

In Vain They Do Worship – Chapter 5

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Ch 5: The Christian at Home · By Willis Young

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CHAPTER 5: The Christian at Home

Up to this point, almost exclusively, I have discussed and examined the demeanour—or misdemeanour—of the workers, and any reference to the Christian in the home life came only indirectly and then only insofar as it applied to the workers or was affected by them.

But even as I write the words “Christian in the home life,” I feel I must stop and explain what is really meant by the term.

In almost every one of the well-known mainline denominations there would be no difference between the idea of the ministry and the home life since the minister or pastor would have his wife and family in a home in the parish or community he was serving, but this is not the case in this undenominational sect in which I was brought up.

You will recall that, in Chapter I, I mentioned that the preachers adopted the New Testament plan of going out “two and two” to spread the word, that they left home with very few possessions and could “provide no scrip for their journey,” that they could not own property or settle down with a wife and family, and that they almost always had to remain unmarried and celibate. All these restrictions are still very much in place, and if there is any change at all in the plan, it is that the curb on marriage has become even more rigidly imposed and more fanatically inflicted. Entering the ministry—or “going into the work” as the church’s buzz word puts it—has always meant leaving home and mother as well as almost every other amenity and nicety, and many a good Christian lad or lass who possessed every qualification for the “Harvest Field”—except “willingness to leave all,” that is—had no choice but to find a good mate and settle down to a lifetime of nine-to-five and raising a family while heads around them wagged with regret and disappointment because “they really were such good worker material.”

Thus, you see, I grew up with the expression: “Christian in the home life,” and, in fact, it was always such an integral part of my vocabulary that I never even thought about it or saw any need to explain it as it rolled trippingly off my lip until one day a “worldly” acquaintance of mine whom I was trying at the time to convert to the faith stopped me short and asked me what on earth I meant when I said it.

Having been trained to be always ready to “give a reason of the hope that [was] within me,” I turned as usual to the Bible to provide me with answers and to help me defend myself.

“From Paul,” we read in the first chapter of Romans, “servant of Jesus Christ, *Apostle by God’s call, set apart for the service of the gospel*. . . I send greetings to all of you in Rome whom God loves *and has called to be his dedicated people*. . .”

Or again in the first chapter of I Corinthians: “From Paul, *Apostle of Jesus Christ at God’s call and by God’s will*, together with our colleague Sosthenes, to *the congregation of God’s people at Corinth*, dedicated to him in Christ Jesus, claimed by him as his own, along with *all men everywhere who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord as well as ours*.”

“ . . . called to be his dedicated people. . .”

“. . . the congregation of God’s people. . .”

The King James Version in both instances says: “. . . called to be saints. . .”

Saints?

Yes, everyone in the church who is not a worker is referred to as “one of the friends,” or “one of the saints.”

So, you see how the term “The Christian in the home life” was born.

And it exists in the mind and on the lips of every discerning professing member of the church even as I write.

There are three categories of Christians in the home life. They are all “professing,” as the saying goes, but the largest and most common group has no specific responsibilities beyond living the life that normal Christians are expected to live. A little less common and slightly more exclusive are those in whose abode the “church” meets for the Wednesday evening meeting or Bible study, as it is sometimes labelled. The ones who make up the third and most select group of all are those who have been chosen—some may call it favoured—by the workers to host the Sunday Morning Meeting. The man of the house in each of these latter cases is called the elder or the deacon, but if you were to ask someone how an elder differed from a deacon, you might get told, depending on whom you asked, that there was no difference at all between them, or, again, *very much* depending on whom you asked, that a deacon was the title applied to the man of the house where the Wednesday evening Bible study was held while the elder acted as host to the Sunday Morning Service. There is, of course, no scripture to substantiate either of these suggestions or concepts, but I will elaborate on this topic under another heading later on.

Although my chapter on “The Outward Jew” examines many aspects of the behaviour and attitudes of non-workers, I feel it is an important enough topic to warrant this further coverage under its own heading at this time. In fact, it isn't so much the behaviour of these people as it is their *misbehaviour* that I have been concerned with and disturbed by.

I am choosing the twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans as my main guide to this section of my work because, in my copy of the New English Translation of the Bible, I read the words “**CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR**” as the editor's introduction to the passage.

“Love in all sincerity, loathing evil and clinging to the good.”

The key pairs of words in this passage are LOVE and SINCERITY, and GOOD and EVIL. I grew up, as you can imagine, with each of these expressions being very much a part of the doctrine in which I was trained and which had such an influence and hold over every aspect of my being. But, while I can still hear them ringing in my ears, they have lost almost all of their doctrinal significance for me because I now realize more fully than ever that the dual acts of “loving in sincerity and clinging to the good” have always taken a back seat to the single act of “loathing evil.” There's not a doubt in my mind that one's chances of salvation in this exclusive sect are just as good, if not better, by running around looking for evil (real or imagined), loathing that evil with a passion born of fanaticism and complying with all the marks of the outward Jew as by concentrating on possessing the inner qualities of sincere love and clinging to good.

To smoke was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To drink alcohol was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To go to movies and dances was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore they must be loathed.

To have a radio or a record player and later a television or a stereo was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore they must be loathed.

To have a Christmas tree and any sort of Christmas celebrations were for so many evils—yes, sins, and therefore they must be loathed.

To attend an evening Christmas concert at the school was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To have short hair and wear make-up if you were a woman, or to have long hair if you were a man, was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore they must be loathed.

To wear stockings that were any colour but black if you were a woman was for many years evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To marry or even to date an “outsider” was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To get divorced and remarry was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To meet anywhere but in “a man's home” for the purpose of church or Bible study was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To have a name for your religion was evil—yes, a sin, and therefore it must be loathed.

To. . . To. . . To. . .

Without having to even think about it, I've just arbitrarily and randomly rattled off the first twelve edicts or commandments that every “born-again” soul in the church believes is the very essence of the sect, as well as that which sets it apart from every other religion in the world, and gives it total claim to being the only TRUTH that has ever existed on the planet. And the list goes on and on.

My father was one of the few people I have known who seemed to understand the concept that being outside “The Family of God”—or “The Truth,” as we called it—was the evil—yes, the sin, and that that was what should be loathed.

Let us suppose, then, that you became curious about how you could “inherit eternal life.”

If you were to approach almost anyone in the church about what you should do, I am just about positive that he would point to that infinite list and tell you that that was what you had to do. I doubt very much that he would ever mention that you should first accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour and make him the master of your life, or that the doctrine of love and good will were more important in the scheme of salvation than all those innumerable, outward “phylacteries” that have been imagined or invented or, to be fair, sometimes inherited by generation after succeeding generation of neo-Pharisees who bear absolutely no resemblance to the Christians they pretend to be and who, like their predecessors in Biblical times, would be completely unable or unwilling to recognize or accept the very Christ they purport to portray.

So few of the believers seem to understand, as my father did, that the doctrine of the church should be that those who are “outside” anyway are not more sinful or less sinful by their external behaviour, and that when they “profess” or “get saved”—whatever you want to call it, they will be led by the spirit to adopt all things that are deemed right and good and to abandon those that are considered by the brotherhood to be evil and loathsome.

So few have the vision to see that so many customs and practices that are taught for doctrine are only commandments of men, anyway, and that they should learn to examine them for what they are worth and to become discerners of whether or not the things they do, the places they go, and the company they keep affect their spirit or, as the Apostle Paul put it, “make [their] brother to offend.”

Have another glance over my list.

Do you notice the stress that is placed on what is evil and what should be loathed? Did you notice that what was “evil and a sin” were all marks of the flesh, all signs of the Outward Jew, and all part and parcel of the one ticket you had to have to get into “[the] father’s house [where] there are many mansions”? Did you notice that the same stress is placed on where you meet for Sunday morning meeting as on what you wear or whether or not you smoke and “drink”? It is just as bad to marry an infidel as to give your sect a name. It is so much worse to have a television in your home than to fail to “love your neighbour as yourself.” Did you happen to notice, too, that it was never evil—no, never loathsome or a sin—to practise ex-communication toward those whose personal standards and convictions were different from the group? Did you notice that it was never evil—no, never loathsome or a sin when people couldn’t get along with each other or when they failed to manifest either spiritual love or the simple “milk of human kindness”? It’s a very difficult concept to explain, but, by dressing the way the workers tell them to, by going to meeting in a home, by believing that the workers have to go out in pairs to preach the word, and by attending diligently to every “jot and tittle” of the church’s established outward code of ethics, the faithful followers feel that they are the world’s only true Christians and that any responsibility they have toward carrying out the true doctrine of Jesus Christ is either incidental or controlled by the whim of circumstance and personal preference.

It is rarely, if ever, that you would be subjected to a sermon on the need to love one another and the world in all sincerity or to hear any admonishment or reprimand directed toward anyone absent or present who was not “shaping up” in that regard. Not so rare, though, are the times when you might have to sit and listen to the need of getting rid of your radio or maybe, even, your television, or getting your hair cut or wearing a longer skirt, or to stop reading the Reader’s Digest or perhaps the astrology column in the local newspaper.

It won’t take you long to catch on to this church’s priorities or to what it emphasizes as being the true mark of a real Christian.

I assure you that I do not stress these features for editorial purposes. That is the way it was—and is, and if I could be accused at all of distorting the facts in any way, it is only that I am under-emphasizing the importance that they play in the minds and lives of the good Bible-totin’, Goin’-to-Meetin’ type of Christian that swells this church’s ranks.

Is it any wonder, then, that I have so often made reference to Pharisaism and to its resemblance to the tenets of this group?

“. . . Pharisaism,” we read in *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, “is the final and necessary result of that conception of religion which makes religion consist in conformity to the Law and promises God’s grace only to the doers of the Law. Religion becomes external. The disposition of the heart is less vital than the outward act. . . .”

As in any organization, of course, there are those who are naturally kind and who are given to love and goodwill. Such people exist in this church, too, and their acts of kindness and deeds of mercy set them apart in my mind. But that is the type of people they are anyway, and it wouldn’t matter what group or sect they were affiliated with because they would go right on being the only kind of people they know how to be.

Another important point I want to make before moving on from this first passage is: *At no time before, during, or since the conversion of those naturally good and beneficent individuals was this type of good, kind, and beneficent behaviour ever preached about or emphasized in any way as being typical of the nature of Christ or was it made a priority in the process of Salvation and all that that implies.*

"LET LOVE FOR OUR BROTHERHOOD BREED WARMTH OF MUTUAL AFFECTION."

Again, that word LOVE crops up.

And, again we have to ask, “What does LOVE do? Or what can LOVE do?”

It can, and does, if the conditions of the text are met, breed warmth of mutual affection.

*But it must be **allowed** to do so.*

The words are specific enough, don't you think? "Let love. . ."

There's nothing complicated about it. "Let love. . ."

There's no hidden agenda. "Let love. . ."

There's no preamble. "Let love. . ."

There's no amending formula. "Let love. . ."

It would seem, therefore, to even the most illogical of thinkers, that, with such a simple and straightforward prescription for producing that wonderful quality of warmth of mutual affection, the church would be a haven for sinners, "a refuge from all woes" as they delight in singing in their meetings, a place of trust and forgiveness, and the last place on earth where people would be judged by the individuality of either their lifestyles or their outward appearances.

But, apart from reading the words and concocting, delivering, and listening to endless homilies on the topic, that text receives no more than perfunctory lip service by all but a very few of the church's faithful "hangers on."

Throughout this whole treatise I have talked so much about my feelings of abandonment while I was still very much involved with the church, its people, the workers and their activities, and the need to be sure that everything we did—they, as well as I—was no more or no less than what was being preached (or is the word "touted"?) as Christianity in its purest, truest, most exclusive and undefiled form. I believed from the bottom of my heart that I passionately loved the brotherhood, that I had an intricate and intimate knowledge of how it worked and all that it stood for, and that I was completely and absolutely behind every sincere and honest effort to ensure its existence and propagation; but somehow, somewhere along the way my motives became so misunderstood that I began to feel that there was no longer any warmth, no longer any affection, and, certainly, no longer any sense of "mutuality."

For ten years or more before I left the church, I pretended that I was still enjoying some measure of that warmth of mutual affection that I had heard about all my life and which, from time to time, and from place to place, I had actually seen and experienced. For those same ten odd years I even pretended that I had the same love for the brotherhood that I'd always had and that I was letting it breed the same warmth of mutual affection in me.

I pretended to my associates in the church. I pretended to my "unsaved" relatives and "outside" friends. And, above all, I pretended to myself.

But pretence was all that was left for there was no more substance. I had been robbed of that.

I came to feel like someone planting a garden year after year, but the seeds never grew. I faithfully watered them by regularly attending every Sunday morning meeting, every Wednesday evening Bible study, and every gospel service of every available mission in the area. I never failed to go to two or three of the falls' Special Meetings and sometimes two and a half conventions in the spring. I weeded my garden daily by never letting it cross my mind that I should go to bed at night without having read my Bible and having been down on my knees at least twice that day in prayer and meditation.

But the rains of love OF the brotherhood that should have watered my garden with that warmth of mutual affection continually failed, and I finally realized that my seeds had dried up, and that my garden was dead.

It was then that I began to feel drained. . .

. . . drained of virtue.

. . . drained of others' interest in me and my welfare – both natural and spiritual.

. . . drained of care.

. . . drained from wanting to be part of something, and drained from not being part of anything.

. . . and, above all, completely drained of any feeling or indication of the love that I believed was the fruit of the spirit and which was supposed to be the church's main foundation.

So, being drained and discouraged, I "gathered up all my toys" and "went home to play alone."

I believe I can say honestly and sincerely that I did this because my love for the brotherhood was now dead, and I felt that if I kept on going and pretending that everything was as it always had been—outwardly, at least—then I would be as big a hypocrite—or bigger—than those whom I was condemning and, in fact, still condemn.

I can sincerely say that I did not "run home to play alone" just to get someone to come running after me or to coax me to go back "to the game," but, honestly, I did think and hope that someone would notice my absence and would care enough to at least ask me why I was no longer around. As it happened, however, no one seemed bothered, and the only people that I ever talked to about my departure were those whom I felt I could trust enough to bring the topic up with them.

I did write two letters—one to the elder in whose home I had met for years on Sunday morning and one to the elder where I was attending the Wednesday evening Bible study. In each letter I simply said I would not be back because of the way I was feeling "in and about myself," and I expressed my desire that we could remain friends and that perhaps each family would feel free to drop in to visit me whenever they could. The closest I ever got to a recognition of my departure from the faith was a rather ominous sort of telephone call from the Sunday morning elder telling me that he had no intention of ever visiting me as he barely had enough time to keep in contact with the faithful members of the flock, and he warned me of rather vague and dire consequences if I ever so much as tried to influence others—especially his children and other young folks—to follow in the way that I had chosen to go.

I assured him he need have no such fear and hung up the telephone.

Thus ended thirty-three years of faith, trust, and faithful service in a man-made, cult-like sect concocted to resemble the New Testament, the like of which the Apostle Paul must have had in mind when he wrote, “. . . the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

Go to **Chapter 6**