

Would Your “*Christianity*” Be Recognized by Jesus? Skip Elmore

When we say we are a Christian, exactly what do we mean? After all, Christianity has been around for over two-thousand years. There are many denominations, movements, social philosophies, behavior patterns and even cults that have adopted the name “Christianity.” In some organizations and institutions their doctrine doesn’t remotely resemble teachings from the Bible. So, what kind of Christian are you? Can there be more than one kind?

Some churches, such as the Trinity United Church of Christ, for example, teach black supremacy, displaying racism that smacks in the face of Jesus’ teachings and any shred of human decency. Some have tried to defend this church by saying they are being misunderstood or taken out of context. But when their pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, gives an award to the Hitlerite, Louis Farrakhan, it doesn’t take a genius to realize their reputation is well deserved.

Another incongruity seems obvious. Many so called “Christian” denominations have chosen to join The World Council of Churches, a very liberal branch of what they call Christianity, where pastors downplay miracles, the need for salvation through Jesus and adapt every current left wing “Politically Correct” ideology. They reject the Bible as God’s literal Word. They are Christian in name only. The famous Jesus Seminar, which concluded Jesus did not rise from the dead, was organized mostly by clergy from the World Council of Churches.

This unusual shift from Biblical loyalties and affections began around the turn of the Twentieth Century when many who grew up in a Protestant America became fascinated with certain philosophies popular in Europe for years and now spilling to the shores of the United States. The return of U. S. veterans from the First World War accelerated this shift. Feeling they had outgrown such “archaic” ideas as a sin nature, miracles and a need for personal accountability, some pastors sought to reinterpret the Bible from a more modern point of view. As Scriptures became “demythologized” the remaining task for their “Christian” concept was to offer social services and leave out all talk about heaven, hell or a need for a transformed, born again spirit. This reconstructed version of the Christian mission became known as the “Social Gospel.”

Reacting in opposition to this Social Gospel trend, a group began to develop that crossed many denominational lines and became known as Fundamentalists, taking their name from the Bible “fundamentals.” They strongly supported Biblical theology, its sin nature, its miracles and opposed almost all social philosophies promoted by liberal theologians.

Their over reaction separated them from many social reform programs as they feared such actions would water down Christ’s personal life changing, transforming relationship message. Their return to an honest interpretation of the Bible was admirable, but they were so fearful of being called “Liberals” that they became what many would call too radical.

Interestingly enough, the two positions became much more extreme and polarized after their original leaders passed away. Walter Rauschenbusch, an architect of the Social Gospel, did believe in the supernatural conversion experience. On the other hand, William Jennings Bryan, the most well known and outspoken Fundamentalist, believed the gospel should leave its imprint upon society and its corresponding economy.

Later, in the 1950's, people like Billy Graham sought a happier medium by creating an offshoot of the Fundamentalists known as *Evangelicals*. Evangelicals concede the church's obligation to make society a better place. Evangelicals believe in the practice of social reform without compromising the spiritual elements of the gospel.

Today it is somewhat confusing because many use the terms Fundamentalist and Evangelical interchangeably. Some Fundamentalist call themselves Evangelicals. Likewise Evangelicals declaring a literal interpretation of God's word are labeled Fundamentalists and are accused of being uninterested in the poor and the needy.

The term "Born Again" as observed in John 3:3 and 3:7 and again in 1 Peter 1:23 has left genuine Christianity with a concept that sometimes needs clarification. To many in society the term implies that Christianity produces two kinds of Christians, those radical ones who are born again and those who believe they are Christians, perhaps because of an emotional experience or prayer at the altar, but without the transformation leading to "Lordship" which they might see as being too fanatic. Of course, if we are not born again, in possession of the Holy Spirit with its incredible wisdom and counsel, we are absent the grace of a Christian. A good question to ask is: Can Jesus be Savior without being Lord??? If He can't, it's obvious; our work is within the church body!!!

Can a person grow up in a liberal church and develop conservative beliefs and doctrine? Certainly, and a person from a conservative environment may become very liberal as varied influences unfold. Anything is possible and the temptation is always present to allow being influenced by *eisegesis*, the search for Scriptural support to validate presupposed beliefs, desires and ideology rather than *exegesis*, establishing Biblical core values based on Scriptural confirmation.

A political candidate said recently that he preferred living by the Sermon on the Mount rather than "some obscure passage in Romans." Undoubtedly the Roman passage in mind was Paul's condemnation of homosexuality. He did not make it clear which part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) was being referenced, but it is safe to guess it was verses 7:1-2 which contain the famous phrase, "*Do not Judge or you too will be judged.*" This is the favorite Bible verse of many because they somehow think it grants them license to ignore all those other Bible verses. You know; the ones that condemn sin.

Matthew 7:1-5 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Please observe, we may challenge the speck in our brother's eye, but we must remove our own planks first. This portion of Scripture has become one of the most frequently quoted in the Bible; it is almost as though John 3:16 has been replaced. To many, it has become a license to do almost anything and then be able to turn the tables and make a helping friend the bad person. "*Do not judge*" has become the watch word for any sort of illicit behavior.

The interpretation is, “How dare you, a Christian, presume to tell others how to run their lives.” Many people view this passage to mean no one should say anyone is wrong about anything. Judging according to this interpretation means any kind of negative evaluation or suggestion is out of order.

The implication by the political candidate is that Jesus’ words in Matthew somehow trump Paul’s in Romans. This displays a complete ignorance of the Bible. It also reveals affinity for the liberal theology so rampant in the World Council of Churches. Paul’s words are anything but obscure. They could not possibly be clearer.

Romans 1:26-27 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Now, do Jesus’ often quoted words from Matthew 7, “*Do not judge,*” give us any another alternative? I believe they do. Let’s remember, in this same sermon, He warned, “*Do not throw your pearls to pigs...watch out for false prophets.*” How could we be obedient to these instructions, identifying “swine” and “false prophets” without making some kind of negative evaluation?

“Judge not” must mean something else or Jesus Himself, the one who kicked moneychangers out of the temple, told an adulterous woman to “*sin no more,*” called religious leaders blind fools and whitewashed tombs, would have been a violator of his own admonition.

The word Jesus used in Matthew 7 that was translated as “*judge,*” can carry the connotation of “condemn.” His message to us in that verse as we read on was a simple one. If we possess a self righteous attitude, a feeling of superiority, we are in no position to counsel others.

It should not be called judging to tell someone their actions are wrong or their behavior is destructive! We fail when we attempt this without preceding it with a tangible demonstration of love. Remember, love is something we do, a verb, not something we just feel. Our society continually attempts to distort Biblical obedience. Matthew 7:1 should never cause intimidation and reluctance to challenge that which needs to be judged.

Now, just how do Paul’s words square with the teachings of Jesus about judging? It’s true that our gospel accounts do not record Jesus speaking directly about homosexuality. But Jesus did confirm the divine inspiration of the Jewish Holy Scriptures (referred to in those days as The Law and the Prophets) and insisted that the Israelites continue to honor God’s Law. In fact He taught this devotion to the Law in the very Sermon on the Mount the political candidate claims to accept.

Matthew 5:17-20 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Since Jesus was authenticating the entire law, that authentication included all obedience including all specific Old Testament law about homosexuality.

Leviticus 18:22 *Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.*

So, the Apostle Paul's teaching was no different than that of the Jewish law. Some still like to dismiss Paul because he was not one of Jesus' original disciples. True, but he encountered the resurrected Christ later (Acts 9). The original disciples were given special authority by Jesus (John 20:22-23), but remember, one of these authoritative disciples, Peter, later authenticated the words of Paul, even to the point of equating Paul's letters with Scripture!

2 Peter 3:15-16 *Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

Incidentally, the verse about judging is taken out of context too frequently. The Bible actually commands making judgments. (1 Cor 5) and Jesus was not forbidding the making of a judgment. He was forbidding self righteous hypocrites who saw another person's sin but did not see their own. If we would judge our own sin, we could also judge someone else's.

So, who are the real Christians? Is that political candidate a real Christian in the Biblical sense of the term? Would Jesus view him as one of his true followers? Only God can see a man's heart and only God knows how a person will fare on judgment day. Still some major clues have been offered and so far we can safely conclude the following about his Christianity: He is comfortable attending a church that is part of The World Council of Churches, the liberal brand of "Christianity" that does not view the resurrection of Jesus as important and does not emphasize or even recognize sin as being anything important. Conveniently, these churches tend to uphold any loose, modern idea of morality and seem to have little tolerance for Biblical morality. They cherry pick their doctrines and accept only the parts of the Bible they like as being the real word of God. The candidate himself demonstrates this by claiming that Jesus' words are more inspired than the rest of the Bible. Jesus Himself taught quite the opposite. He accepted the entire Old Testament and commissioned His disciples who, along with their disciples, wrote the New Testament.

Many call themselves "Christian" with little or no regard for the teachings of Jesus. What is the source for this provocative statement? Jesus! Since this political candidate likes the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps we would do well to close this article from Jesus' own words in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:21-23 *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he 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 perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you evildoers!'*