

Defend Your Faith February

The Real Life “In Christ”

Bill Watkins

What does being a “faithful Christian” mean to you? What do you think it would mean to the average person on the street?

For some it would surely mean a person who regularly attends religious services. For others, faithfulness would primarily involve the specific beliefs to which a person might be committed. I wonder how many people – even religious people – would connect daily attitudes and behavior to deep religious conviction?

The critics of Christianity are seemingly correct sometimes when they point out that religion has very little to do with the real world. Religious people often meet with one another - using words and concepts that have no real connection to the life they live each day.

Surely God did not send His only begotten Son to suffer and die so that we could gather on Sundays, sing a few songs, pray a few prayers, listen to a theological treatise, and then go out to eat - untouched, unchanged, and unconnected to others. If Christianity is to be anything of value at all, it must be a life – a real life – a transformed life.

In Ephesians 4:25-32 Paul said, “Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Notice the context in which these verses are written. The first verse of this chapter says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” Paul is telling the Ephesians that they must give heed to the way that they live. He is saying that Christ will change the way they conduct themselves in the world. Paul makes it clear that since they have chosen a life with Christ, they must carry out that life in a way that is a credit to their calling.

The verse after Ephesians 4:32 says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). Children who love and are loved by their father want to be like him. We love and are loved by our Father. We love Him because of who He is and what He does. So act like Him. Think like Him. Be like Him. Imitate Him.

Before we knew Christ, we behaved like the rest of the world who “walk in the futility of their mind, who have “their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” We were hardened, lewd, unclean, and greedy (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Because we have come to learn of Christ and His way, we should no longer walk as we did before. We can no longer live as we once lived. We must “put off” our “former conduct” (Ephesians 4:17, 20-22).

Being renewed in the spirit of our minds, we put on the new man who has been created by God in true righteousness and holiness. When we belong to Christ, our daily life changes (cf. Ephesians 4:23-24).

Notice that there was a way we lived before we became Christians and when we became children of God, there was a distinctly different lifestyle. God has made it clear that our Christianity is directly linked to our behavior.

What’s the difference in lifestyle? The difference is to be enormous.

Before Christ, we lied. We had our reasons and they seemed justified to us, but now we speak truth to our neighbors. We now recognize that we have a bond with every other human being. We now know that people are made for God and not for our use. Because we share this in common, we treat others with consideration and truth (cf. Ephesians 4:25).

Before Christ, we became angry. After being united with Christ, we still get angry, but we refuse to hold on to it. We recognize that prolonged anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives (cf. Ephesians 4:26-27). Anger is the father of wrath, malice, hate, jealousy, and revenge.

Before Christ, some people engaged in stealing. As transformed believers, stealing is no longer a part of their life or motivation. What has taken the place of stealing? New Christians accept the responsibility to work hard to create a product that makes life better. Note that once they have become Christians they no longer work just so that they can have more. They now work in order to be able to give something to those who have need (Ephesians 4:28).

Before Christ, our speech was often useless and at worst harmful. Now that we belong to Christ, our words do not insult or hurt. Instead they are beneficial and healing. Our words now build people up instead of tearing them down. Our words are now designed to impart grace to all who hear us. Now, because our lives are not about us and our speech reflects the love and generosity of our Father, people are attracted to Christ through our words (Ephesians 4:29).

Before we were in Christ, we were on our own spiritually. Now we are assisted by the Holy Spirit. He is our assurance that the blood of Christ is sufficient to rescue and save

us. Because of this we refuse to behave in ways that work against Him. If we live in ways that grieve the Holy Spirit, we make God's work harder. The Spirit within us is evidence that God is serious in His commitment to save us. We must be serious in that commitment as well (Ephesians 4:30).

If the real life in Christ is our own, what should we look like? Paul did not leave us wondering. He outlined the changes we must make.

Because we have experienced the love and forgiveness of God, we must no longer be bitter. Resentment can no longer control our behavior. Anger, angry outbursts, heated shouting, put-downs, and hate must be eliminated from our motives and our conduct. Because we now recognize that God loves everyone we meet, we refuse to hold any human being in contempt and hate (Ephesians 4:31).

How do we eliminate anger and hatefulness? We replace it in our lives.

We will replace malice with kindness. Kindness means to be helpful, useful, easy, gracious, and beneficial (Ephesians 4:32).

We will replace anger with compassion. Tenderhearted means to feel for others from deep inside. It means that we can be touched with sympathy (Ephesians 4:32).

We will replace hate with forgiveness. We will not expect others to pay the price for our contentment or happiness. Just as Christ forgave us when we did not deserve it, we will release others from the debt of having to repay us. Because we have been forgiven, we are as committed to forgiving others as Christ was to forgiving us (Ephesians 4:32).

Letting Christ work in you changes your behavior and attitude. When that change happens, your whole world changes.

As important as it is that we develop a correct belief system, it is equally important that we develop a real life. We have been saved through Christ in baptism to become the people who behave in God's ways.

How well are we doing? How real is your life?