

ON BEING A CHRISTIAN

Alan Lyke

[B]ut these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name. — John 20:31, NASB

What does it mean when we say we are Christians? And how does being Christians impact our calling to be educators? In the process of drawing his gospel to a close, John summarized the essence of the Christian faith. While we recognize we must listen to the whole of scripture, and we realize that there's more that can be said about being a Christian, if we were asked to sum up what it means to be a Christian with just one verse, the above text would serve us well. Everything that can be said about being a Christian includes this basic invitation and promise: “[Y]ou may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). Though this is familiar territory for us, as effective educators, we need to take some time to review what this key assertion means.

Our Christian journey begins when the Holy Spirit acts upon us, we respond to the tug of the Holy Spirit, and we become spiritually whole. Our Christian faith-life begins when we believe that to be spiritually whole includes belief in the Triune God. This God is the one whose Spirit reveals God's self through creation, through the history of the children of Israel, and ultimately through Jesus and the Body of Christ, the Church. This God is the one who makes it possible for us to recognize and respond to God's self-revelation, the God whose grace gives us the ability to believe.

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Our Christian faith-life progresses when we come to the place where we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, sent by the Father. God graciously sent Jesus, and Jesus fully embodied that grace as he fulfilled His mission in obedience and love. However, the final impact of their actions calls for belief on our part: an embracing of Jesus, an authentic, free response, empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that the life He has in mind for us can be ours. John wrote about this at the beginning of his gospel: “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Jesus waited then for them to believe; He waits now for us to believe.

It is important to remember that this believing is more than just rational consent. This believing involves the giving of ourselves to Jesus Christ and includes accepting His forgiveness, taking up His teachings, following His leadings, and being living witnesses of Him as the way, the truth, and the life. This



believing results in our re-creation as believing ones, in the transformation of our very being. This believing results in our being united with others who are part of Christ’s timeless community, in our being birthed into the eternal family of God. Again from John’s gospel, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name . . .” (John 1:12). We become Christians, Christ-like ones, and begin to realize the fullness of the life that comes with being His when we believe in Him.

Our Christian faith-life matures as we continue in our believing in Jesus Christ. We mature through our full surrender to the purifying presence of the Holy Spirit, who now dwells in us. We mature through the enlightening of the scriptures as God speaks to us through His written Word. We mature

through our fellowship with other believers, with whom in community we are the Body of Christ. We mature through our obedience as we follow the leading of the Spirit of Christ. We mature through our trust in Jesus as we face the challenges that come with living in a broken world. We mature through our faith in the promise that God will hear us when we pray. We mature through our hope as we believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will return just as he said he would.

And for those of us who teach in Nazarene colleges and universities, our Christian faith-life also matures as we serve as academics and educators . . . because God has called us to minister in these ways. We teach because we are Christians who are following the path we believe God has called us to take, each of us seeking to critically and creatively discern Christ's truth in all academic disciplines. We mature as we research and teach others what is important to us, what we have studied to understand, and what we are passionate about others knowing. We mature as we are illumined by the Holy Spirit, as we discover with our students what God was and is doing in our fields of study. We mature as disciples as we faithfully teach and learn with our students, growing and living together as a part of the Body of Christ while pursuing our academic disciplines.

As one Nazarene educator put it, "Christian education is faith expressed precisely through learning and living. To believe is to learn and to live; truly to learn and authentically to live is to express faith." The same educator went on to say,

We simply go about our teaching in the calm confidence that today, the Spirit is calling us and all of our students to himself and will use our work to do it. We are confident that God is taking today seriously and taking us and our students seriously. For that reason, we approach our disciplines with discipline and reverence, for they are and they will be means of grace.⁷

So, what does it mean when we say we are Christians? It means we have believed and are believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and our lives reflect the same. And how does our being Christians impact our calling to be educators? It means we have embraced and are embracing our

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God-given vocation, as evidenced by how we apply ourselves to our fields of study and give ourselves to those we teach. Embodying our callings, we fulfill this admonition attributed to St. Teresa of Avila:

Christ has
No body now on earth but yours;
No hands but yours;
No feet but yours;
Yours are the eyes
Through which Christ's compassion for the world
Is to look out;
Yours are the feet
With which he is to go about
Doing good;
Yours are the hands
With which he is to bless now.

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ENDNOTE

⁷ Paul M. Bassett, Re-Wesleyanizing Nazarene Higher Education. <http://nazareneblogs.org/lebronfairbanks/projects>.

RECOMMENDED READING

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