

“CHRISTIANS”

are often seen as

**WORLDLY AND NOMINAL**

**or**

**RESISTANT AND CARELESS**

**or**

**TRUE AND FAITHFUL**

How does God see us?

Are we culturally conformed Christians, or are we being transformed into the image of Christ?

*'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.'*  
Rom 12:2

When we understand that Jesus enrolled every believer in His work of world Evangelism, we know every true believer is on a mission to draw people to Christ. *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth."*  
Acts 1:8

*"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*  
Matt 28:19-20

With this promise of the Spirit and the command in mind, we should be concerned about the lack of Evangelism undertaken by many members of local churches. And this failing is followed closely by a seeming indifference to each church member being committed to building up one another in Christ by the effective use of God given spiritual gifts. *'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.'* 1 Cor 12:4-7

When we see the abundant lack of devoted service to one another in the church, we must wonder if those who claim to be Christian have actually been born again by faith in the power of the Spirit of God.

Since God is not ineffective in achieving His goals, the problem must be with those who claim to be Christian but lack the fruitfulness that resembles what Jesus requires of all who follow Him.

This dilemma of worldliness in the Church is nothing new, for many hundreds of years the church has been populated by unconverted and

lazy people who present themselves amongst the truly chosen children of God without any real distinction in quality.

But since God enables all those whom He has drawn into relationship with Christ, true Christians get about obeying His word and doing His will in the manner He calls them to fulfil. *'For it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure.'* Phil 2:13

This work of God is given in the explanation Jesus to any who claim to be in His kingdom. *"I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."* John 15:5-6

Those who are indeed in Christ will be fruitful. A lack of fruitfulness is evidence of separation from the source of life that is in Christ alone.

What follows in the article are the collective thoughts of many committed Christians who grieve the lack of kingdom fruitfulness in the local church.

For the true believer, remaining in Christ will mean His love will be so compelling that the self of unfruitfulness will be denied in order that the life of Christ will take over and be the reason for living. And as a result, this compulsion of love for Christ will produce the qualities of His life that get the results that always remain of value in the kingdom of God.

And not only are we concerned with the lack of effective discipling in our churches, we are just as concerned for those who think they have a place in the kingdom of God and will instead get a mighty shock. Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:21–23 should be a wake-up call to cultural Christianity: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'"*

The unfruitful and the culturally conformed Christian don't see that the whole life of sacrificial service is the will of God in following the example of Christ and applies to them.

These worldly Christians are more concerned with the comforts of this world and its attractions than living in the presence of Christ in order to serve in His kingdom the Church of today.

In some cases, the problem of unfruitfulness is due to a lack of correct teaching concerning the word of God. *'All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.'* 2 Tim 3:16-17

And even if there has been much learning, and the mind is full of sound doctrine, unless there is a determination to put it into practice, we are more deceived for learning and never coming to the truth intended.

Without the application of what we learn we are worse off than the unconverted. *'Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.'* 2 Tim 3:7

We have only gained knowledge when we are doers of the Word of God and not just hearers. Until we start witnessing to Christ under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit and begin doing something about making disciples as Jesus commanded, we haven't really begun to follow Him.

But due to the power of God's word wielded by the Spirit, immature Christians who are unfruitful can change. For much of our lack of obedience in following Christ is our own reluctance to live for Him.

In his book "Speaking the truth in love" David Powlison records the words of Richard Sibbes. (1577–1635)

"It were an easy thing to be a Christian, if religion stood only in a few outward works and duties, But to take the soul to task and to deal roundly with our own hearts, and to let conscience have its full work, and to bring the soul into spiritual subjection unto God, This is not so easy a matter, because the soul out of self-love is loath to enter into itself, lest it should have other thoughts of itself than it would have." Richard Sibbes

He goes on to write: "Sibbes gets first things first. Jesus' almighty kindness comes to sinful people in order to recreate us as children of God's glory. He remakes us poor in spirit, so we face our dire need for outside help. He remakes us boldly committed and grateful, knowing whom we have believed. He remakes us tender hearted regarding the interests of others. As you become willing to "have other thoughts" of yourself than those that arise spontaneously, you initiate torrent of other changes. The over throw of your self-righteousness produces wonderfully different thoughts about Jesus Christ and other people.

But the soul's blind self-love resists this sort of change. The one activity that creates the truly human life feels harmful to us instinctively. What keeps us from loving and needing God with all that we are? Something in us doesn't want to face the Someone who insists on having the first and last say about our lives. Naturally, that something in us does not want to be seen for what it is. It is allergic to the truth about ourselves because we have an allergic reaction to "spiritual submission to God." We say No, No, No to life on God's terms, and we forfeit self knowledge in the bargain.

And again: Only the Word made flesh sees into our evil this deeply. Only the Lord of life aims us in the direction of what human life is meant to be: honest love for God and neighbour. Do you genuinely love God? Do you heartily consider the interests of others? How can you move in that direction? Those are the final exam questions in the school of life."

And again: "We human beings most fiercely resist seeing ourselves as God sees us, because we fiercely resist seeing God as he is. We don't want someone else to get final say- and we don't want to admit it. We don't want to need someone else to rescue us from our selves."

And again: "So start with yourself. Take your soul to task. You will then be better able to bring the hard and sweet words that others need, if they, too, are to let conscience have its full work."

David Platt wrote:

"I am convinced that we as Christ followers in American churches have embraced values and ideas that are not only unbiblical but that actually contradict the gospel we claim to believe. And I am convinced we have a choice." David Platt from his book "Radical"

And again: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"* (Luke 9:23).

"Talk about countercultural. In a world where everything revolves around yourself, protect yourself, promote yourself, comfort yourself, and take care of yourself, Jesus says, "Crucify yourself. Put aside all self-preservation in order to live for God's glorification, no matter what that means for you in the culture around you.

And isn't this, after all, the main issue in any culture? Maybe better stated, isn't He the main issue in any culture? What if the main issue in our culture today is not poverty or sex trafficking, homosexuality or abortion? What if the main issue is God? And what might happen if we made Him our focus instead?"

David Platt. "Counter Culture"

The resistant and reluctant Christian needs to be careful of having an evil unbelieving heart.

*'Take care, brothers and sisters, that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end.'*

Heb 3:12-14

But cultured unbelieving Christians are without power to do anything. We have to recognise that cultural Christians are unable to comprehend God's word in a way that the Spirit enables so that it rules their life.

*'Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.'*

Rom 8:7-8

## **Nominal Christians are unproductive in the kingdom of God**

Unbelieving Christians don't have ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches.

Cultured Christian cannot remain in Jesus who they don't know because they have not died with Him.

They haven't been washed in His blood and sanctified by His sacrifice.

They cannot be led by the Spirit because they don't remain in Him.

They cannot be taught by Him because there is no unity with Him and His word.

They are unable to be comforted by His presence because they are separated from Him.

They cannot grow spiritually because they don't share in His life.

They cannot produce His fruit because His love doesn't fill their heart.

They cannot be light in the world because the light of the world doesn't dwell in them.

They will not see heaven because they don't know the King.

Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself with "Christianity" but does not truly adhere to the obedience of true faith. A "cultural Christian" is a nominal believer, who openly wears the label announcing they are "Christian," but this man-made label has more to do with their family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord who must be obeyed. Cultural Christianity is more social motivated than spiritually compelling. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian who offers themselves daily as a living sacrifice acceptable in service to God.

Some people identify as "Christian" as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being "Muslim" or "Buddhist."

In the worlds culture, the gospel is often presented as a costless addition to one's life. It is just a matter of adding churchgoing to our hobbies. We

can add charitable giving to our list of good deeds, or we add the image of the cross to the trophies on our mantle piece. In this way, many people go through the motions of “accepting Jesus” with no accompanying surrender to come under the His rule of His Lordship. In these cases, the words of John 3:36 are striking. *“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

These people, who have no real personal relationship with Christ and do not abide or remain in Christ, are cultural Christians. They are dead branches that hang around the True Vine because they have no true attachment. Cultural Christians cannot produce the fruit of the life of Christ. Immature Christians struggle to put of the flesh of self.

### **The following are some identifying marks of cultural Christianity**

- Denying the authority of Scripture over our life.      2 Tim 3:16-17
- Ignoring or downplaying true repentance of self-denial to follow Christ as the first step toward knowing God.      Matt 4:17; Acts 2:38
- Focusing on Jesus’ love and acceptance to the exclusion of His teaching on hell, obedience, and self-sacrifice.      Matt 4:17; 23:33; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5
- Tolerating or even celebrating ongoing sin while claiming to know God.      Rom 1:32; 1 Cor 5:1–2; 1 John 3:9–10
- Redefining scriptural truths to accommodate culture.      Num 23:19; Mal 3:6
- Understanding Jesus to be a social reformer, rather than God sacrificed for our sin.      Matt 10:34; Mark 14:7
- Claiming God’s promises while ignoring the requirements included with them.      Psalm 50:16; Jer 18:10
- Denying or minimizing Jesus’ claim that He is the only way to God.      John 3:15–18; 14:6
- Performing enough religious activity to gain a sense of well-being without a true devotion to Jesus.      Gal 5:16–17; Rom 8:9

- Talking much about “God” in a general sense, but very little about Jesus Christ as Lord. John 13:13; 14:6
- Seeing protection and blessing as goals to be achieved, rather than by products of a love relationship with God. Mark 12:30; Deut 11:13–17

**But the people of faith who are true believers belong to Christ**

*‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”— in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.’*  
Gal 3:13-14

*‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.’*  
1 Cor 6:19-20

God has injected Himself into the life of the individuals who have denied themselves and taken up their cross to follow Christ. And He has sanctified them in Christ by His Spirit so that the person now lives as the dwelling place of God.

Does God dwell in all who claim to be Christians? *‘Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?’*  
2 Cor 13:5

John Calvin wrote the following in his Sermon on Eph 4:20-24 The year was 1559

“Furthermore, he says, "If you have learned Him well, according as the truth is in our Lord Jesus Christ'. And this is purposely set down, because there are many fickle and whimsical people who make great and full-mouthed profession that they are Christians, as though they had devoured the whole gospel, and yet they have neither wisdom nor prudence in them. Would to God that examples of them were not so rife at present in the world! But if a man should ask each one of them if he does not desire the gospel Yes, what else? he says. That comes from

them without any difficulty, for it costs very little to say the word. But let a man examine the greater part of them as to how they have benefited, and he shall scarcely find one out of a hundred who knows with any conviction what belongs to Jesus Christ. To say that men may lawfully eat flesh on a Friday, and to mock all the superstitions a popery, and to say that they are but empty and trivial things that they can do with ease. But, at the same time, if a man asks them what it is to be regenerate, what patience is, what newness of life is, and what it is to be fashioned again after the image of God of there the majority of them will show that they never tasted the truth of the gospel, but have disregarded all but the externals, and never came to the real substance of it.

And this is not nowadays only, for St. Paul makes it clear that even in his time many people abused the name of Christ and desired to be regarded as great Christians, and yet they never understood the things of the Son of God. Wherefore, let us note carefully what is said here.

Again: When each one of you boasts of being a Christian, it may still be the case that you do not know for what purpose Jesus Christ was given by God His Father, nor how we are made partakers of Him, nor what our redemption is, nor how we may enjoy all His benefits. If you do not know these things, it But if a is certain that this boasting of yours will cost you very dear, be cause you have openly professed to be Christians, and yet you do not know what are the qualifications of your Christian profession, nor to what end to apply them. This in effect is what we have to remember from this passage.

St. Paul shows us here that if we have been taught in the gospel, we must differ from the ignorant and unbelievers. For God's separating of us and setting us in a rank apart in that way, and His enlightening of us, is in order that we should no longer be like random wanderers, nor like silly blind wretches groping in the dark, but that we should know the right way of salvation. And more especially, seeing that we are daily

exhorted to come to Him, and that He gives us means to further us more and more in the faith, let us be very wary that we do not profane so holy a thing as the truth of the gospel and the pure doctrine of God. But we profane it if we do not know for what purpose God has given it to us, and that we must hold it fast. For I have told you already that many fanciful persons will pretend Christianity well enough, but yet for all that, there is no substance or root in them. Therefore let us see to it that we know to what we are called, and that God is not frustrated of His intention when He performs the office of teacher towards us. Let us consider how He shows us the way of life and salvation. And as He is a good and faithful teacher, let us be scholars in the same way to Him.”

### **Evidence of a true Christian can be seen**

*"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth."* Acts 1:8

Paul writes, *"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. . . . The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* (Romans 8:9, 16) A true Christian has God's Holy Spirit living within to keep the believer living according to the word of God

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well. Let's not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*

Gal 5:16-17, 22, 24-26

The evidence of a true Christian is displayed in both faith and action. *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* (2 Cor 5:17) James says, *"I will show you my faith by my works."* (James 2:18) Jesus put it this way: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever*

*follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12) A true Christian will show their faith by how they live for their Lord. a true Christian both abides in Jesus and remains in His word so that they are able to produce the fruitfulness of His life.

Despite the wide variety of beliefs that fall under the general “Christian” label in our world today, the Bible defines a true Christian as one who has personally received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord to be obeyed, and who trusts in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness of sins, and who has the Holy Spirit residing within, and whose life demonstrates change consistent with faith in Christ.

### **The true Christian has forsaken the world to live for God**

*‘Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever.’* 1 John 2:15-17

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”* John 15:1-2

*“If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”* John 15:7-8

*‘For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.’*

2 Cor 5:14-15,17

Evidence for a true Christian life is witnessing to Christ and the truth of His word as Lord and Saviour who has authority over all things.

A true Christian will have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the church.

A true Christian will display the discipline necessary to put away anything that could hinder Christ as having first place in their lives, to will and to do according to His purpose.

A true Christian will be about making and training disciples to make and train disciples to abide in Christ and live by His word under the governance of the Spirit of God.

### **A true Christian can be identified by work of the Spirit**

- A true Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour to be obeyed in all things. John 1:12
- Christ's death and resurrection has been appropriated to that person as his or her substitute for a life of sin. Rom 10:10; 2 Cor 5:21
- The Holy Spirit lives in that person to lead them into holiness. Rom 8:9
- Receiving Christ is more than just a mental acceptance of certain truths. Jesus said that anyone who wishes to become His disciple must "*deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*" Luke 9:23
- The faith that saves us also changes us as a new creation. 2 Cor 5:17
- True faith means a lifestyle transformation and desire to please the Lord are direct results of being "born again." 2 Cor 5:14-15

### **Wanting wriggle room to please ourselves is a deadly compromise**

Jesus is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. "*So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*"

Rev 3:16

Everything the Christian does is in relation to Christ. This means we either serve Him, or we please ourselves. We either obey Him or we deny Him.

Being a true Christian is not humanly possible without God intervening. A this is shown when we obey Jesus Christ who said: "*If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. For what good*

does it do a person if he gains the whole world, but loses or forfeits himself?"

Luke 9:23-25

Even the ability to deny ourselves comes from the Spirit of God. *'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.'*

Eph 2:8

### **We are not to be shy about putting off what is earthly in us**

*'Therefore, treat the parts of your earthly body as dead to sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, rid yourselves of all of them: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you stripped off the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it.'*

Col 3:5-10

The more we are resistant to holiness through obedience, the more inclined we will be to having a private faith that separates us from the influence of the gifts of the body of Christ in other believers.

We need to take into consideration Demas, a fellow worker with Paul who went back to the world. *'Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.'* (2 Tim 4:10) *'They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be evident that they all are not of us.'*

1 John 2:19

But in Christ we are destined to the incorruptible glory of holiness when we are finally united to the Lord of glory. For now, our life in the Church means we need to live in view of our future resurrection in Christ.

*'Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.'*

Col 3:1-3

*'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'*  
Gal 2:20

*'As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God. Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking actual words of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.'*

1 Pet 4:10-11

*'Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought. So having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent.'*

Acts 17:29-30

Repentance is foremost a decisive reorientation of one's life away from the self and toward the Lord. This does not mean we repent only once at the start of the Christian life and then go our merry way, for confession of sin is needed until life's end. *'If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'*

1 John 1:8-9

John Calvin comments on today's passage, saying, "Repentance is an inward matter, which has its seat in the heart and soul, but afterwards yields its fruits in a change of life."

True converts will not find their assurance in denominational membership or in a past act of devotion. They find it in a justified life of repentance and faith. They will *"Produce therefore fruit that is fitting of repentance."*

Matt 3:8

The big problem the Church must deal with, is that it is forbidden by the world that anybody should question the motivation of those who claim Christ. But we are called to Abiding in Christ.

*"Apart from Me you can do nothing."*

# **Living Water Resources**

## **Come to the River**

We have only gained knowledge when we are doers of the Word of God and not just hearers. Until we start witnessing to Christ under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit and begin doing something about making disciples as Jesus commanded, we haven't really begun to follow Him.

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