

Being A Christian

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Given 02-Jun-18; Sermon #1436A

Many of you may remember a man named J. Paul Getty. In 1957 he was named by Fortune Magazine as the richest man in the world. He authored several books, not that he needed the money. That was not why he wrote the books, maybe he was just bored. One of them was entitled, *How To Be Rich*. You might think this book, like many others did during that time, that it was about how to get rich. That was not what it was about at all. It was about living as a rich person. It was about being rich.

I want to talk to you today about how to be a Christian, not how to become one; but being a Christian. Christians remain the largest religious group in the world in 2015, making up nearly one third, 31% of the earth's 7.3 billion people. That is according to a new Pew Research Center demographic analysis. It is estimated 2.3 billion people claim to be a Christian. But what does it take to be a Christian in the eyes of God? Let us begin by turning to Luke 14. Jesus Christ is speaking here.

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Notice He did not say he cannot *become* My disciple. He said they cannot *be* My disciple. These are pretty hard words. I have heard it said many times this word “hate” does not really mean hate, it means love less than. If you look it up in the Greek, dig a little deeper than *Strong's*, and go into the Greek experts about this word, and they will tell you no, no, no. This word means hate or despise.

Was Jesus telling us here that we are literally supposed to hate our father, mother, our life, or all our siblings? No, Jesus spoke using a figure of speech. He did not mean this literally. It is a figure of speech. He used figures of speech many times. Remember when he said, if your eye offends you, pluck it out, if your hand offends you, and then cut it off. He literally did not mean for you to do that; He was speaking in a figure of speech. Now the reason He puts it this way, just like He did with plucking your eye out or cutting off your hand, was He wanted to emphasize the seriousness of what He was talking about. He is demonstrating to us the seriousness of being a Christian disciple. It says in verse 27,

Luke 14:27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

He is laying down some more requirements; we have to bear the cross. He does not mean that we have to tow around a cross, it is a figure of speech. Do you think that is going to be hard? It is going to be tough. He goes on to tell us that we need to count the cost.

Luke 14:28-30 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’?

I remember people in past, many times people I knew over the years who would say, “I have turned myself over to the Lord. I have given my heart to the Lord.” I said, “Really?” But in about three months or six months later, they took it back. So what is He saying here? He is talking about some serious business. This is just not some fad. It is serious business. Drop down to verse 33.

Luke 14:33 “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

You could become one, but you just cannot *be* one. This is serious business, brethren. Do we count the cost? I am sure when many of you were baptized, the minister counseled with you about counting the cost. At that point in time it probably went in one ear and out the other about what the cost really would be. You see, we have signed into a contract, our covenant with God which we took on when we were baptized. My baptism anniversary, I think, is tomorrow. June 3, 1975. It was a Tuesday night, at Joe Baity’s parents’ house. Burgin Baity, Joe’s father, was an elder then. We might ask ourselves, why would anyone want to be a Christian when you look at this? When you look at this contract, well, one reason is we do not want to die. God offers us eternal life. Turn over to John 6.

John 6:47 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

That is part of the agreement, right? He says,

John 6:50-51 “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

Because of this the Jews were arguing with each other, saying “How is He able to give us His flesh to eat?” The Jews should have known better. They understood what covenants and contracts were all about. They should have known that He was speaking with a figure of speech; not literally, that He was not talking about them coming over and gnawing on His arm. They knew that to make a covenant, people would often have a meal together, sit down, and they would come to a negotiated agreement. We might want to negotiate with God on becoming a Christian. You say, “Well, I’ll give you one day a week, and some of the money that I earn. Let’s see, what else can I give you? Well, you can have all that I possess, and all my family after I die.” Jesus says it is not negotiable. You can either take it or leave it.

John 6:53-54 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

This is the agreement, the contract we signed. It is called Passover. We just recommitted to the signed contract again for another year. There will be eternal life. What is it worth to you? Are you ready to sign the contract and renew the covenant with God? It is not negotiable. We either take it or we leave it.

So you want to be a Christian? Not merely to become one, but to *be* one. I want to list some of the requirements of being a Christian. The requirements we are going to look at are not all-inclusive. Obviously there will be a lot more to it. But we are going to have to meet these requirements.

Turn with me over to the Old Testament prophet called Micah. We have read this many, many times in years passed.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Should anybody want to say, “Well, you know, that’s just Old Testament talk. That’s not really part of our agreement now. Just turn over to Matthew 23 and let us look at what Jesus Christ Himself reiterated these requirements.

Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Notice He is talking about a law or commandment. Judgment? No. Here He shows that is to do justice, mercy, love, and faith. If you are going to walk humbly with God, it has to be in faith. Why? Because God requires it. He goes on to say that these you were obligated to do. You are required to do this and not leave the others undone.

Our first requirement to being a Christian is to *do justice*.

Now the word just or justice and the word righteous or righteousness, did you know they are identical in both the Old and New Testament?

Some translators would render the original word “just” for “justice,” and other times they just render it “righteous” or “righteousness” with no apparent reason. Notice Isaiah 56:1 where the same word is used.

Isaiah 56:1 Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.”

Where the word righteousness and justice are the same word, they could have switched them off and said, do righteousness or My justice to be revealed. I do not know why they randomly did it that way, it does not matter. We understand to do justice means to do righteousness. Whichever word they use, it means essentially the same thing, in verse 2 he says,

Isaiah 56:2 “Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it [notice here, we get back to the law]; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

So the scripture talks about evil. As a matter of fact, pretty much anybody who does not keep God's commandments, in the Scripture is called evil. It is just bad. It is not really the way we would think of evil, but they are just not living right. They used the word evil. We know in Psalm 119:172 it says that “All your commandments are righteousness,” a very familiar verse to you. So righteousness has to do with the keeping of the law.

Mark 12:28-30 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is:

‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”

Now the words, “with all your” is literally “from the source of.” That is the meaning. The word “with” is a Greek proposition called “ek,” which denotes that from which actions or emotion proceed. Furthermore, the word “all” means whole, entire, and complete. These words “with all your” strongly stress the fact that there can be no holding back or incompleteness in our commitment to God without serious repercussions.

Note that the words “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,” are not condensed, as in with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Instead, the words “with all your” are repeated with equal emphasis on each faculty that we are to be using in loving God. Let us take a look at each one of these faculties that Jesus said we are to be using to love God.

Our *heart*, first of all, brings out the concept of the inner person, that which is the center of our life. Our relationship with God is central. God is not a side issue or once a week a balm. Perhaps above all else, heart stresses the idea of our affections, which ultimately determine our actions. It means setting our affections on Him.

Matthew 6:21 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

It means desiring God above all else. Solely used to refer to the physical life, the love God with all your soul or life means to be willing to give one's life to God and devote all to Him. That means *total* commitment.

Mind refers to ideas, viewpoints, perspective, or perspective of life. To love God with all your mind means to submit our minds, our thought patterns, our opinions, and our decisions based on God's Word. It means going not on our own understanding and bringing every thought into captivity to His obedience. Not easy, it is a rough road and that is part of the contract.

We are to love Him with all our *strength*. This refers to our abilities or talents or gifts. All of these are to be surrendered and devoted to Him for His glory. We are not to lean on our own strength, we are to use our strength as we lean by faith on Him. Every fiber of our being, every aspect of our lives is called up and focused on the majesty and essence of God. He is to be the very basic reason for our being and our actions.

We can see a big picture forming here. God does not want us just to love Him just part of the time or with part of our being. Rather with *all of our being*, everything we have. We cannot place anything, anyone before God with all our affections and desires, with every breath of air we take, we have to use for His glorification.

A second requirement to being a Christian is to *love mercy*. Nowhere is the essence of mercy revealed more clearly than in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Then we get into the second part of the law and this is called loving your neighbor as yourself. That is what Jesus said. That is what the law tells us, love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Turn to Luke the 10th chapter. Nowhere is the essence of mercy revealed more clearly than in the Parable of the Good Samaritan than in verse 25.

Luke 10:25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [He said what is part of the agreement that I have to do?] He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” [Well, wait a minute.] But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

I am not going to read the whole thing here. This is the story of the Good Samaritan. You guys know it and can read it later if you do not remember it. I think everybody probably does. He is talking about a guy who went on journey. He became a victim, he had been beaten and robbed and left for dead. A priest and a Levite come by and kept going and left him for dead. They actually showed no concern for him whatsoever. A Samaritan, whom the Jews did not like at all—to them they were virtually dogs—who was on a journey, came upon him. When he saw him, he felt compassion. You know the rest of the story, what he did to help this man. He went way out of his way, he felt compassion and any acted on mercy.

Luke 10:36-37 “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

It is a requirement. The words most often translated “mercy” in the King James Version conveys strong feelings of pity, sympathy, compassion, and affection. The Old Testament word is sometimes translated “loving kindness” in the King James. The word loving kindness is the same exact word that describes God in the Old Testament as the Greek word *agape* that describes Him in the New Testament. Same word, same meaning in some places they will translate it “mercy.”

That, to us, describes one important aspect of mercy. When God looks at suffering people, he feels compassion. God is not a God without affection. He feels compassion toward them in their need. With God though, compassion always precedes mercy. Compassion precedes mercy, it never stops there. He continues with His mercy. Let us look at verse 45 of Matthew 5. Jesus was speaking here.

Matthew 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

I want you to notice the very same thing where he commanded us to be perfect in Luke, same setting.

Therefore the command to be perfect, means to be merciful. That is, to be perfect in God's eyes is when we are merciful and this mercy is demonstrating that we love our enemies just as that Samaritan did. Mercy is love in action, or loving kindness, being like God. Compassion differs from mercy, in that compassion is about an emotional connection that moves us toward an action, while mercy is the action itself. I do not know if any of you remember, but I gave a sermonette on this several years ago at the Feast of Tabernacles on mercy. You cannot stop compassion; you can cut it off.

I John 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

I want you to see that whoever has this world's possessions or goods and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion cannot stand. You mean we could just shut it off if we want to? Yes! He goes on to say, how can the love of God reside in such a person? We have to be careful. You can feel that emotion of compassion toward somebody, and you need to let it extend to mercy to carry through. That is what God would do.

This leads us to the third requirement, which is *walk humbly in faith with our God*. In the Scripture the words walk, walked, walking, is translated over four hundred times in the King James and the majority of the time it refers to a particular course of life. The way in which we live, or the way we act, or in the way in which we behave. The phrase walk with God is rendered in the Septuagint in the Old Testament, as "pleased God." We know that it involves faith then. Walking with God has to do with pleasing Him. So if you want to please Him you have to walk in faith. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. Just look at Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. We are just hoping in the contract that God is going to follow through with what He said, right? I think we can trust that teacher. He is going to follow through on that, but we have to get a conviction of things not seen. You see we are *convinced* that what God says is true and He is going to honor the contract.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

We must believe in the fact that God exists, that He is Sovereign, He is the Almighty Eternal God and He will perform what He says.

Hebrews 10:38 "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

We must trust Him with all our heart, with all our being, not leaning on our own understanding. We must know that God loves us and will perform what He says He will perform. We see that all that walk with God are also required to be *humble*. A humble person is gentle. Jesus says that He was gentle, led by the Spirit. A humble person should be bold and aggressive for doing the will of God. Christ was, but never contentious or hostile. You know you should be poor in spirit. Never thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to because there is just absolutely no room for arrogance, pride, jealousy, and certainly not self righteousness, in the heart or mind of a person who is going to walk humbly.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility.

God requires us to be humble but walk in faith and He will reward us with honor at the end of this contract. Total commitment is called for.

Psalm 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

This means that the whole person is placed figuratively on the altar of God as a living sacrifice—spirit, body, and soul. This is what is required to be a Christian—to do justice or righteousness, follow His laws of mercy, and that also involves forgiveness, because forgiving others is a merciful act. To walk humbly in faith with our God and with all that entails.

Like I said before, this is not all in one place. It is not easy to walk this way. Jesus actually said it would be difficult to be His disciple. Let us look one more time at the words of Christ.

Matthew 7:13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”

How many people was that? Six point three billion have entered in at the broad wide gate, the broad way, the easy road.

Matthew 7:14 “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Jesus said that. Remember,

Matthew 22:14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

There are many who chose the wide gate, the easy road, who call themselves Christian. Only a few will actually choose, find and choose that narrow gate that is difficult and stay on it. These are the ones that are *being* a Christian, that are walking that difficult way.

I am leaving you with a question that we all need to ask ourselves: Did I just *become* a Christian or am I *being* a Christian?