

What Should it Mean to be a Christian?

by Larry Plachno

What should it mean to be a Christian? Many people would define a Christian as a follower of Jesus Christ. That answer is somewhat of a cop out since it fails to explain how following Christ changes your life and your concept of right and wrong.

In looking for an answer to this question, the best place to start is at the beginning. Why did Jesus Christ come to our earth? The standard answer is so He could suffer and die to atone for our sins. If you take a minute to think about it, this tells us two things. The first item should make us somewhat thoughtful . . . it tells us that sin exists and there is a right and a wrong. The second item this tells us is downright terrifying . . . that there must be atonement for doing wrong? Have you thought lately on how to atone for your wrongs?

Hence, one of the first duties of a Christian is to determine right from wrong and to avoid doing wrong. How do we determine what is right and what is wrong? Jesus Christ gave us that answer when he instituted the New Covenant.

Prior to the coming of Christ, the Hebrews had a multitude of rules and regulations that is known as the Old Covenant. There were thousands of individual rules that went so far as to cover what you could do on the sabbath and even how to prepare food. In its place, Christ gave us the New Covenant that is based on two criteria; love of God and love of neighbor.

Why this switch from thousands of individual rules to two simple criteria? Two different reasons have been suggested. One is that society had matured to a point where we could understand cri-

teria and no longer needed individual rules. When kids are small, you tend to give them individual rules such as “don’t touch the hot stove,” and “don’t play in the street.” However, as they mature, they are more able to determine right and wrong on their own.

A second reason suggested is that the old rules could not possibly keep pace with the advancements our society was making. Some of the old rules dealt with food preparation. With primitive sanitary conditions, those rules were useful and valid. However, with the sanitary conditions and food processing procedures of modern times, some of those items were no longer concerns. At the same time, the old rules failed to keep up with new developments. None of those old rules mentioned printing, television, aircraft, automobiles, the internet, modern medical developments or cloning.

Putting Christ’s “love of neighbor” admonishment into workable terms is very simple. Years of research into social problems has disclosed that there are only two alternatives when we are faced with an action or decision that could impact others. We can either be unselfish and pro-society in making our decision based on how it would impact others and society; or, we can be selfish, permissive and pro-choice and do what we want regardless of who we harm.

There is a reason why there are only two alternatives. It is a process called desensitization that tends to make us accept selfishness, permissiveness and the pro-choice attitude while we ignore right and wrong. When people see others being permissive and pro-choice or when they are told that it is acceptable to be permissive and pro-choice, they then become



Have we become so selfish and permissive that we have forgotten about right and wrong and about good and evil? When is the last time you heard anyone talking about the criterion for right and wrong? What does right and wrong mean to a Christian?

more permissive and pro-choice in their own actions and decisions. Hence, permissive and pro-choice decisions are interconnected and people who are permissive and pro-choice in one area are statistically more likely to be permissive and pro-choice in other areas.

This is the reason why there is so much selfishness, permissiveness and violence in our world. People no longer worry about right and wrong and no longer care about doing what is best for others and society.

This might sound like some modern development but in actuality it is as old as Christianity. The early Christians knew that the basic principle of Christianity was putting others first. It is recorded in the Bible and elsewhere that these early Christians went out of their way to let others go first, avoid harming others, and do what is best for society. Many dictionaries still define a Christian as someone who is humane, decent, generous and has a loving regard for others.

What is interesting is that research and statistics show us that when we work together for the good of society, all of us come out ahead. Being selfish, permissive and pro-choice pulls our society in different directions which is why we have problems. People who put others first, work with other people, and do what is best for society, tend to be healthier, live longer, are less likely to live in poverty and less likely to be homeless. Hence, if we work together and put others first we will have a very workable society and will approach a heaven on earth. Is this what Jesus Christ was trying to teach us?

Why have Christians lost this attitude to put others and society first? The answer is that they have been desensitized by the selfish, permissive and pro-choice attitude in society, in our media, and even from our political leaders. Many Christians no longer talk about right and wrong. Catholic confessionals are empty these days because no one thinks about right and wrong anymore even if they still call themselves Christians.

If you stand back and look at this situation, there is a very sobering thought. We are given the option of either being unselfish and pro-society or of being selfish, permissive and pro-choice. This makes our life on earth sound very much like a test for an afterlife. When you stand



Jesus Christ suffered and died to atone for our sins. Hence, we know that there is a right and a wrong, and that there must be an atonement for evil. People who ignore right and wrong make a mockery of Christ's suffering and death.

in judgement before God, will you be able to say that you were unselfish and pro-society or admit that you were selfish, permissive and pro-choice?

What can we do about the fact that our society has become desensitized to right and wrong and has turned selfish and permissive? The obvious solution is to sensitize people to the fact that there is a right and a wrong. We need to talk about right and wrong and a criterion for right and wrong. Make people think about right and wrong and push them towards selecting a criterion for right and wrong. Are they unselfish and pro-society and base their actions and decisions on how they impact others and society? Or, are they selfish, permissive and pro-choice

and do whatever they want regardless of who gets hurt?

However, at least a little bit of caution is advised. People do not like to be told it is wrong to be selfish, permissive and pro-choice. Remember that the son of a Jewish carpenter walked this earth 2000 years ago and admonished people to love God and love their neighbor. His reward was to be crucified on a cross.

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