

EVIDENCE OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE

Recently one of our better-known candidates for president declared that he is a Christian. It didn't take long for his critics to question the accuracy of his self-portrayal. Among those who objected to his claim to follow Jesus were those who pointed to specific examples of the candidate's behavior, which they viewed as inconsistent with living as Jesus called his followers to live.

Before jumping into a fray like this one, it's probably more useful to look at our own lives. We need to ask ourselves and our pastors, "What does a Christian lifestyle look like?" Another way to ask the question is this: "If you (or I) were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?" I've wrestled with this question for a long time.

It seems that even within Christian churches we don't all agree on what Jesus expected of his followers. We probably all start with a particular view of what the Bible says about how to live. Some Christians treat the Bible as a source for stories about God for children. Others regard it as a useful tool to teach basic morality to them. Still others experience it as a book that encourages us to care for those in need as stated in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

However, there are other Christians who regard the Bible as a rulebook. They often support a very demanding interpretation of Biblical rules such as the Ten Commandments and certain other rules that they extract from various parts of the Bible. If we listen carefully to their arguments, however, there are usually certain commandments that are assigned more moral significance than others. We may or may not be critiqued by church friends if it's discovered that we exaggerated on our resume a little or didn't tell the IRS everything. Adultery and violence, however, are not so easily overlooked when the Bible is used as a rulebook. Then there are crimes that get one excommunicated, dis-fellowshipped or shunned. They might include truly horrible crimes against children and other helpless victims. Or, it could just be, as nearly happened to me in New England, that a person is excommunicated (literally, "out of the community") for not believing every doctrine taught by that denomination or that local congregation.

To have any hope of knowing how to respond to those who we perceive as "out of line," either in their beliefs or their behavior, we need to understand ourselves better. Our answers to two questions will help us to gain some insight into what drives our responses to certain behaviors.

- 1) "What do we believe makes a person a Christian?"
- 2) "Where in the Bible, in other Christian sources or in our experiences do we find support for our beliefs?"

Meister Eckhart, a 13th to 14th century German monk and mystic, wrote, "There are plenty to follow our Lord half-way, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves."¹ Eckhart believed that being a Christian required us to "commit our lives to Him (God) in unreserved obedience."

Does the thought of unreserved obedience to God send us running for the exits? We need to look inward to understand why. As we begin and continue to look within ourselves, it can help to ask, "If we were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?" (I will follow up on this blog.)

Rev. Larry LaPierre

¹ From [A Testament of Devotion](#) by Thomas R. Kelly as quoted in Bob Benson, Sr. & Michael W. Benson (ed.), [Disciplines for the Inner Life](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), p. 359-360.