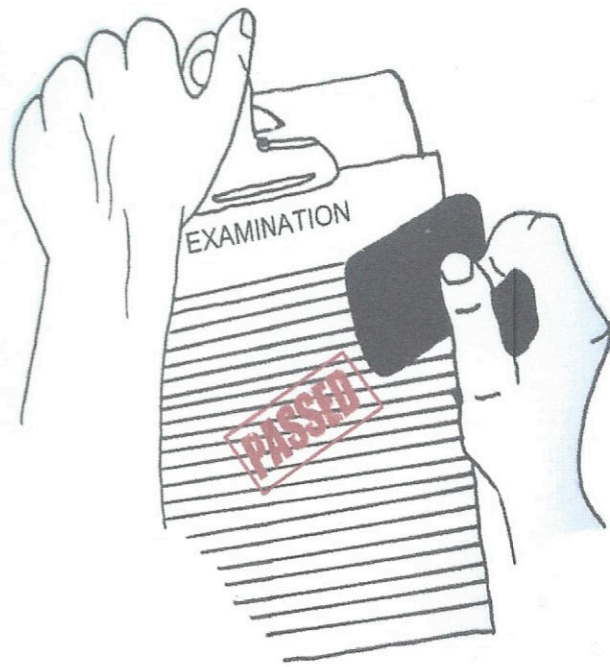




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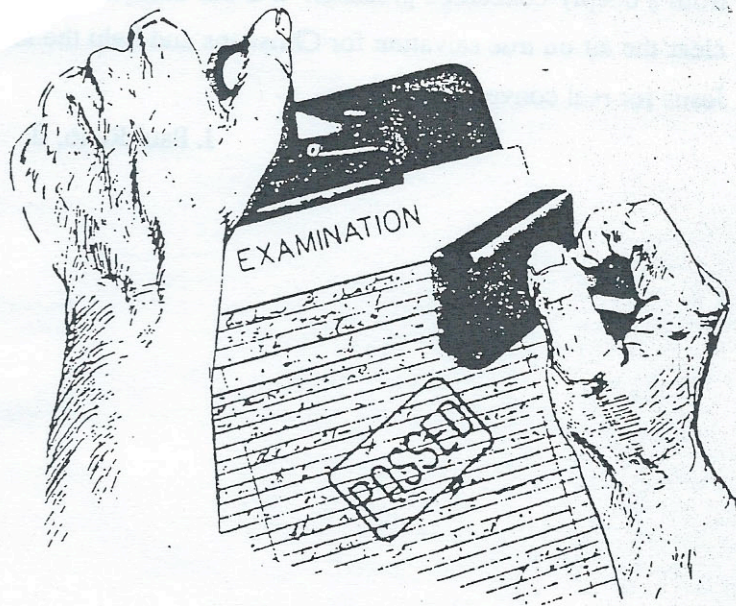


BIBLICAL  
CHRISTIAN?

J. PAUL RENO

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# BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN?

J. Paul Reno

The following message was preached at a Camp Meeting at the Faith Baptist Church in Gainesville, Georgia, during the summer of 1995. Requests for the message in written form has been sufficient to try to make it available. The form is of the spoken word and it comes from a deeply-concerned preacher. It is our desire that the message will clear the air on true salvation for Christians and help the lost to come to Jesus for real conversion.

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## WHO IS A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN?

The words in John 12:21, "...we would see Jesus..." ought to be key words in our lives. We ought to get up in the morning desiring to see something new, or maybe something old, or something refreshing about Jesus. Before we go to bed at night, we ought to check to find out whether we have put in a day without seeing Him. It would be a wasted day if we hadn't seen Jesus, wouldn't it? After all, we're preparing for an eternity with Him. We ought to desire to know more and be more like Him--"...we would see Jesus..."

I ask you to follow with me as I read Acts 11:19: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians preaching the Lord Jesus." I can imagine how difficult that would be. Up to that point, it had been to the Jews only. They now decided they'd preach to somebody of a different race, different background, and different culture from their own. "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added to the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul, and when he

had found him he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:21-26). I would like to center our thinking on that last phrase, ". . .the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"--not in Judea, not in Galilee, but in Antioch.

I want to speak tonight on the subject of who is a Biblical Christian. By the way, that's the only kind there is. The world uses that term very loosely. The church, also, uses the term "Christian" very loosely. Not so much today, but when I was a boy, people used to think they were Christians because they had been born and raised in a Christian country, the United States. That showed the looseness of that term. Perhaps the invasion of pagan religions into America has solved that problem for us. We no longer see ourselves as an exclusively Christian nation; and people can no longer assume they are Christians just because they live here. That may be a side blessing of the terrible blight we are fighting. If we can find anything to rejoice in, we ought to. That might be a help.

There were also those who thought they were Christians because they went to church. Now, I've been to car garages, but it never made me a mechanic. I've been to grocery stores and I've been to the kitchen, but it never made me a cook. I went to school, but that didn't make me a scholar. The church doesn't make a person a Christian. People assumed it did. Some of them assumed that if they joined a church, that made them Christians. I think there are still some people laboring under those false ideas today. I think there are a lot of people who are assuming that if they made a decision, or if they said a sinner's prayer, that made them Christians. Others assumed that if they got dunked under water while somebody mumbled some words which

they couldn't even hear, that made them Christians. As though some kind of works or words or whatever is going to make them Christians!

We have lost sight of God's definition of a Christian. The term is used so loosely and commonly that when you come to the Bible, you'll find some surprising things. The word "Christian" occurs two times in your Bible. And the word "Christians" occurs one time in the Bible. So, we will do an exhaustive study tonight and look at those three verses. Now that's not so bad, is it? If I had told you at the beginning that we are going to study every text that mentions the word "Christian" or "Christians", some of you would have cringed. That shows how we assume there is something in there that is not there.

That reminds me of when I first started pastoring. I decided to study some doctrines I had been hearing a lot about and see what the Bible had to say. So, I looked up the word "rededication". I wanted to study that doctrine. I thought Strong must have missed some of the words that were in the Bible because he didn't even have an entry under that. I even checked the dictionary to make sure I was spelling it right. So, then, I figured it must be under "reconsecration". I couldn't find that either. All I could find was "repent". So I found out what the Bible doctrine is. You know, you can get some strange ideas about what's in the Bible by listening to people and by reading literature. But when you come to the Bible, it's just not quite the way you expected. The world uses the word "Christian" so freely and loosely, but God used it sparingly because He wanted to carefully define it. By God's using it three times, I think we can get a very clear idea of what God calls a Christian. There are a lot of people who think they are Christians who do not match up with what the Bible says is a Christian. This text that we are looking at is the first use of the word in your Bible. Of course, those of you who study know that the first use of a word is often a key

as to how it's to be used in the rest of the Scriptures—how it's to be understood.

I read very simply, ". . .the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:26). That tells me that only those who were disciples were entitled to the name "Christian". It reminds me of a question that a man whom I greatly admired asked nearly a year ago in a small little Bible study in a living room. He is old enough to be my father. He's been a missionary for forty-five years. He asked, "Are all Christians disciples?" Before anybody could get confused, I answered, "Of course." Because it was the disciples who were called "Christians" first in Antioch. Somehow people have gotten the idea they can be a Christian without being a disciple. That's not a foreign idea. You can hear it on your radio. I don't have television, but they tell me that they even state that sort of thing on television. I know it is in literature in the religious book world. How to get Christians to become disciples is commonly taught. What a contradiction of terms! God says that until you are a disciple, you can't be a Christian.

I point out that it wasn't the Christians who called themselves "Christians". It was the outsiders who named them "Christians". They took a look at them and saw something in their lives that made them so different that they called them "Christians". To them, the disciples were like Christ. When they looked at the disciples, they felt that they were looking at the image of Christ. To them, the disciples were little Christs. The disciples gave them an idea (by watching them) of whom they were talking about. And when they listened to them, they were always talking about Jesus. So they said, "We'll call them 'Christians'." And the name stuck. And God put it in the Bible. It's a good name. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

We have a lot of people who would like to think that they are

Christians, but they are not interested in being disciples. Others would like to think that they are disciples, but they have no idea what it takes to be a disciple. The Bible clearly spells out what is required to be a disciple. Jesus clearly taught what is required to be a disciple. You'll have to meet the standards of Jesus to be a disciple before you have any right to the name "Christian".

" . . . If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed . . ." (John 8:31). They believed, but Jesus said that wasn't it. There had been those in John 2 who had believed, but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them because He knew all men. They had believed, but they didn't have Jesus. Of course, the devils believe and they don't have Him either. They just tremble. But we've got some who believe, and even though they don't have Jesus, they don't have sense enough to tremble. They've not received of the Word. They've not entered into the Word. They've not looked at the Word. And they've not gotten into the Word so they continue in the Word. We've got a generation that has "tried Jesus". After all, that's what they were told to do: "Try Jesus". You don't "try Jesus". You surrender to Him and let Him take over. He's the Savior. He's the Lord. He's the Ruler. He's going to be everything. And He says that if you're going to even qualify as a disciple, you get committed to His Word, you get in His Word, and you stick with His Word and continue in His Word. If you run off into something else, that will show that you are not His.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in I Corinthians 11:19 that it is necessary that there be heresies so that they which are approved may be revealed. There has to be something to chase after to show that they weren't real. It's a winnowing-out process. The first thing Jesus said that you need to do if you want to be a disciple of His, is to get in His Word and stick with it. We have a generation that started with the Book



but have gone running after other books and any perversion of the Book, or they have just tossed the Book out and gone religious, or they have just forgotten about God. They say that they made a decision at some time, and they believe they are going to heaven. Well, they've got their decision, but they don't have Jesus. They've got their sinner's prayer, but they don't have Jesus. I want you to know that it takes Jesus to get into heaven. He said, "No man cometh to the Father but by me." He didn't say by your decision or by your prayer. I'm talking about what is a Christian? He said that you have to bend to be His disciple, and that you have to continue in His Word.

The second thing He says about being a disciple is in John 13:35. He is speaking to those whom He has. Judas is now gone. He says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." If you want to be a disciple so you can be called a Christian, continue in the Word and love others who belong to Jesus. If you can't see something in them of Jesus, maybe you don't love the Jesus who is in them. You say there is something else besides Jesus in some of them. Well, that's why God allowed mirrors to be invented. In I John 4 and 5, this whole issue is raised. There is the likeness of Christ. God's conforming all of His children into the image of Jesus. That will give you something to love. That doesn't mean you have to agree with what is wrong there, but you can love the part there that is like Jesus. There will be a love one for another. Today, in some modern perversion that has slipped into fundamental circles, you would think that the verse reads, "They shall know that you are my disciples by how you fight one another." Perhaps there is a perversion that says that. It wouldn't surprise me considering how much they have changed other parts of the Bible. This is a mark of the disciple. They love the Savior; and they love the Savior in the Savior's people. They have a

love one for another. After all, we're going to live with each other.

I remember a dreadful thought that crossed my mind years ago: What would happen if God had assigned seating at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and He'd put certain people next to me or across the table. I must have always assumed that they would be stuck off in another room, and that we wouldn't bump into each other until we'd gotten so far down the road that we'd forgotten a few things. I'm not saying that God is going to do that. I'm just saying that I had that thought cross my mind. What would happen if God did do that. That will make you want to find something of Jesus in some of them to love ahead of time. You think about it. It'll make it a whole lot easier to be there when we get there. Maybe that's why the tears aren't wiped away until after the judgment seat of Christ, the marriage supper of the Lamb, being in heaven during the tribulation, coming down to the Battle of Armageddon, ruling and reigning for a thousand years on the face of the earth, and going through the Great White Throne Judgment. Not until then does He wipe away our tears. Maybe some of us hadn't been all the disciple we should have been while we were here on this side.

I find a third mark of a disciple in John 15:8: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." If you're Jesus' disciples, you'll continue in God's precious Word; you'll love one another; and you'll bear fruit. Of course, those of you who are familiar with this passage know that it has to do with Christ being the vine, we being the branches. We're to bear fruit. Then, it says we are to bear more fruit. Then, it says we are to bear much fruit. Those who bear much fruit are those who qualify to be His disciples. And only the disciples are called "Christians". How's the fruitfulness in your life? Not what you've done, but what the vine has produced through you as a branch that reveals the nature of the vine, the goodness of the vine,

and the sweetness of the vine. When people look at you, do they have to say: "Well, we would see Jesus." Or do they say: "I'm seeing something of the fruitfulness of Jesus--a Christian."

There was a missionary who labored long and hard in China translating the Scriptures into a dialect or one of the Chinese languages. He worked with a Confucius scholar. He was brilliant in the language. He tried to get the language just right to explain these truths. He'd explain just what the text means. He'd work it out and try to get it as faithful and right as possible. The Confucius scholar would give him advice from time to time.. The missionary had been praying: "How will I witness to this scholar?" After the completion of the New Testament, he said to the man: "You have helped me go through the whole New Testament. I've explained what it teaches as best I could to you. Wouldn't you like to become a Christian?" The Confucius scholar said: "Yes, I believe I would if I could ever meet one." And the missionary was broken. He realized that he had thought being a Christian was academic, intellectual, and religious; but he had never lived it practically before this man. What I am trying to say to you is that continuing in the Word, and the love one for another, and the producing of much fruit qualifies a person to be a disciple so that he can be called a Christian.

We're talking about some practical things, aren't we? You say: "Is that how you get to be a Christian?" No, no, no! A thousand times no! You get to become a Christian because God instantaneously converts you from a sinner to a saint. But anybody can say: "I'm a sinner who has been converted to a saint." The proof is in the pudding. It shows in the life. There were those who believed and those who said they believed.. Jesus said that you'll be His disciples if you continue in His Word. That will show there has been a real work, a thorough work,

and a deep work.

I'm not worried about continuing in God's Word next week. Does that bother you? Are you worried that you are going to quit following God and His Word next week? I mean, has God done so little in you that you've no desire and change? It's a settled issue. Of course, you'll continue in His Word. Of course, you want to love the brethren. Of course, you want to be bearing fruit. You're not doing that to be saved. That is the desire of your heart. It has become natural to you. You're tied into the vine and you're a branch, and that's what happens. It's what life is all about. I'm not denying an instantaneous conversion. We're trying to define whether a conversion occurred at that instant or not. A disciple is called a "Christian".

The second use of the word is found in Acts 26. Many of you could have named the text at the beginning. Perhaps you've meditated on it; but we need to refresh our minds from time to time on this matter of disciple. By the way, the word "discipleship" is not found in the Bible. Boy, that was a surprise to me. You probably knew it, but it was a surprise to me. I looked up the word "discipling". I had lots of paper ready to take notes, but discovered it is not in the Bible. So I looked to find out about those who had been "discipled". But that word is not in the Bible either. That will wreck a whole lot of programs today, won't it? I looked up "disciple" and "disciples" and found them constantly mentioned in the Gospels and, perhaps, thirty times in the Book of Acts. But, I believe the last mention of that word is along about Acts 21. It is never mentioned again in all the rest of the New Testament. The emphasis after that is on being saints. Strange how people grasp backwards to try to cover up lack of reality in the present tense.

I remember when Brother Duncan Campbell was preaching in the United States near the end of his life. He said he was asked what

kind of follow-up program they used for Christians and revival in the Hebrides Islands. He said they used the program from the Gospel of John 10. They told him they had not heard of that one and asked him what it was. He said, "And when he leadeth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice." (John 10:4). He said, "We don't have to follow them. They follow Christ. And if they don't follow Christ, they never, never become anybody who needs following up on. They just need to get converted."

See, we are trying to disciple people who never got converted. You can't get them to love one another. You can't get them to continue in the Word. You can't get them to produce the right fruit. We've been trying to call them Christians and trying to disciple them; and we get all worn out because we have the whole thing backwards. We need to get back to Bible definitions. You see, He gives eternal life to those who follow Him, and they follow Him because they are now sheep. It's their nature to follow Jesus. His sheep hear His voice. He knows them and they follow Him. He said in John 10:28, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. . ." We like to jump into the middle of that sentence; and we get all confused. You say: "Don't you believe in instructing the new converts?" Yes! I believe in instructing the old ones, too. I believe in getting instruction myself. I believe in feeding on the Word of God. But I believe there's something that happens in a person when he gets converted which takes him from darkness into light. He comes from the kingdom of the Devil into the kingdom of God. He gets washed from his sins by the blood. He becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things are passed away and all things are become new. We're just trying to define it Biblically here.

Let's look at Acts 26:28: "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." It's the second use of the word

"Christian." He is saying: "I may be a king. I know much about the background of the Old Testament and the customs of the Jewish people. I understand these things." Paul had already told him this. He said, "I know what it is you are preaching and teaching." You can read the passage here. He said, "I've heard it. I've listened to it, but I am not a Christian. I'm almost persuaded, but I'm not a Christian yet." Almost persuaded, but almost is not "in" yet. You say, "Well, that poor, pagan Agrippa." Look what Paul said in verse 27: "King Agrippa believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." Agrippa was a Bible believer who said, "Though I may believe the prophets, I am not yet ready to be a Christian."

We have a generation today who say they are Christians, but don't believe their Bibles. We talk about Bible-believing Christians as though there are two kinds. Here is a Bible-believer who is not a Christian by his own confession. He believes the facts of it, but he has not believed in the sense that he has rested his soul in the One whom the Bible tells about. Remember what Jesus said in John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of me." Some people believe what the Bible says but they have not trusted in the One the Bible speaks about. That's Agrippa. He believes the prophets. He believes the prophecies. He probably was a pre-millennialist. He might have been even closer to us than that. He believed what the prophets said. He had no question about it. But he said, "I am not a Christian. I believe the Bible, but I'm not a Christian. That's God's record there."

But we have a different definition today, don't we? We have softened that thing down so far it's pitiful. People believe much of the Bible, but not all of it. Yet they think they are Christians. How are they ever going to continue in the Word if they don't believe it

and are not committed to it?

Paul said, ". . .I know that thou believest." King Agrippa replied, "Almost, but I'm not a Christian. Jesus is not mine; I'm not Christ's. He has not changed me. I'm not willing to be under His domination and control, but I accept what the Book says." There will be people going to hell like that. We don't know that Agrippa ever got converted. We don't know that he ever became a Christian; but in most churches he would be considered to be in pretty good shape, wouldn't he? We have a lot of people who are not disciples and who are not Bible believers. But we'll accept them as Christians anyhow.

Paul goes on and answers what Agrippa has said, ". . .I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts 26:29). In other words, Paul was saying, "You need to be more than almost a Christian. You need to be altogether like I am." I remind you that according to I Timothy 1:16 the apostle Paul is God's ". . .pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." I'm quoting. We have a lot of examples of what it means, but God said Paul is the example. And Paul said that he is the example; that God made him the pattern. And Paul told Agrippa he wished Agrippa and all who heard him were like he (Paul) was.

God didn't pick Judas as the pattern of what it means to be saved or a Christian. There are a lot of people who would like to live up to Judas' pattern—at least up until the end of his life. God didn't pick Thomas as the pattern. He could have. That would have made a lot of people very happy because they have a lot of doubts. They like to think that is normal and just fits the pattern of being a Christian. God didn't pick Peter as the pattern. He was first hot, then cold. He denied the Lord, then wept. People would like to think that the goal of becom-

ing a Christian is to become like a Peter--feisty at times and running at other times. But that is not the pattern. That may be off on the fringe, but that's not the pattern. God didn't pick Demas, who would run well with some of God's men but then would forsake it all, having loved this present world. But there are a lot of people who would make you think that Demas is the pattern of the Christian life. They say, "Well, I'm just like Demas." Well, that can be a rather frightening position to be in. That is not the pattern and it may well be that Demas was never converted. Some would say, "Well, I'm like John Mark." Mark stumbled, tried, did things on his own, ran off with an uncle on a trip. I know that by the end of Paul's life, Paul said that Mark was of help to him in the ministry. But Mark is not the type or example or pattern. Barnabas wasn't. You go on through. God picked Paul.

We would like to think that Paul got a double dose of conversion. We only got single doses. We would like to think that he is in a different class than any of the rest of us could ever live in. God says, "No, that's the pattern. That's what happens when I save a sinner." We would like to set the standard so low that a lot of what comes down the line that God would inspect and reject is going to pass our inspectors. But He'll reject it in the end and say, ". . . I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:23) That's a frightening thing, isn't it? They say, "But I was a Christian. Look what I did. Look who I knew. Look what I said. Look where I stood. Jesus will say, "I never knew you. You weren't tied to Me." We're talking about who is a Biblical Christian by the Bible definition.

I take you to the third passage now in I Peter 4. We're finding out what God defines as a Christian. We need to be careful about using God's terms with our definitions. We'll misunderstand the Bible when we do that. Use God's terms with God's definitions, and you'll under-



stand what He has to say. You see this is why people can be tolerated as Christians in churches when their lives are such a mess, and their doctrine is such a mess. There's nothing like Christ about them, but they're good Christians. They're sincere Christians. At least, they're Christians. God doesn't know them, but we sure do. I Peter 4:16, "...if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." True Christians suffer. That goes against this happy health-and-wealth gospel we've got. You see, that's not a real gospel, and it doesn't produce real Christians. Real Christians are going to suffer. The Bible says, "...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Timothy 3:12). That's what the Bible says. You don't have to read far in the Bible to find that Satan will make a Christian suffer because He hates Jesus. The only way he can get at Jesus is through a Christian. True Christians will suffer. Satan and his demons will attack your mind. He'll attack your emotions. He will attack your thought life. And we could go on and on.

Let me ask you: How much suffering have you had from the supernatural realm--not because you are wrong, but because you are a Christian? The world will see that you suffer if you are a Christian. The world loves its own. But Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." They'll see that you suffer if you're a real Christian. If you've really been saved, the world will see to it that you will suffer. The devil is not going to miss who you are; and the world is not going to miss who you are. How much suffering has the world been pouring on you. How much persecution, how much rejection, how much trouble has the world given you? "...If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15).

That's pretty stout. Then, there are those whom I call the

Ishmaelites. You read about them in Galatians. They try to mix God and the world because they are like those who came from Abraham and Hagar. They reproduce faster. Ishmael had twelve sons to Isaac's two. They do better financially. All of Ishmael's sons became dukes, but Jacob was a wanderer. And Esau had his struggles. You can go on and on. They are the religious "halfwayers" because they had a halfway experience but are not truly under the covenant or in the faith, not really saved people. As Ishmael fought against Isaac, and as the Arabs have always hated the Jews, so these people who seem to come from something right but have mixed in that of the world with their profession, have always despised and persecuted God's people. That's what it says in the book of Galatians.

So you're going to suffer if you're a Christian. You'll suffer from the supernatural. You'll suffer from the world; and you'll suffer from the religious crowd. That's all right. You're a disciple. You're fully committed. You're like Paul—you're becoming conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when it comes time for you to suffer, you're not to be ashamed but rather to rejoice. This adds to your reward in heaven. You're to glorify God that you get to suffer. That's what the Bible says, ". . . glorify God on this behalf." (I Peter 4:16). You get to suffer as a Christian. This is wonderful. Now, if you never were saved, you won't think it's so wonderful. If you are saved, you might struggle with it sometimes. That's why this had to be written to help you out. But you'll be able to. You'll begin to understand it one day.

He goes on, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God. . ." (I Peter 4:17). God always starts with His people. That's the whole theme of the book of Habakkuk. God said, "I'll deal with mine; then I'll get the Babylonians." Peter goes on to say in that

same verse, ". . .if it first begins at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of Christ?" Most people see the gospel as an explanation to get a decision. I'm here to tell you that the people who have never seen the gospel as something to be obeyed, entered into, practiced and bowed before are going to get theirs after God gets done with His people; because they are not God's people. You read in the book of Galatians that there is an obedience factor in the gospel. You'll find it in I Corinthians 15, also. We have left that obedience factor out, but God has it in. That helps draw the line.

Peter goes on to say, ". . .if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Some people think that the righteous have it easy, and the rest of us are going to sneak in the back door. No! It took an act of God to get us there, and He had to act in such a way that He could still judge sin, stay holy, and be just while justifying the sinner. If the righteous are scarcely saved after all that, what hope is there for those who won't have Jesus, won't obey the gospel, won't submit and have the righteousness of God as their righteousness? They want to produce their own self-righteousness, which God calls a bunch of filthy rags. Where shall they appear? They'll appear before the Great White Throne to be thrown into the lake of fire. Read about it. It's a sad thing. You see, there are real Christians. Some of you have wondered why what happened to you when you got saved didn't happen to others. You wonder how these others are getting saved so different from the way you did. God doesn't have two kinds of salvation. He has only one. It produces real Christians. The others are claiming the name. They're like those seven harlots in the book of Isaiah. They lay hold on one man and say, "We'll have our own food. We'll have our own clothing. But give us your name to take away our shame." In other words, "We have our own doc-

trine, and our own righteousness, but we need the name of Christ so that we'll not be embarrassed before the world. We want to be called Christians even though we're going our own way."

God said, "I'll tell you who are Christians. And I won't make it so hard. I'll put it in there just three times; and I'll spell it out simply in the context. Then you can know who is really a Christian and who is not."

That's the burden of my heart for tonight. We are not a Christian country. Most of our churches are not full of Christians. Some may not have any real Christians in them at all.