

CHAPTER III

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

Christianity Is Historical: It Is Not A Myth Or Legend.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ may not be classed with the mythical birth of Athena who sprang forth fully armed from the head of her father Zeus. The events of the Bible really happened. They are historical events!

Christianity traces its source to the revelation of God in history. This revelation cannot be separated from the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, His miracles, and in particular His Resurrection. We have seen that these deeds are not only the basis but also determine the structure of Biblical Christianity. If these deeds did not happen historically, then Christianity must be thoroughly and completely rejected.

We are left with no alternative. the Scriptures are adamant in their demand. This is particularly true of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is a part of the ministry of Christ from its very beginning to its end (John 2:18-21; Matthew 20:17-19). When He was pressed to give a sign, He spoke of His Resurrection (Matthew 12:38-40). The same is true in the confession of His deity (Matthew 16:13-21; Mark 8:27-31; Luke 9:18-22).

Even the most rudimentary listing of the importance of the Resurrection is overwhelming. The Scriptures frankly state that the Resurrection affirms the deity of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:4); that it is an important evidence for the truthfulness of the gospel (Acts 17:31); that it is an indispensable part of the content of the gospel (Acts 4:2; 17:18; I Corinthians 15:1-4, 13-19); that the divine provision of salvation is found in the

Resurrection (I Peter 1:3; Romans 4:25) that a confession of belief in the Resurrection is a necessity for salvation (Romans 10:9, 10); that it is the source of the believer's hope of his own resurrection (I Corinthians 15:20); that it is the provision of grace and power for the Christian life (Romans 6:5-14; Philippians 3:10); and that it was the message of the Early Church (Acts 1:22; 2:22-36; 3:12-19; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:26-41).

Christianity Is Supernatural: It Is Not A Result Of Human Desire Or Natural Law.

Christianity has not been produced by a wish-fulfilling compulsion of an insecure race. The eternal and infinite God has revealed Himself within the realms of time and space. His activity, therefore, cannot be explained by utilization of natural law. Christianity has within it the element of the miraculous.

This characteristic is an affirmation that God has an existence independent of and separate from His creation. This rejects the view that God and the universe are the same, as held by Pantheism, or that God has withdrawn Himself from His creation, as taught by Deism.

The supernatural origin of Christianity may be illustrated in the birth and nature of the Jewish religion. Both sacred and secular history testify that Israel worshipped one god (Monotheism) while the surrounding nations were worshipping many gods (Polytheism). She worshipped a sovereign God, Who ruled over all, while her neighbors worshipped gods related to certain sections of land. Her religion was ethically and religiously moral while the religions about Palestine were tainted with immorality. To explain these fundamental differences is very difficult on a naturalistic basis. It is hardly sufficient to refer to Jewish genes and chromosomes.

Christianity Is Redemptive: It Is Not Mere Religious Advice.

Christianity purports to be practical and powerfully so. Its leading exponent, the Apostle Paul, stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it worked (Romans 1:16)! This is why the term "gospel" has generally been designated as "good news."

God has provided in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death a spiritual deliverance. He has provided life (Ephesians 2:5) for our death (Ephesians 2:1); forgiveness (Colossians 2:13) for our guilt (Romans 3:23); righteousness (Romans 8:3, 4) for our unrighteousness (Romans 3:10); reconciliation (Ephesians 2:13-16) for our alienation (Ephesians 2:12); and cleansing (I Corinthians 6:11) for our depravity (I Corinthians 6:9, 10). The list is endless. Why one would reject Christianity, when there is so much of practical good to be obtained, is beyond human logic. It is, in fact, diabolical.

In the Scripture the redemptive characteristic of Christianity is portrayed by such words as "grace" and "power." The former generally indicates the work of Jesus Christ whereby man may be freely accepted by God (John 1:17; Ephesians 2:8, 9). The latter usually designates the provision or the effect of God's grace (I Corinthians 1:24; Ephesians 1:19-23).

Christianity is redemptive because there is a Redeemer. Jesus Christ, the son of God, who fulfilled God's demand in that He bore our judgment on Calvary (Romans 5:6-11; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24). what we deserve - fell upon Him. We have been redeemed.

Christianity Is Representative: It Is More Than A Religious Philosophy.

When Jesus Christ became a member of the human race, He did so as man's representative. This is one of the reasons for His baptism and temptation. He acted on behalf of those believers who were given to Him by His Father (John 17:2, 9, 19).

The work of men who have been given the legal right of representation may illustrate this facet of Christianity. Such men may travel to a distant city or country. As the representative of some firm or institution they may sign their name to a great sheaf of orders. In a legal sense the president of the firm is signing his name in his representative. So are the vice-presidents and all who may be involved. What their representative does involves all of them.

And so it is in the work of Jesus Christ. when He lived His righteous life in fulfillment of God's demand, all believers were identified in His obedience (Romans 5:19; 8:3, 4; 10:3, 4; Galatians 4:4,5). They were seen by God as living in Christ. Christ not only died for the believer, the believer died in and with Him (Romans 6:1-8; Galatians 2:20). He was resurrected in and with Christ and is now seated "*in the heavenlies*" (Ephesians 2:5, 6; Colossians 3:1-3).

The practical application of this characteristic of Christianity is breath-taking. All the value of the representative work of Jesus Christ has been given to the believer! It has been imputed to him as a free gift. It has been written into his spiritual bank account. This is why the Apostle Paul stated that the believer, in Christ, has been blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), "*... all things are yours*" (I Corinthians 3:21).

Christianity Is Personal: It Is Not Theoretical Or Abstract.

It is Jesus Christ Who stands at the door (Revelation 3:20). He bids no one stand at arms-length.

Christianity not only revolves around Jesus Christ, He is Himself the divine provision for all of man's redemptive needs.

In salvation man receives, through repentance and faith, the Person of Jesus Christ, Who becomes His Savior (John 1:12; Acts 16:31). Salvation is therefore, not so much an experience, as it is a relationship with the Son of God.

The same principle holds true in all facets of the Christian life. The Apostle Paul described the Lord Jesus as the believer's "wisdom," "power," "righteousness," "sanctification," and "redemption" (I Corinthians 1:24, 30). All areas of man's need can be subsumed under these five headings. God has made Himself available to us in and through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

In harmony with this truth Paul determined to "know Him" (Philippians 3:10); and emphasized the importance of being conformed to His image (Romans 8:28, 29). He spoke of Christ's presence in the believer as "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), and prayed that the saints at Ephesus might grow in their "knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17).

The invitation is clear, "*... come unto Me ... I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28).

Christianity Is Revelatory: It Is Not An Ambiguous Guess.

God is not an object which man may subject to his own scrutiny. If God had not chosen to reveal Himself, man would have been left in a religious enigma.

That God would make Himself known is beyond man's wildest dream. But it is true.

Christianity Is Authoritative: It Is Not A Compilation Of Subjective Human Opinion.

That God has spoken is an inescapable fact. How to assess such a "speaking" is insurmountably difficult. The word "authoritative" is indeed necessary but woefully weak. No word or concept is adequate here.

The extent of man's depravity is portrayed in his arrogant "ability" to hear and yet reject the revelation of God as irrelevant or even as false and to disobey God with impudent smugness!

Christianity Is Covenantal: It Is Not A Powerless Invitation Of Dubious Promise.

The invitation of salvation and its attendant promises come into the lives of God's elect with irresistible force. Such speaking is accompanied with a life-giving power (John 5:24, 25; Ephesians 2:1, 6; Colossians 2:13; I Peter 1:3).

As a result, the true believer is brought into a covenantal relationship with God. This is the manifestation of the Father's covenant or promise with the Son in the Covenant of Redemption (John 17:2, 4, 6-12, 22-26) which was made before time began. The "New Covenant" of this present time (Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15) was anticipated in the Old Testament Covenant (Jeremiah 32:40; 33:19-26). Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6) and the believer's Surety (Hebrews 7:22), so that all the salvation provisions of the New Covenant will surely be his (Hebrews 8:10-13). The New Covenant was initiated or ratified by the work of Jesus Christ in His atonement (Matthew 26:26-28; Hebrews 7:11-28; 9:15-28; 10:1-24). One of the purposes in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is to remind the believer of his covenantal relationship with God (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

The true Christian does not belong to himself; he belongs to God. Through the vicarious work of Jesus Christ and the application of this work in divine sovereignty,

God has brought the Christian into an eternal covenantal relationship with Himself.

Christianity Is Exclusive: It Is Not The Highest Form Of The Human Religious Quest.

Christianity is the result of divine revelation. It is a disclosure by God, not a discovery by man.

There is only one way to God. Jesus Christ said, "*I am the way ... no man cometh unto the Father but by Me*" (John 14:6).

Christianity is not the most highly developed form of man's search for God. It is not related to such religions as Animism and Hinduism as the fruit and flower are related to the seed. Christianity has not been produced by a religious evolutionary force.

While there are elements of truth in all the religions, Christianity stands alone as The Truth.

Christianity, we have seen, revolves around the Person of Jesus Christ. Every religion, therefore, which does not believe in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God and practice His Word can only be condemned as false (Matthew 7:21-29; John 3:36; 8:24; Romans 10:9, 10; I John 4:1-6; 5:9-13).

To be acceptable with God one must be more than sincere. He must be both sincere and right (John 4:24)!

Christianity Is Demanding: It Is Not A Weak, Sentimental, Permissive Avocation.

" ... Give up yourself ... Surrender your rights ... Lose your life ... Follow Me!" Such statements break through all

attempts to treat Christianity as a tolerant hobby. They summarize Christ's demands for discipleship (Mark 8:34, 35).

The mandate within Biblical Christianity is not found primarily in its commandments. It is found in the One around Whom all in Christianity revolves - Jesus Christ - and in His love.

To be loved by God is the most demanding, obligatory, inescapable imperative that could ever be conceived. To be so loved means to be recognized as a person by the Creator. It means to be the recipient, in some way, of the evidence of God's love - the giving of His Son (John 3:16; 4:8-21).

That God would love and give Himself in a voluntary sacrifice brings to all men an unavoidable and all-inclusive demand. It is that we love and give up ourselves to God. It means to recognize Him for Who He is and to give Him His rightful place in our lives.

To give up a sin here or there, to relinquish a pleasure, to give money, talent, time, and even one's complete life is quite irrelevant (I Corinthians 13). God wants and demands the person. He wants you, your heart - not your money or your platitudes (Proverbs 3:1, 5, 6; 4:4, 23; 23-26; Matthew 22:37,38). Once the heart is given, then the commandments find their rightful place. They become the means whereby one's love for God is expressed in daily life (John 14:15, 21, 23; I John 2:5; 5:3; II John 6).

Christianity Is Contemporaneous: It Is Not A Specimen Of An Antique Religious Practice.

Christianity is historical but it may never be relegated to the historical past. The Christian may not worship a First

Century God. The True and Living God is the great " ... *I am*" (John 8:58). He is the same today (Hebrews 13:8) and is ever present with His own (Matthew 28:20). God is not bound by time and space.

There is something extremely wrong in asking for "The Old time Religion," and "The Old time Power." God has nothing "old" to give. He Who is the truth, with His life, forgiveness, deliverance, authority, demands, and power, is always in the present tense (Hebrews 3:7, 13; 13:8).