

Intercontinental Church of God

25. The Christian

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

A true Christian is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. His attitude of mind and behavior are consistent with the teachings and life of Jesus Christ; he follows God's way of life as expressed through His laws and respects his fellowman by being concerned with "giving" rather than "getting." A Christian strives for success in all areas of his active, abundant life.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The early disciples of Jesus Christ strove to imitate His actions, teachings and way of life. It was for this reason they were labeled as "Christians" (i.e. followers of Christ) by nonbelievers to whom the disciples' way of life was obvious (Acts 11:26). During the time of the early New Testament apostolic Church, the term "Christian" was certainly in every way accurate—for the disciples were indeed imitators and followers of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. But today in the 20th and 21st centuries, the word "Christian" is extremely loosely and inaccurately used, the description being frequently applied to any person or group that simply *Professes* a belief in the person of Christ and acknowledges Him as the Savior. The appellation "Christian" is even applied to all people, irrespective of their religious convictions, who are simply born and reared in a "Christian" culture. These usages are far from adequate when we consider the original meaning of the term "Christian," which is: "one who actually follows the life and teachings of Christ in detail." Even a cursory examination of our ostensibly Christian culture in general and the many purportedly Christian groups in particular brings out little dependence on the teachings of Jesus Christ and even less resemblance to His actual life.

To be a Christian, a person must have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9). Before one can be baptized and receive this Spirit, he must repent of his sins, express faith in Christ and then accept Him as his personal Savior. This deep identification with Christ must precede the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to having the Holy Spirit, one must live and act by the teachings and values of Christ if he is to be considered a Christian. He must live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). "He who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 John 2:6). The greatest expression of that obedience is a wholehearted demonstration of love toward God and toward neighbor. In this regard, Christ said His disciples would be known because of their love, especially for one another (John 13:35; 15:10-17). Ultimately, of course, it is through the Holy Spirit that one can obey God and express love. In turn, God will give His Spirit only to those who are willing to obey Him (Acts 5:31). Therefore, the basic qualities of Christianity go hand in hand with being a true Christian and cannot be separated.

Christianity is a Way of life. It is more than just believing. It is the attitude of mind which leads an individual to follow God's directives for social conduct and for personal behavior. Indeed, before the name "Christian" took over as common terminology, it was their *way of life* that set Christians apart as different (Acts 9:1-2; 19:9; 24:14).

Christianity revolves around clear, demonstrable actions which reveal the intents and beliefs of a person trying to live as Jesus lived. Mere belief in a name or title in and by itself, as James points out, is valueless: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder" (James 2:19).

A Christian is one whose whole outlook and frame of mind is in the process of transformation from "carnal" to "spiritual." When one rises from baptismal waters he becomes a "new man" by taking on a whole new spiritual lifestyle, created after the likeness of God in "true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Whereas before his conversion he armed himself to face life with his own pride, ego, strength and intellect alone, the true Christian now adds the "whole armor" of God—the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Word of God (Eph. 6:13-17).

These fruits or characteristics of the Holy Spirit become progressively more manifest in the life of a Christian. Hate is replaced by love, anxiety by peace, fearfulness by faith, indulgence by temperance, and pride by meekness. All these and the other fruits of the Spirit work together to overshadow the natural, carnal characteristics of adultery, idolatry, strife, envy, wrath and the many other aspects and variations of human nature.

As the Christian begins to express godly qualities, he grows in the appreciation of their superiority over his own human qualities. From this appreciation grows the goal of expressing, more and more of the righteousness of Christ living within him (Gal. 2:20) while he roots out, with God's help his own disobedience and *self*-righteousness. He struggles to move closer to the basic essence of "pure and undefiled" religion: an outgoing concern for others with no thought of recompense for the self: this godly attitude is exemplified in James' admonition in 1:27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

The Christian will strive to avoid some of the pitfalls of close human associations. Judging one another (Rom. 14:13), making spiritual comparisons (2 Cor. 10:12), offending those who are weak, gossiping and spreading rumors (James 3); none have any place in true Christianity. On the contrary, each Christian must do his or her best to "never ... put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Rom. 14:13), to compare ourselves only with "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), to strengthen those who are weak, and to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

Likewise, the Christian will grow in the knowledge of God's Word and begin to express the wisdom which comes from this knowledge as understood through God's Spirit. The Spirit of God united with the "spirit of man" within him opens his mind to comprehend godly things (1 Cor. 2:9 ff). It gives him understanding and insight and reorders his values and priorities so that God and His knowledge are now first in his life (cf. Prov. 1:7).

Having God and His plan primary in one's life in no way denigrates the physical cares and requirements of normal living. Quite the contrary, a Christian addresses himself to these things with new understanding of their place in his goal of following God's way in this present physical life as he strives toward gaining eternal life and entering the God family.

The Christian knows, that one who will not provide for his house is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). Thus, the physical cares of life are no longer an ephemeral end in themselves, but are a means of developing and expressing love through giving. Christians should certainly be the greatest examples of *both* spiritual and physical success. For a Christian to accomplish less in his physical life than he is able is not only a waste of his own abilities but a neglect of his God-given potential.

The true Christian views his secular education, the establishment of a career and subsequent professional development as vital keys for building the successful life exemplifying the characteristics of God. Additionally, the opportunity to become professionally accomplished and prosperous by the world's traditional standards—to gain a good reputation in one's field, a position of responsibility, social recognition and financial rewards—are not only good but desirable, as long as God and His laws always come first. God wants His children to be successful in all aspects of their physical lives. To develop the full range of our God-given human potential as responsible, mature, effective adults is something all Christians must strive for. To do any less neglects these

God-given gifts and squanders opportunities for both physical and spiritual growth. Indeed, a successful Christian makes a powerful witness to the practical, efficacious veracity of God's way of life as revealed in the Bible.

A Christian life is thus in no way passive. It is full of challenges, both physical and spiritual. It requires great resolve to obey God, to shun both the overt and the subtle evils and influences of human society.

The true follower of Jesus Christ will strive to prove the superiority of a godly way of life through his own *example*. A Christian does not debate religion with others; he does not try to twist their arms into believing as he does, nor does he try to "convert" them in an antagonistic manner. He is, however, prepared and happy to answer questions about his beliefs when asked by an interested person. As Peter stated, "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15). A Christian strives to be a "light" to the world by allowing his actions to speak for themselves. He knows that one who tries to love his neighbor as himself will win that neighbors love in return and may, according to God's will, encourage that neighbor toward following Christ as he himself does.

Thus, a Christian has many positive qualities. The most basic summary of these qualities is to say they comprise a life of *giving* as opposed to getting, of serving others instead of being served, of loving instead of selfishness, and of accomplishing and building instead of tearing down and destroying. It is the way spoken of by Christ in the beatitudes and in the sermon on the Mount. It is the way naturally produced by the motivation of God's Holy Spirit. It is the way Jesus lived and acted; and a Christian is one who follows Christ in this way.

But the requirement for a Christian to adhere closely to the principles of Christ does not mean that all Christians must be totally identical in personality, personal tastes or preferences. Quite the opposite is true. God, as the Creator of mankind, was the One who designed the potential for wide differences in human proclivities and personalities, likes and dislikes and even in our physical and mental makeup. He intended from the beginning that differences in environment and heredity should allow (and even cause) great variety within the human species. And God intends that these differences should be expressed (within certain limits).

We are required to lead a life of personal responsibility and character before God and our fellow man—a life that is pleasing and obedient to our Creator and one that enables the individual to find and reach his greatest personal potential and fulfillment.

God's great love for man has given man the basic guidelines for living life which, if followed, will ensure a full, abundant physical life and the growth of godly character in every pursuit and activity. These fundamental instructions, as revealed in the Bible, allow for great individual variation so that all can still maintain their own personal identity, preferences and individuality.

The two overriding principles one should consider in applying God's law to the everyday cares and pursuits of life involve the continuing and conscious recognition that: 1) Christianity is a way of life; and that 2) everything we do as Christians should be done as if under the scrutiny of Christ (Col. 3:17). In different areas of life, these principles take on different meanings.

For example, the Bible clearly recognizes the arts as representing some of the highest expressions of man's potential. Obviously any art form which encourages the breaking of any of God's laws is wrong, but beyond this, the Bible makes little distinction as to "right" or "wrong" in art, music, literature, poetry, architecture, etc., other than to emphasize positive purpose in their expression. The application of God's laws in these areas of artistic expression is more complex today than it was in biblical times. The key principles, applying the fundamental standards of God's Word, are balance and beauty, elegance and harmony, inspiration and skill, sensitivity and creativity. (Cultural differences may necessitate that certain criteria, "beauty" and "quality," for example, be subjectively determined. What is beautiful music to an Asian or an African might seem discordant to a European and vice versa. The unifying principle is to be found in an affirmative answer to the question, "Is

it edifying to the individual Christian?" As in other matters, each person must use wisdom and discretion based upon these general guidelines and make his own decisions for himself)

A godly way of life must include the basic aspects of physical health: good nutrition in a balanced diet, proper amounts of exercise and sleep, living in accord with public health ordinances and principles, and taking care to avoid bodily injury. While eschewing faddism or fanaticism of any kind, the church encourages everyone to eat natural foods as much as possible and to avoid those processed foods and preservatives which can have debilitating physiological effects. In this context, a Christian will avoid the use of tobacco or illegal drugs in any form and drink alcoholic beverages only in moderation. If illness or injury should occur, a Christian has a great advantage over the nonbeliever; he can ask for God's help in healing, in addition to seeking the most competent medical aid available.

In matters of dress and style, the church teaches and emphasizes the biblical principle of modesty. Balance, good taste, quality and modesty are stressed in the use of all clothing and bodily decorations such as hair styles and makeup. How a person looks and what he wears is a personal matter, but an individual should attire himself in such a way as to be presentable to Christ. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The church encourages its members to look "normal," in keeping with the styles and customs of their times and places. Church members should not look overtly different from other people in their immediate surroundings, though they should always be striving to improve themselves, being representatives of God, in all areas of their lives. In all such matters the members are encouraged to avoid extremes and to use common sense. This sound-minded, temperate approach is what a Christian will develop as he grows in God's Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7; Gal. 5:22-23). The use of *balance* in these areas is essential, though the church does not police its members' personal lives.

In the area of celebration of nonreligious holidays, the Church of God has never taken any stand against the observance of various and sundry days during the course of each calendar year, whether they be national or personal. In all countries around the world, our members keep nonreligious days which are special to their countries or themselves. For example, the majority of American church members celebrate Thanksgiving Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Washington's Birthday and the like. Other personal days have long been commonly observed by Church of God members, days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day and wedding anniversaries. These are commonly observed either through the exchanging of gifts (as in Mother's and Father's Days), the celebration over a family meal (as in Thanksgiving), or merely abstaining from work or going on an outing (such as Labor Day, the Fourth of July, etc.).

The Church of God, likewise, has no specific statement of doctrine concerning the common custom of the celebration or the observance of birthdays. The Bible itself keeps careful track of the ages of the patriarchs and of the kings of Israel and Judah (especially at the beginning of their reigns). Levites worked in the service of the tabernacle of the congregation from thirty to fifty years old (Num. 4:23). Our society also requires that we continually list the date of our birth in everything from job applications to the national census.

To some families, the passage of the birthday of a child at age six is quite an important occasion with congratulatory hugs and kisses and the sending of a proud little boy to his first day in grade school. Perhaps, in other families, the event is comparatively unimportant, and there is no special note taken of the passage of any particular year. In all of our memories, it is safe to say that some birthday observances have retained special meaning: perhaps it was a particular plateau of life at which a certain achievement or accomplishment may have been on the horizon, such as entering into teenage or reaching the age of legal responsibility.

Of course, these national or personal holidays should never overshadow the observance of God's holy days. They are not on a par with, nor should they be elevated to, the importance of the festivals of God which reveal His plan and thereby convey great spiritual significance.

Taken all together, the Christian life is one of deep religious conviction coupled with vigorous activity, serious accomplishment, sound-minded balance and common sense. As he applies God's principles to every facet of his life, the Christian strives to meet the challenges of becoming fully successful while living above reproach before both God and man.

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

[The Intercontinental Church of God](#)

P O Box 1117

Tyler, Texas 75703

Telephone: (903) 561-7070

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