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Has Christianity Failed?

A correct answer to the question as to whether Christianity has been a success or a failure depends upon a proper understanding of what constitutes Christianity, and just what God intended it should accomplish in the earth. Christ is presented to us in the Bible as the Savior of the world; and the logical conclusion is that God had planned for the world to be converted to him, and thus to be saved from death. Nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus came to the earth to die for mankind, and yet the world is still far from being converted. Christianity in general is rapidly losing ground, and whole nations have set themselves against religions of various kinds. Are we to judge from this that God's plan has failed?

The disciples, in Jesus' day, based their hopes of the Messianic kingdom upon the prophecies of the Old Testament, and their hopes were therefore, in the main, correct. They failed to understand that the time had not then come for the establishment of that kingdom. Just so with

most professing Christians since then: their belief that God had planned the conversion of the world through Christ and the church is correct, but they have failed to see from the Scriptures that this is not the age in which God purposed that this work should be accomplished.

As the immediate disciples of Jesus failed to note from the prophecies that the Messiah must suffer and die as man's Redeemer before the promised kingdom blessings could come to the world, just so have professed Christians failed to see from the Scriptures that the true church of Christ must suffer and die with him before she will have the privilege of sharing with him in the future kingdom work of converting and blessing the world of mankind. The Apostle Paul states this matter clearly, saying, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. 8:17,18

The glory referred to here is evidently the glory of joint-heirship with Christ in his Messianic kingdom. If those who attain to this glory must first of all suffer with

him, then it means that the present mission of the church is not that of conquering the world for Jesus, but of following faithfully in his footsteps, even unto death.

CHRISTIANS FOLLOW JESUS

This is in reality what Jesus himself taught his followers. For example, on more than one occasion he said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." That these were to follow him all the way into death is made positive by Jesus' words in Revelation 2:10, which reads, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." That this faithfulness implies fortitude in the face of suffering persecution is shown by his promise of Revelation 3:21, where he says, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

When the divine commission was given to the church to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the purpose was distinctly stated to be that of making disciples, and giving a witness. That this witness was not intended by God to conquer the world, but to result in the preparation of Christians themselves for the future work of reigning with Jesus, is made clear in Revelation 20:4. We quote: "I

saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

If the mission of the true Christians in the world has been merely that of bearing witness to the truth and by means of the experiences thereby gained, to prepare themselves for the great future work of converting the world during the thousand-year kingdom period, then we can readily understand the apparent failure of Christianity. We see, indeed, that the true Christianity has not failed; that it is merely the false hope of many professed believers that has not materialized. When we see that the present mission of the church is one of sacrifice and suffering rather than one of conquering the world, many puzzling questions are at once cleared up for us.

For example, have you not often wondered why it is that faithful Christians have usually suffered more than unbelievers? Have you ever wondered why, after Jesus came as the light of the world, mankind actually was plunged into a long period of darkness which we now speak of as the Dark Ages? Have you ever wondered why there are more than twice as many non-believers in the world today as a century ago?

Who has not wondered about questions of this nature? Many, as a result of their wondering, have concluded that Christianity is a gigantic farce, and that this supposed foundation and bulwark of civilization has signally failed to make good its claims.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

The popular idea of Christianity has been that one becomes a Christian in about the same manner that one joins a club, and that it constitutes a sort of safeguard against divine wrath that otherwise would send the individual to a terrible place of torment at death. Hence it has been supposed that God wants everyone to become Christians so they might escape this terrible fate. Now that it is being discovered, in the fuller light of a better day, that the nightmare of eternal torment is not taught in the Bible, the way is thus becoming clear for a better understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

The word Christ, being a Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, is used in the New Testament to connect Jesus with that glorious array of Messianic promises found throughout the Old Testament. As already noted, the first of these promises was given in the Garden of Eden when God said that the seed of the

woman would bruise the serpent's head. Another, and more specific promise, was given to Abraham when he was told that through his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Jesus, the Christ, came into the world as the seed of promise to be the one who would bless all humanity, and the Scriptures show that those who become true Christians by following faithfully in his steps of self-sacrifice, even unto death, are to be a part with him of the promised seed.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians of his day, said, "If ye be Christ's [Christians], then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29) In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that Christ "is not one member, but many." A very important point for consideration is presented by the apostle in these two statements. They show that in the selection and development of Christians, God is merely carrying on a preparatory work in connection with the future Messianic purpose to bless all nations. It means that God has not been trying to make Christians of all mankind, but merely selecting a few from among the nations to be associated with Jesus in his future work of blessing the entire world, both the living and the dead.

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

Who are these Christians today whom God is selecting to reign with the Messiah? In what church will we find them? God is the Judge as to just who they are. Specifically, a Christian is one who, having recognized that he was a sinner, and alienated from God, has repented, and who, through faith in the shed blood of Christ, has made a full consecration of his time, talents—all that he has—to the Lord, and is faithfully endeavoring to carry out that consecration. Denominational church membership has nothing whatever to do with it.

In the fifteenth chapter of Acts there is a revealing account concerning the divine purpose in the selection of the faithful Christians of this age. The apostle explains that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles,” not to make all of them Christians, but “to take out of them a people for his name”—the true Christians. After this, declares the apostle, divine favor will return to Israel, and the broken-down “tabernacle of David” will be restored: and then, he says, “the residue [remainder] of men,” and the Gentiles, will have an opportunity to “seek after the Lord.” First must be completed the work of taking out a people for his name—the bride of Christ—to be

made up of all fully consecrated Christians.—Acts 15:14-18

When we thus see that God does not intend that all the world, in this age, shall become Christians, it helps us to understand many passages of the Bible that heretofore have been very difficult to understand. For example, in Revelation 5:10 we are told that the future reign of Christ and the church is to be here on the earth. How could this be true if all except the church are to be taken away from the earth and tormented forever in a burning hell? Over whom, then, would the saints reign here on the earth? This difficulty vanishes when we realize from the Scriptures that the world is to be blessed, not cursed, following the completion of the true church.

Viewing the matter thus, we can see that God's plan of human salvation provides an opportunity for all, both the church and the world, not that all are to be saved irrespective of their own cooperation in the divine arrangements. The Scriptures distinctly point out that all who sin willfully after having come to a full knowledge of the truth are to be punished with everlasting destruction—but not everlasting preservation in misery, as the Dark Age creeds present the matter.

THE TRUE CHURCH'S REWARD

Another interesting point, in connection with God's selection of the Christian church to be associated with Christ in his Messianic kingdom, is that such faithful Christians are to have a higher reward than the world in general. God's provision for the world is that they shall be restored to life upon the earth—a restoration of the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, which is a dominion over the lower creation here on the earth; but to the Christian the Master gave the promise, "I go to prepare a place for you, . . . that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) The church is to have a heavenly reward, but it is not God's purpose to take all mankind to heaven, as we shall see later in this discussion.

The prospect of everlasting life through the shed blood of the Redeemer is the blessed hope set before both the church and the world in the Bible. The scriptural presentation is not that of heaven for the righteous and eternal torture for the wicked, but is rather that of life or death.

The first man, Adam, disobeyed and lost life; but eventually Jesus came as man's ransom, to meet the penalty of death by his own death on the cross. As a result of

this, the world once more will be given the opportunity to live. This opportunity will in due time come to all; but during this Gospel Age, fully consecrated Christians are the only ones who actually have a full opportunity to benefit from the death of the Redeemer. These, because they follow Jesus in laying down their lives sacrificially, are rewarded, not only with life itself, but with immortal life. These are they who “seek for glory and honor and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) The obedient of the world of mankind, during the future kingdom period, will also be given an opportunity to live, but the life they receive will be merely the restored human life forfeited by Adam. The obedient will then live everlastingly, not because they will become immortal, but because God will continue to sustain their lives.

WHY THE WORLD IS NOT CONVERTED

The work of true Christianity has thus far been only that of preparing the future joint-heirs with the Messiah for the great work of his long-promised kingdom. Little wonder, in view of this, that the attempted work of converting the world has made so little progress throughout the Christian era. The Creator knew that, from the human standpoint, Christianity would

appear to be a failure. Jesus himself, in referring to the end of this age, said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) Thus the fact that very few in the world today really believe in the Bible is no surprise to God. His beloved Son, the Redeemer of the world, foresaw this very condition, and foretold it. This is another good reason why we should have faith in what the Bible says.

The hundreds of divisions among the so-called Christian churches likewise were foretold in the prophetic Word. Paul said that there would come a great falling away from the true faith, and this most certainly occurred.

If Jesus and his apostles were a group of deceiving men, bent on putting over some selfish scheme for the purpose of favorably influencing the whole world of mankind, would they deliberately predict that it would not be long before their entire scheme would fail and they themselves become laughing-stocks in the minds of millions of people? Such pessimistic predictions would not be very encouraging to the early believers, nor induce very many to join the movement. Worldly wisdom would say, "Paint the future as bright as you can, or else you will never make many converts."

Jesus and the apostles were not guided by worldly wisdom. They fully understood that the purpose of preaching the Gospel in this age was not to build up large and imposing church organizations. They knew that God did not intend that the mere preaching of the Gospel now would lead the world to the feet of Jesus. They foresaw that while a little flock of true Christians would be gathered and prepared for the future work of blessing; misguided men and women, as a whole, would distort the glorious truths the Master taught, and that, as a result of this, Christianity would appear to go down in defeat.

How glad we are, however, that real Christianity has not failed; that the divine plan for this age is being successfully accomplished and that now this preparatory work for the new kingdom is about completed. Indeed, there is much scriptural evidence to show that the period set aside in the divine purpose for the call and preparation of the true Christians to reign with Jesus in his Messianic kingdom is nearing an end. It should rejoice our hearts then, to consider some of the evidences which indicate that we have almost reached the end of this age and the beginning of a new one, one in which the foretold blessings of peace and life will be dispensed to a dying world.

THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE: RESTITUTION

The full restoration of the human race to a state of perfect health, happiness, and everlasting life, in a worldwide Edenic home, is the expressed purpose of the Creator as recorded in his Word, the Bible. Reason tells us that this is as it should be. If God created the earth for man, and man for the earth, it would be illogical to suppose that he would permit opposing forces of deception and rebellion forever to thwart his loving designs; or that he would be forced to adopt some alternative arrangement in order to salvage a few of his human subjects by transferring them to another state of life.

When God created man and provided him with that wonderful Eden home, the commission was given to multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it. Nothing was said to Adam and Eve about going to heaven when they died; indeed, death was not in the offing for them as long as they remained obedient to the Creator's laws.

They were to live—on the earth—and not die. They were to fill the earth—not heaven—with their progeny. Try, then to imagine the glorious, ideal conditions that would have obtained on this planet Earth if sin and death had not come upon the scene and the original Edenic paradise had

been enlarged to embrace the whole earth, as God had commanded. Picture that worldwide paradise filled with a perfect and happy human family, all enjoying eternal life and the eternal favor of their Creator. It is this practical, blessed boon that is yet to come to the human race, such restitution having been provided through the death of Jesus.

PROMISES OF RESTITUTION

When, in the very beginning, God said that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, he actually meant that the results of the serpent's work of death would be destroyed, and man would be restored to that which he was then forfeiting by disobeying his Creator. When God told Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed, it was in reality a promise of restoration to all of Adam's posterity.

When the angel announced the birth of Jesus, saying, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord," it meant that the whole world was to have an opportunity of being saved from death, and restored to life upon the earth. (Luke 2:11) When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in

heaven,” he simply was reminding them of the real and ultimate purpose of the kingdom of God—the restoration of man’s lost estate. Every Christian who has uttered this prayer—whether he realized it or not has prayed for the restoration of paradise conditions on the earth.

When our Lord and his apostles promised all faithful Christians that they would become joint-heirs with Jesus and would reign with him, it meant that ultimately they would share with him as the spiritual seed of Abraham, in the glorious work of dispensing the promised blessings of restored life. (Rev. 5:10) When the Scriptures tell us that Jesus “by the grace of God tasted death for every man,” it means that the penalty of death, which rests upon every man because of original sin, will in due time be set aside, thus opening the way for every man to live again upon an earth made perfect.—Rom. 6:23; Heb. 2:9

It is in order to accomplish this work of restoration that the church, as well as Jesus, is exalted to such a high position, both of nature and of glory. What a better hope of glory this is for the church of Christ than the Dark Age theory that God has been trying to get the whole world to join the church in order that they might be saved from hell-fire!

It is this glorious work of restoration, or restitution, that follows the second coming of Christ. The Apostle Peter indicates this in Acts 3:19-23. Just before making the statement here recorded, Peter had healed a man who had been lame from his youth. Using this incident as an illustration and as a basis for the important lesson he was about to impart to his hearers, he said, "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoke by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." What an all-comprehensive prophecy this is, restitution of all things! What a different sequel to the second coming of Christ is this from the traditional doom that was supposed to follow his return to the earth.

Times of refreshing—not of gloom and torture—shall come from the presence of the Lord. The expression, "from the presence of," in the Greek, literally means "out from the face of it." It is based on the oriental idea that to turn one's back upon another is, an evidence of disfavor, but to look upon another indicates that he is considered a friend. How

full of meaning then is this expression, as the apostle uses it in this prophecy! In the Garden of Eden, God turned his back upon his human creation because his law had been disobeyed. "In his favor is life," says the prophet; but the world lost God's favor because of sin, and like the flower deprived of the sunlight and rain, the people have withered and died.—Ps. 30:5

THE PROMISES WILL BE FULFILLED

While God's back, figuratively speaking, has been turned against the human race for more than six thousand years, nevertheless he has been making promises concerning the future time of blessing, and also making preparation for the things which he has been promising. The second coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom mark the time when these promises begin to be fulfilled. Because of this Peter tells us that then God will turn his face toward the human family, and that as a result, times of refreshing shall come.

The Apostle also says that there shall come times of restitution of all things, spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. It was perfect life on earth that man lost, and it is perfect life on earth that is to be restored. How could the world be restored to heaven,

when it has never been there? All of God's holy prophets have foretold these coming days of blessing for the distressed and dying world of mankind! Did you ever wonder about deserts blossoming and fig trees growing in heaven? It is earthly things of this nature that the Old Testament prophets wrote about, and now we see that their messages pertained indeed to earthly blessings of life and happiness in the restored paradise.

Peter's restoring to health of the one man who had been lame was used merely as an illustration of the fact that when the Messianic kingdom is established there will be similar restitution for all. Isaiah, for example, said that when the kingdom time comes, "the lame man shall leap as an hart," that the "tongue of the dumb shall sing," that the "ears of the deaf shall be unstopped," and the "eyes of the blind" opened. (Isaiah, chapter 35) Not only will these restitution blessings affect those unfortunate ones who are maimed and crippled, but all others who desire it shall be benefitted thereby. Spiritual blindness will also be removed when the "knowledge of God's glory" fills the earth "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9; Jer. 31:34

The Messianic kingdom is symbolized in prophecy as a mountain. It is this

mountain-kingdom that Daniel foretold would grow until it fills the whole earth. (Dan. 2:34,35,44) This same mountain is mentioned by the Prophet Micah where we read, "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: and nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it."—Mic. 4:1-4

THE LAST DAYS

The expression, last days, as used in the foregoing passage, is descriptive of the closing days of the reign of sin and death upon

the earth, and the period in which a new and better order will be established, under the direct administration of the Messiah. The Dark Age imaginations concerning the last days are found to be entirely erroneous when compared with this and other hope-inspiring scriptures. For example, instead of the last days signaling the end of all hope as well as all opportunity for repentance, the prophet presents an entirely opposite picture. He says that then God will teach the people his ways and that they will walk in his paths; that they will cease their selfish, war-like tendencies, and will devote their time to the promotion of peace and goodwill: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Not all the details of the Messianic kingdom arrangements are revealed in the Bible, but we are assured that the same divine power and unerring wisdom that brought into being and now controls the orderly movements of all the millions of heavenly bodies, vouchsafes the kingdom methods by which the knowledge of God's law of love will be enforced throughout the lengths and breadths of the earth immediately following the present debacle of human sin and selfishness.

The symbolisms of Micah's prophecy, of course, are based on things with which

the prophet himself was familiar. Spears and swords are not much in vogue as effective implements of warfare today. If this prophecy had been written in more modern times it doubtless would have mentioned submarines, airplanes, poison gas, and nuclear warfare.

Likewise, the vine and fig tree picture is that of peace and contentment, based on an adequate assurance that the necessities and comforts of life will continue to be available for all when Christ's kingdom is in full operation. A comfortable house, free from mortgage, lacking nothing, would be the modern conception of the same glorious condition.

We quote another interesting prophecy of the times of restitution: "In this mountain [kingdom] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees . . . well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away all tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it."—Isa. 25:6-8

What more could be asked than that which is described in this heart-cheering

prophecy of restitution blessings to come? A feast indeed it will be, when "the desire of all nations shall come." (Hag. 2:7) The feast symbolizes the life-restoring and life-sustaining provisions of the Messianic kingdom.

The veil, symbolizing the blinding influences of that "old serpent," will then be removed. This will be made possible because, as the Revelator points out, Satan will then be bound that he should deceive the nations no more.—Rev. 20:1-3

Death is then to be swallowed up in victory! It was death that entered the world and destroyed the happiness of all; but "that which was lost" is to be restored, hence death must be destroyed.

In Revelation 21:4 we are told that "there shall be no more death." The difficulty in the past has been that many tried to make all these glorious earthly promises apply to heaven, overlooking the fact that only a few—the genuine footstep followers of the Master during this age—are to have a heavenly reward. It is here on earth that death has reigned; and it is here, therefore, that there shall be no more death.

How happy the people will then be to accept the kingdom blessings of life and salvation! Note what the prophet says on this point: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for

him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:9

Millions of people, indeed, have waited and longed for a better understanding of the true God! Many, also have hoped and prayed for the salvation that he alone can give! The world has been waiting for the sunrise of God’s returning favor—ignorantly waiting, perhaps, not having much idea of how or when it was to come about. When the blinding influences of the archdeceiver have been removed and the knowledge of God’s glory fills the earth, then the world will know its God, and actually and enthusiastically return to him with its whole heart.

GOD’S MIGHTY POWER

Let no one’s faith be staggered by the immensity of the things which God has promised to do for mankind. Remember that we are now considering what the all-powerful eternal Creator of the universe has promised to do. The God who produced life in the first place is abundantly able to reproduce it in order to fulfill his promises.

This restitution is to include the dead as well as the dying. It is this that is involved in the Bible teaching of the resurrection. This wonderful doctrine of the

resurrection from the dead has been made void by the traditional theory that there is no death. How could one be raised from the dead unless he were dead? How utterly impossible it has been for a confused world to grasp the simple but soul-satisfying hope of restitution while their minds have been blinded by the immortal-soul tradition! Now, thank God, we can see what constitutes salvation; that it means an awakening from the dead and a restoration to life upon the earth. The Bible pictures death as being a sleep, from which all are to be awakened, refreshed, in the morning of the new day soon to dawn. The divine time clock of the ages already marks the early morning hour; and while the darkness is still dense, the day is rapidly approaching; yea, it is very near.

The most wonderful part of it all is the fact that these life-giving blessings of restitution are indeed just around the corner. It does not require a superabundance of faith to believe it, either. The prophets of the Bible have been so accurate in their foretelling of present world conditions—the conditions that were immediately to precede the establishment of God's kingdom—that it is not hard to believe the same divine power and wisdom that must

have guided in giving prophetic utterance to the things which we now accept as realities must also have guided in foretelling the still more wonderful things which lie just ahead.

Let us then rejoice in the inspiring prospect that is before us; and may the vision of those joys to come enable us to bear patiently the trials of the present. The reign of sin and death has been a long and weary night for the world as a whole, yet for each individual the time goes quickly by, and with its passing, each one has laid the foundation of a very valuable lesson. If now we can realize that the wise and loving Creator has allowed the reign of evil for the very purpose of enhancing our appreciation of him and his laws, we can patiently wait for, and continue to pray for, the ushering in of the new day.

Preview of the Kingdom

Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society: not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete. ■

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