

Question: About the only lifestyle difference I see between some Christians and non-Christians is that the Christians go to church. Somehow, I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind. Would you care to comment?

Unfortunately, too many people see Christianity as little more than church-going. As long as the proper “acts of worship” are performed in the assembly each Sunday and attendance at other “church services” is maintained, these people seem to think they have met God’s requirements. But this is not what Jesus had in mind.

For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). If we expect God to accept our worship, we must seek to make things right with one another. The apostle John reinforced this statement by saying that “anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

On another occasion, Jesus pronounced woes upon those who were careful to keep external technicalities of God’s law but failed to act with justice and compassion toward others. Thus, Jesus said: “You hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former” (Matthew 23:23; cf. Micah 6:6-8). Righteousness before God involves more than performing religious rituals.

Jesus would also point out that the Old Testament prophets often rebuked God’s people for coming to the temple with their sacrifices on feast days while refusing justice to the oppressed, the fatherless and the widows between the religious observances. In fact, the prophet Isaiah said their offerings were not only meaningless but also detestable to God (Isaiah 1:10-17). In a discussion of worship at the temple, the prophet Jeremiah asked: “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow

other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe'-- safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 7:9-11).

From the above examples, we must conclude that worship which does not transform a person's conduct in daily life is unacceptable to God. Sunday's truth must make a difference in Monday's world. When this does not happen, our Lord's name and the reputation of genuine Christians are often maligned.

To those who are not Christians, I would suggest the following: (1) Don't judge all Christians by the failure of some to live up to the standard of Jesus. (2) Understand that the Christian life is a growth process. Even the best of Christians do not consider themselves to have reached full maturity yet; however, our gracious Lord has not finished working on them. (3) Know that our God is fully aware of those who continue in unrepentant hypocrisy. At the right time, he will hold them accountable for their unrighteous ways.

Please don't allow the failures of some people to keep you from the blessings and hope that can be found through faith in Jesus. You may be surprised to find that Jesus and his teachings for life are worthy of a more careful examination. A fake pearl does not reduce the value of the genuine article.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2014/09/05