

It's not easy being a Christian. We think of the early Christians and the obstacles they faced—persecution, lions in the Coliseum, crosses lining the roadside—and we are glad that the government does not execute us for our beliefs. But it's not easy to be a Christian today, either.

- Being a Christian requires commitment.
- Being a Christian requires service.
- Being a Christian requires sacrifice.
- Being a Christian requires walking by faith even when the path is unknown.

Being a Christian requires living by spiritual principles and ideals, even when others label us fanatics. After all, there is a whole world out there saying, “Everybody is doing it! What's wrong with you?” Jesus doesn't make it easy for us. We like to think of Christianity as a comforting faith—and it is—but Jesus challenges us with words like these:

- Love your enemies.
- Pray for them that persecute you.
- Be reconciled to your brother before coming to the altar.
- Sell all that you have and give it to the poor.

Contrast those words of Jesus with the kinds of messages that you hear around you every day. Listen to these titles of best-selling books:

- *Winning through Intimidation* by Robert Ringer.
- *Virtue of Selfishness* by Ayn Rand.
- *Power: How to Get It, How to Use It* by Michael Korda.

Listen to these bits of American philosophy:

- It's a dog-eat-dog world. All is fair in love, war, and business.
- You can't expect young people to abstain from sex until marriage, so let's teach them about “safe sex.”
- Don't worry about the homeless. It's their own fault.

But James says, “*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says*” (1:22). God has a higher calling for those who live by faith. He calls us to rise above the ordinary. Why should God expect so much of us?

First of all, God expects so much of us because of who we are. We are his children, created in his image, and he calls us to look and act like our Father. James says, “*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created*” (1:18). In other words, God has caused us to be *reborn*—to become his children. And he wants us to look like our Father.

The words of James chapter one have always held a fascination for me. James tells a parable of sorts to make his point: “*Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do*” (James 1:23-25).

I read a little article about yearbook photos not long ago. Some of us are deceived into thinking that we still look like we did in our yearbook photo. Rarely does that happen. Others would much rather forget what they looked like in their yearbook photo. The article mentioned a few yearbook photo captions. Robert Parker's yearbook photo had this caption: "I look better in person." Don't all of us, Robert. Don't all of us. Gladys Jones' yearbook photo had this caption: "Thanks to Washington High School I learned how to right good (r-i-g-h-t). Spelling and grammar are another matter entirely Gladys.

And so it is that God says to us, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.*" He is saying in essence, "I have created you in my own image. Now live as if you were my child—because you are."

Secondly, God expects so much of us because our actions make such a difference in the lives of other people. We can't help other people to know Christ unless it is pretty obvious that we know him ourselves. And we have a responsibility as Christians to draw people to Christ.

On the occasion of every baptism here at Ken Mawr we hear the parting words of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus said: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20).

That is our mission—to make disciples. How can we do that unless we are disciples ourselves? Edgar Guest captured the idea in just a few words a century or so ago. He said: "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way."

In other words, what we *do* speaks louder than what we *say*. If we want to tell people about Christ, we need to show them Christ in us. If we want to tell them what Christ can do in their lives, we need to be able to show them what Christ has done in our lives. James says, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*"

And finally, God expects so much of us, because he provides us with the new birth to become the people that can do what he asks us to do.

A prerequisite of leadership in the U.S. Army is that you cannot require a person to do a job unless you also provide the resources required to get the job done. That's actually true of doing any job, but in the Army it's a standing rule. When God calls us to be "*doers of the word,*" he also gives us the resources necessary to do the job. That doesn't mean that he gives us everything we *want*, but he does give us all that we *need*. He helps us every step of the way. God doesn't always give us everything "up front." Sometimes he expects us to strike out in faith and his provision follows. There's an old German proverb that reflects this which says, "Begin to weave, and God will give the thread."

Indeed, God blesses faithfulness. I read an article about Truett Cathy, the founder of the Chick-fil-A restaurants. The fast-food company has over 2,200 restaurants in the U.S. and will be going international, opening a number of restaurants in Canada next year. Cathy founded his company in 1964. It has grown

to number three nationally in chicken fast-food sales. When Cathy began his restaurant he had a highly non-traditional corporate mission statement. It read, “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us; and, to have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A.”

Don’t expect to eat at a Chick-fil-A restaurant on Sunday—they’re closed. The locked doors bear witness to Truett Cathy’s conviction that when God created us he built into every week a day of rest. When people question the policy, he says that the policy helps to attract employees who want to attend church on Sunday. He also notes that his restaurants generate more sales in six days than most do in seven. God has blessed Mr. Cathy’s faithfulness.

God is performing a work in our lives which began with the birth of our faith. That work of God continues to cause our faith to grow and be strengthened.

God wants us to bring forth fruit in this new life. In order for that to happen, we need to turn away more and more from whatever leads us into temptation and sin. We also need to commit ourselves to not merely listening to the word, but doing what it says. When we do that we should expect spiritual growth in our lives and we should be willing to measure that growth according to the ways in which we have been blessed by God.

James says, “*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created*” (1:18).

When we do not forget what we have heard, but do it—we will be blessed.

And that’s a promise. Amen.