

The Price of Christianity

What is a true Christian? In today's times we see a great variety of people claiming to be Christian. There are mainstream preachers who flaunt excessive wealth with their extravagant clothing, expensive cars, large real estate properties, etc., and even some can boast as being millionaires or even billionaires. In any city one can find church buildings making an ostentatious display of wealth. All of these claiming that their success and accumulation of wealth is a sure sign of God's approval and blessings. Actors, singers and entertainers who have become rich by performing (some of which are the vilest and most immoral), give thanks to God for their success. Even our president boasts that his possessions are evidence that he is a spiritual man and that he has a relationship with God. These people and organizations seem to ignore what the scriptures say on being a Christian and having God's favor. Their criteria are in complete opposition to the word of God. So, what do the scriptures say about wealth and its relation to our spiritual success? Matthew 19:24 gives us a strong warning about the dangers of riches. It says "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Mark 4:19, in the parable of the seeds sown, warns of a class that "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." These are but two of the many scriptures that warn the Christian of the dangers of riches. Yet we find that today many so-called followers of Christ are making the accumulation of material possessions their primary pursuit though the scriptures warn us that we cannot serve two masters; you cannot serve God and mammon. (Mat.6:24) Many people of faith have fallen into despair and are burdened with anxiety worrying about their financial status, ...do I have enough? ...will I have enough? ...have I saved enough? ...will it be there when I need it? After these things do the heathens seek. Ironically, at least in the U.S., there is printed on every form of currency the phrase "In God We Trust," and this should be an instruction and admonition to every Christian who has it in their possession. By doing such we can be like the apostle, in that whether we have little or we have much, to be content. Another prevailing thought in Christianity is that "just being a good person" makes you a Christian. In the preceding verses of the Matthew 19 text, the story is about a man who came to Jesus wanting to know what he must do to have eternal life. The Lord gave him a list of things he should do and the man's reply was, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." Then the man was asked to give up his earthly pursuits and follow Christ. The result was the man went away sorrowful. It is evident that this man was a "good" person who according to his confession had, being a Jew, done what was required of him as pertaining to the law he was under and apparently had been richly blessed by keeping it. History is full of people of the most noble character; people who sacrificed their life and liberties on behalf of a hope, of a people, and of mankind in general. We applaud those of such noble character, but does such action from someone merit them the name of Christian? We answer No. But if these "good" and "noble" people cannot claim the name of Christ, WHO CAN? Let us look to the word of God to define the genuine Christian. First one must have faith in Jesus

Christ; that He was the son of God sent to be the lamb that will take away the sins of the world. (Jn. 1:29) Secondly that it is through Him and Him only that we can obtain forgiveness of sin (Act 4:12) Thirdly, by having our sins forgiven we have a standing with God the Father. This is called "justification." (Rom. 3:24) It is provided by the Grace of God. It is a free gift. None of the children of Adam could obtain it on their own. It is provided when we "believe" in Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians think that this is the only and last step to be taken in order to be engrafted into the body of Christ. However, to be Christ-like (a footstep follower), more is required. If we have been made right (justified) through the grace of God (Christ's sacrifice), what are we to do with this grace? The apostle Paul warns us that we could receive it in vain. (2Cor. 6:1) In the 12th chapter of Romans he urges us to present our (justified) bodies a living sacrifice and not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the "renewing of our minds." THIS IS SANCTIFICATION. It is a whole new way of thinking. (2 Cor. 5:17) It is not worldly, it is not concerned with riches, prestige, honors, rewards or anything else this present life has to offer. The old life is dead, and dead with it are all of its earthly aims, hopes and ambitions. True Christianity goes beyond belief. James tells us belief is nothing; some devils believe and tremble. True Christianity is sanctification and sanctification is works. "I will show thee my faith (my sanctification) by my works." (Jas. 2:18) But what is works? And what does it mean to present our bodies a living sacrifice? Works may be classified in two categories: 1. Character development. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy (sanctified) and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness longsuffering." (Col. 3:12) It is most important that true Christians develop Christ-like character in every aspect of their lives. The tree is known by the fruit which it bares and the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. (Gal. 5:22-23) These things should be found in abundance in the heart or at least in the sincere desires of the heart of a true Christian. If we find ourselves lacking in any of these fruits, we should seek the Lord's assistance and daily strive to obtain them in our character. This will be a life-time struggle because those who strive to do so will have a constant warring between the new mind and the old fleshly mind that is always trying to resurrect itself. 2. Sacrifice. Christ said "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mat.16:24) What does it mean to deny oneself? Self-denial is the giving up or surrendering of our rights, privileges and preferences in order to help others and to do the will of the Heavenly Father. Some err in thinking that abstaining from sin is sacrificing. Abstaining from sin is required and expected of all men. It is not a sacrifice. Sacrificing is the willful surrendering of things that are rightfully ours; our time, our talent, our money, our all. These are the things we must lay upon the alter of sacrifice just as Christ did if we should be his followers. We have to be ever mindful of how we use our possessions that we are not wasteful, slothful or negligent in using them in the Lord's service. Such extreme discipline, thoughtfulness and care given in our use of what the Lord has entrusted us with is sure to bring persecution from the world, for this new way of thinking and behaving is in opposition to the ways of the world. 1 Peter verses 2:11 and 4:4 tell us to think it not strange that the world does not understand and thinks ill of us. But if we have enlisted in the Lord's

service, this is our portion of the cross we have to be willing to bear. But what are the benefits of pledging our life, our all to Christ? We have the assurance that in this life God is causing all things to work together for our good. He will provide us with everything we need. We are spiritually begotten children of God, we are the apple of his eye. If in this age we are willing to lay down our lives and suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him. In the resurrection we will be given glory, honor and immortality; in other words, we will become part of God's intimate spiritual family. So, if we have taken on the name of Christ, let us see to it that it "cost us our all" and we are making our best efforts to be copies of Him. We should: 1. Delight to do the Father's will, 2. Love the Father with all our heart, mind and being; holding nothing back (even life itself) to serve Him and His cause, 3. Take up our cross (endure hardship and affliction) and follow in his footsteps (sacrifice), and 4. Live our lives in such accord with Him that He will not be ashamed to proclaim us before the Heavenly Father and call us HIS BRETHREN.