, and certainly, we did not associate with anyone who promoted these habits. This was our concept of "real" Christianity.

We didn't have television in our house until I was in the sixth grade. Daddy shielded us from this uncertain new venture so that all I can remember watching is *Price Is Right* and Lawrence Welk. On Saturday, in preparation for church on Sunday, Daddy always polished everyone's shoes while he watched Lawrence Welk. Mom took this time to prepare Sunday lunch, and I would read my Sunday school lesson. Then, on Sunday, we went to church in the morning and evening, taking a nap in the afternoon. I loved church, but I could have skipped the nap.

I'm not sure what other people did on Sunday, but our family fervently served the Lord, honoring the principles that we understood to be most important. Our activities were focused entirely on the Lord because Sunday was the Lord's Day. We gave this day totally to Him. Daddy even turned down invitations to family events because it was Sunday.

I suppose you are now wondering if I felt deprived. Absolutely not! We lived for God, and this was our concept of how it was done. It was a

wonderful life! Yet, when you consider behavior that exemplifies real Christianity and characteristics that undermine it – like gossip, jealousy, bitterness, revenge, anger, selfishness, and impatience – perhaps we missed the main point. A Christian is not simply someone who adheres to a particular dress code or refuses to drink soda on Sunday.

Today, I've watched jealousy destroy lives and injure families. I've cried over shouting matches that obliterated the bounty of God's peace. I've witnessed bitterness that sanctioned revenge and destroyed marriages. Certainly, this evil behavior is far more important than a Sunday afternoon nap. The Scripture says, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."¹ It counsels

GOD BLESS YOU

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I read an article where the author said Christians need to shut up and all I could think while I read it was, "This author needs to shut up."

I honestly can't recall my mother ever using the words "shut up" when I was young, and that's probably a good thing. We (my spouse, daughter, and I) probably say it too often, but then, delicacy was never my first behavior choice. I put that out there, being brutally honest, to make my own point here.

However, to start things off, I refer to the Scripture:

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But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith ... (Gal 5:22).

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand (Php 4:5).

Notice the words “gentleness” and “moderation”. These are in essence the same thing, a mildness of spirit that brings peace.

Now, let me say there are times when Christians need to speak up because, unfortunately, the secular non-Christian world sees our silence as acceptance and, often, weakness, as well. But the manner that we speak makes the difference.

Speaking gently, peacefully, is, anymore, harder and harder to do when we are bashed over

the head with issues that go outside of our beliefs. As if head-bashing will change our minds in the first place. Yet, twice in the Scriptures are we told to spread the “gospel of peace”, which goes distinctly against that. (Rm 10:15; Eph 6:15)

Peace spoken in gentleness and kindness, with longsuffering and faith. We’re not walked ON in the process, but walked WITH, the other person able to communicate and not feel condemned.

Ah ... condemnation. That’s the product of the head-basher. But again, the Word of God says it isn’t part of how we behave. (Rm 8:1) We neither give it to others nor receive it to ourselves, and frankly, as well-meaning as that author was, as correct of a point as they made, I was prompted, instead, to change my words to not be so crass, to maybe, next time, not say “shut up”, but “God bless you.”

And thus, to better reflect Christ. I wonder how that will make the difference in me ... in you.

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us to lay aside all bitterness, wrath, anger, and evil speaking.² It reminds us that God has said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”³ The Word of God also declares, “Overcome evil with good.”⁴ This principle has held me steady for many decades.

These commands and many others dictate the behavior of a real Christian. They are far beyond religious dogma, which only addresses outward appearances. Instead, they reflect an attitude of a heart totally surrendered to a great and mighty God.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, the apostle Paul writes, “Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” I love this verse because it allows us to improve, to make progress. The New Living Translation confirms this saying, “Let us work toward complete purity because we fear God.” Yet, as we work toward purity, there is no doubt that we will fall short from time to time. On these occasions, we will hear God’s Word and His Spirit say, “Start over. Try again. God will forgive and forget.” This means that a harsh word is not an

unforgivable disaster. A judgmental plan that seeks revenge is not the final word. Yes, they are SIN. And we say that in capital letters – THEY ARE SIN. But in God, there is forgiveness.

In a moment of deep contribution, we can bow our heart before God and say, “I was wrong. Please forgive me.” The blood of Jesus Christ forgives us and cleanses us.⁵ Then, we covenant with God not to repeat that sin. We refuse to live our lives like a train travelling the same railroad track over and over again. We are not going down that track again. We will live to please God.

The Holy Spirit will help us! With His help, we can successfully crucify our flesh! We can lay aside ungodly passions and lust. Not by our own willpower, bulldog tenacity, or superior intelligence, but because our contrite and broken heart seeks God above all things. Because we embrace truth – God’s truth – depend on His Spirit, and desert our selfish desires.

This is the path of a REAL CHRISTIAN who is perfecting holiness in the fear of God. This is our path!

¹Jas 3:16 ²Eph 4:31 ³Rm 12:19 ⁴Rm 12:21 ⁵1Jn 1:9