

**The Word of Truth Ministry Presents
Special Full Length Studies
#SS05**

Christian Individualism

By Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them. Proverbs 20: 12.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears for they hear. Matthew 13: 16.

It can be said that a man is the sum of all the influences that have ever worked upon him and in him. In the course of our lives we pass through many experiences, we come under many influences. These may be good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, beneficial or injurious. There is reason to believe that every experience makes some impression upon us and leaves a mark which can never be fully erased. The effects of experiences can be overcome, but the experience itself cannot be annulled.

Everyone who takes time to think about it realizes that his life is played upon by many mysterious forces and circumstances. There are waves and billows of influences that arise outside of ourselves and over which we have, if any, only a small measure of control. As we review our personal histories we have to take into account all the things which have made us what we now are. Then in view of what we are and the situations in which we find ourselves we must develop proper ways of living if we want some measure of satisfaction and happiness in this life. Personal adjustments to fit the facts of life that cannot be changed or repealed are essential to wholesome and proper living.

Many experiences in our lives and many of the influences that act upon us can be traced back to men. Others, not so easily traced, might be attributable to satan or demons. Yet other experiences are brought about by and must be related to God. If the lives of human beings were played upon and shaped only by men, by demons, or by events, the outlook would be most discouraging, to say the least. Good men seeking to influence the lives of others for good would find themselves constantly swept aside by more

powerful currents. Their efforts would always be like men hurling handfuls of sand to stop the flow of Niagara, if it were not for the fact that the great and good God also plays upon the lives of men to accomplish His purpose in them.

Because of the nature of God's present activities, all His works being done in secret, many may doubt and some will deny that God ever plays upon the lives of men. Men who are fiercely struggling to live their own lives without God are not apt to recognize that He seeks a place in them. The "still small voice" can easily go unheard in the clamor that ever surrounds us. Nevertheless, one work of God when yielded to can counteract all other related experiences of a lifetime.

In my own life one experience has been my portion which surpasses all others in making my life what it is. Since it is a continuing thing, it has dominated and controlled my life for more than two-score years. Certain divine acts, influences, and circumstances have entered into my life and as a result I became and I am now a personal, individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. This enormous fact makes it necessary for me to find for myself a way of life which will permit me to live out to the very limit the relationship which I now bear to God. I owe this to Him whose work in my behalf brought me out of darkness into His own marvelous light. The way of life which I am living is called *Christian Individualism*. This is the theme of these pages.

Personal Testimony

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul. Psalm 66:16.

It has now been more than forty years since God in Christ moved in relationship to my life. I did not at that time understand what He was doing. I do not fully comprehend it even now, but I do know from what I have learned through years of study that He moved in relationship to my life to make Himself a part of it. Today I rejoice that I did not slam the door in His face and refuse to give Him any place. I know His purpose was not to glorify or exalt me, but to glorify and exalt Himself in me. He was to increase and I was to decrease, and this is the way it has been. Therefore, if any detractor should seek to deny the work of God in my life by pointing out that I am nothing and nobody, I will readily admit the truth of this.

This work of God in my behalf was wholly gracious. It was all act of love and favor to one who was undeserving, and I could have refused His grace. Grace is God's supreme expression of love and it seeks for love in return. But God's love, while persistent, does not force itself upon anyone, nor will it force or demand love in return. God's work in my behalf was not only gracious, it was also entirely in secret. This is in harmony with God's present method of dealing with men - gracious and secret. I would today be completely ignorant of the fact that God in grace had ever touched my life if I had ignored and refused His gracious work. To yield to the gracious work of God means that one will come to know that God has worked in his life, but let one reject that work and anything that God did will be completely forgotten.

The very fact that anyone stands today as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is proof that God has worked there. A literal translation of the Greek of **1 John 5: 1** tells us that: **"Everyone who is believing that Jesus is the Christ has been generated of God."**

It is the generating work of God that is behind every true believer. In the providence of God, lest faith in Jesus Christ should perish from among men, our God is continually initiating a work in the lives of men, which if a man yields to it and is carried along by it, it will result in that man becoming a God - produced believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do not know if this work is universal, if it is something which God does for every man or whether it is a limited work which God does only for certain men. If God does it, then the recipient of it will be judged on this basis, if not, then on some other basis. This I leave to God. However, I do know and I am sure that He did this work for me and that as a result I am a theogenic, that is, a God-produced believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. By the authority of His divine Word I have the right to claim every blessing, every privilege, and every honor that God has promised to all who now believe. Upon such declarations as these, I take my stand:

But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the children of God, even to them that BELIEVE on His name. John 1 :12 A.S.V.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVETH in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

He that BELIEVETH on Him is not condemned: but he that BELIEVETH NOT is condemned already, because he has NOT BELIEVED in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3: 18.

He that BELIEVETH on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that BELIEVETH NOT the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him. John 3:36.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word and BELIEVETH on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death into life. John 5:24.

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that BELIEVE: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:22, 23.

For what saith the Scripture? Abraham BELIEVED God, and it was counted unto Him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but BELIEVETH on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Romans 4:3-5.

In view of all the blessings, the privileges, and the honors that are to be the portion of those who believe, I rejoice and take honest pride in the fact that I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not confess to any denominational affiliation, but I do confess my affiliation with Him. I am not related to any organization, but I am related to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Belief in Jesus Christ has become a definite part of my character. It is the basis of my way of life.

At this point it needs to be stated that my present faith in Jesus Christ was not reached in an instant. When I made my start more than forty years ago as a believer in Christ Jesus, my faith or belief in Him was very weak and quite simple. This is all it can ever be for anyone at the beginning. I was ignorant of almost every fact the Scripture testifies concerning Christ. However, I soon found that the same God who had generated me in relationship to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ had taken another step in grace and had generated me in regard to a living faith in the Bible as being His verbally inspired Word. This resulted in faith in the written Word of God, the Bible, and this 'was added to my faith in the personal Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I know today that these two go together, and that they must always remain together. Any weakness of faith in the Word of God will result in weakness of faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Belief in the one can not exist apart from belief in the other. Belief in the Lord Jesus must be, in its beginning and in its continuation, one's belief in the record God has given of His Son. We must not believe anything concerning Him that is not declared in God's Word, and we must not fail to search out and believe all concerning Him that is written there.

Faith in Jesus Christ is faith in God's Word concerning Him. He is the personality that fills the pages of God's book. To search for the truth revealed there is to search for the truth concerning Him. The more we learn of Him, the greater and fuller our faith can be in Him. Any increase of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will always be founded upon an increase in our knowledge of what God has revealed in Scripture concerning Him. This being my deep conviction I have applied myself assiduously to the study of the Bible. This is my chief activity as a believer in Jesus Christ. My goal has ever been "that I may know Him."

At this point I need to declare and to emphasize the fact that at no time before I became a believer, or at any time since, have there been any sights, sounds, wonders, or evidential miracles in connection with God's dealings with me. I know that my faith in Jesus Christ is a God-produced faith, but I also know He used no evidential miracles, no signs, and no wonders to produce this faith within me. To claim that He did, would exalt me, but it would not honor God. He did use such things to produce faith in Paul, who afterward became His apostle, but He did not use them to produce faith in me. He could have, but He did not. It cannot be said of me, "**Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe**" (John 4:48). I believe, and I have seen no signs or wonders.

I do not complain because of this, for I am quite happy to be one of that company of whom it can be said: "**Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed**" (John 20:29). This is the way it has been with me, and this is the way it will be with me, until that day in the kingdom of God when He is manifested, and faith shall be replaced with sight. When He is manifested, I expect to enjoy the portion and receive the rewards and honors which will come to those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Thus it is that I take my stand as an individual, personal believer. in the Lord Jesus Christ, as one who has explicit faith in the record God has given of His Son. My belief in Him is an active belief, a living thing that is growing as I myself grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. I know what it is to continue in the faith, and I know what it is to increase in faith.

My faith in Jesus Christ and my faith in the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God has had its effect upon my character, my conduct, yes, even upon the whole course of my life. I am not now what once I was. Neither am I yet what I desire to be. However, in order to live out a life of faith in Christ to its very fullness only one course is open to me. This is a way of life which I describe by the words *Christian Individualism*.

It has been my privilege to recommend this way of life to many active believers in Christ. Some have adopted it and found it good, since it allows them to stand in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free. It is primarily for their sakes that this study is being written. For while I would recommend this way of life to others, I write to encourage, inspire, and defend those who already appreciate the importance of Christian Individualism. This way of life is constantly under attack, and more so now than ever before. Collectivism and conformity is the spirit of the times in which we live. This makes this defence of individualism necessary.

The Challenge

Being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, wherein ye are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ. 1 Peter 3:15, 16A.S.V.

"Without the church there is no Christianity." These were the bold words posted upon the bulletin board of a great church on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, a challenge to all who passed by. The one who was responsible for them being there probably believed what they said, and I suppose that many who read them nodded in assent, there being many who would never dare challenge anything written on a church bulletin board. But I repudiated and rejected them with all the strength of my being.

I am personally acquainted with hundreds who are Christians in every Biblical sense that can be given to this exalted word, yet they are Christians wholly apart from all institutions and organizations that are called churches. In fact they actually reject "the Christ of the churches" in order that they may fully exalt and give the preeminence to the Christ of the Scriptures.

I claim to be one of these; therefore, I reject the intolerant and dogmatic declaration proclaimed by this church to all who passed by that without the church there is no Christianity.

If this were true it would make the institution called "the church" to be the mediator between man and Christ. It would mean that the life He would have us to live cannot be lived apart from a church, that he who receives and becomes identified with the one must also receive and become a part of the other, and that only those who are identified with some church are identified with Christ. All this I repudiate as being contrary to the Word of God.

It is my conviction and it is my experience that it is the divine privilege of the individual to lay hold of Christ in all that He can ever be to any man, and to enjoy all His rich blessings and fellowship wholly apart from any institution called a church. Such things as nearness to God, likeness to Christ, devotedness to His Word, and separation from the world can all be attained to and maintained by the individual believer in Jesus Christ without being any part of an organized company. He can be attached to Christ, to His name, to His Word, to His cause, yes, even to His people without being any part of any church.

These words may come as a shock to many who hold the popular conception that the chief expression of a man's relationship to Christ is to attend a church on Sunday morning. Today as a rule men are classified under "those who go to church," and "those who do not go to church." All who go to church are considered to be good, honest, moral Christians. And even though this is not true, men persist in believing this lie. On the other hand all who do not go to church are considered to be heathen unbelievers whose morals are open to question. This is a greater falsehood than the first.

On a recent tour I noticed a large, well painted and lighted billboard that proclaimed these words: "Jesus said: I am the way, the truth, and the life. Go to church next Sunday." The first part was not set off by quotation marks, and those ignorant of Scripture would think the last part were the words of Christ. See John 14: 6 for His exact words, and compare what was left out with what was put in.

The above is not an isolated example. In the translation of *Kittel's Bible Key Words*, the translator, J. R. Coates says in the preface to the section on "The Church": "The challenge of the Bible is not, 'Do you agree?' but 'Do you believe?' and 'Will you join up?'"

In a question and answer column conducted in the daily papers by Billy Graham the question was asked: "Cannot I be a Christian without joining the church?" To this Graham pontifically replied in a complete violation of Matthew 7: 1, "Yes, you can be a Christian without joining a church, but you will be a very poor one." Thus he makes all Christians in "the church" to be very white, and all Christians not in "the church" to be very black. However, I am sure that Graham knows this is not true, and I doubt if he has ever gone to the trouble to become personally acquainted with any Christians who do not belong to churches.

At this point an objection is sure to be raised that since Christ's people are usually found in the membership of some visible organization, we cannot be attached to His people and have fellowship with them without membership in a church. It is said that we deny ourselves the joys of Christian fellowship by failing to unite with some organization.

This idea is based upon the premise that men join churches for the sake of finding fellowship with other believers in Jesus Christ, an entirely false premise to say the least. Men join churches as a rule in order to satisfy their desire to be with friends of like economic and social status, or maybe just to conform to the present popular idea that everyone should belong to something called a church. Many people are in churches simply because they got caught up in a drive for new members. They are one of the "500 before Easter" group and the best that can be said of them is that they have done their part to make some church the second or third biggest in the State, or the one that reported the largest gain in new members to the annual convention or conference.

While it is true that many sincere and true believers in Jesus Christ are found in the churches, there is no need for me to follow them there in order to have their friendship and enjoy their fellowship. To submit or to defer to an organization where, as a rule, matters of great spiritual importance are settled by a majority vote is too high a price for me to pay for the friendship or fellowship of any man. The true believer in Jesus Christ will never deny friendship or fellowship to another believer just because he does not cast his lot with a church organization. The sectarian minded will do this, but the fellowship of such is hardly worth having if some surrender of principle must be made to gain it.

The only real advantage that could be gained in any organization for the active believer in Jesus Christ would be the enjoyment of personal relations with other believers who are in touch with God through Christ. However, due to the mixture that is found in the average church, the active believer in Jesus Christ soon finds that his desire to think about, to talk about, and to communicate his beliefs about the person and work of Christ creates a situation where those who care little about the Lord and less about the truth consider him to be a fanatic and a troublemaker. He finds there is a definite conspiracy to keep quiet about all Biblical matters when in his company. And while the active believer in Jesus Christ is fully prepared in mind and heart to understand and endure the petty sneers, the scornful looks, and the contemptuous expressions of any man or all men, yet when he finds this in a church he has every right to refuse to be subject to it. A few experiences along these lines are usually sufficient to cause the active believer to realize that fellowship which is based upon a high regard for Christ and love for the truth of God's Word cannot be found in the churches. He learns how unpleasant life can be in a society in which he does not really belong.

The Answer

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil. Ex.23:2.

It needs to be recognized and understood that there is in the western world today a popular religion that goes under the name of Christianity, but which has little relationship to the meek and lowly one who lived in Palestine 1900 years ago. This popular religion is fostered by, and it centers in organizations and institutions that are called churches. These organizations ask us to believe that they are the outcome and fulfillment of the declaration made by Jesus Christ that He would build his *ekklesia*. They insist that *ekklesia* means "church," so, presto, they are Christ's church, and the one who would belong to "His church" must join one of their churches.

The moment that *ekklesia* is said to mean church, and by further sleight of hand every religious organization that meets on Sunday is called a church, then the flood gates are opened for a million-and-one errors. The following quotation is a sample : Cyprian, an early church father, said that "outside the church there is no salvation." Calvin said that whoever has God for his Father has the church for his mother. [Elmer G. Homrighausen. In - I Believe In the Church (Nashville Abingdon Press 1959 p. 62)].

This quotation is one of many that could be cited to show that exaggerated concept of the church which is prevalent throughout much of Protestantism today and which more and more runs parallel to the Roman Catholic concept, namely, that the church is the supreme authority and that it is in the world to eventually conquer the world as an ecclesiastical organization. This is a new conception of the church, at least for Protestants, and it is being hammered home at every opportunity. The tolerant, indifferent, and ignorant members of the churches are accepting it without question, happily parroting the declarations of their leaders.

We could not have Christianity without a church. Individual Christianity is an impossible contradiction. The church is the redeemed community. It is the fellowship of the forgiver and the forgiven. (Elmer G. Homrighausen).

It is clear that from the very first, Christian faith was community rather than just the faith of widely scattered individuals. For example, in almost every place that the phrase "in Christ" occurs in Paul's letters, it means "in the Christian community." It does not stand for a private kind of mysticism. To be "in Christ" is to be "in the Church." The term "individual Christianity" cancels itself out. Anyone who takes Christianity seriously is forced to take the Church seriously...[The Significance of the Church by Robert McAfee Brown. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956) p. 17].

It is not too surprising to find this complete rewriting of Biblical truths coming from a liberal professor of Union Theological Seminary. It expresses the new ideas of a movement that is ever growing in intensity. Having given up the authority of the Bible, these men would now exalt something called "the church." In order to do this they must clothe organized religion with a character that it does not possess.

A declaration of Emil Brunner, the well known Swiss theologian is apropos in this connection. He declares, "that the Church itself, in so far as it identifies itself with the *Ecclesia* of the New Testament, rests upon a misunderstanding." **This fact, that the churches we see today and the ecclesias of the New Testament are not in any way the same thing**, is a truth that very few will want to consider for fear that it may shout at them still louder. I seriously doubt if any actual objective study of the Greek word *ekklesia* has ever been made. [Ed. NOTE: Such studies were later done by Mr. Sellers, and can be read in his Seed and Bread Issues #SB097,SB115,SB120, and SB141] . If it were, it would be found that the institutions commonly called churches cannot be identified with and have no connection with the *ecclesia* of the New Testament. Many who recognize this try to resolve the difficulty by appealing for a distinction between "the visible church" and "an invisible church," but all who do this must remember that the idea of invisible *ecclesia* is foreign to the New Testament.

The great danger that exists in blindly identifying institutions called churches with the Lord Jesus Christ is brought into sharp focus by another quotation from Brunner[*The Misunderstanding of the Church*, by Emil Brunner. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953) p. 113] - - It is unmistakable that today, in Europe especially, there prevails a far-reaching mistrust of everything that has to do with the Church, even among such as are quite open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must not forget that the idea of the Church is heavily compromised by nineteen hundred years of Church history, and the churches have accumulated obstacles between Jesus Christ and the individual man which are often impossible to surmount. The suspicion of all that goes by the name of the Church is therefore most certainly not to be referred exclusively to a false individualism, but on the contrary flows not at least from the recognition that that fellowship which is the theme of the Gospel of Jesus and the Apostles, not only is missing from the churches but quite often is simply not desired there. For who thinks, when he hears the word "church" of brotherhood, of a vital creative togetherness..

These words are pertinent and they center attention **on one of the great values of Christian Individualism. It permits a faithful presentation of Jesus Christ to others.**

Christian Individualism permits a man's eye to be single when he seeks to win men to Christ. There is no demand upon him to bring men to Christ and also to the church. He is able to plead God's cause and feel no need of pleading the cause of any church or denomination. Thus he does not put what might be difficult or insurmountable obstacles between man and Christ. He can deal with some sinners which many churches would reject knowing quite well that Christ will receive them.

Christian Individualism lifts a man to sublime independence of all the religions that surround him. Knowing well that a man can be joined direct to God through Jesus Christ, he can deal with men with the sole object in view that this shall be their experience with God. He knows that the Bible invites every man to stand face to face with God in Christ, and that it does not require him to face the issues created by religious organizations.

The Christian individualist knows the satisfying value of having gone direct to God, knowing no intermediary but Jesus Christ His Son, and no ultimate authority but His Word. He refuses to listen to the officious cries of churchmen who declare that he cannot have Him unless he also takes them.

The Christian faith was from the very first the personal faith of individuals. This is made clear by the declarations of Paul who tells us that after God's dealings with him on the Damascus Road, he did not confer with any human being, neither did he go up to Jerusalem to them who were apostles before him, but went into Arabia, then later came back to Damascus (See Gal. 1:15-19). Of course these believers were not always scattered, and wherever possible they moved and acted as a fellowship of individuals. When one of them found himself cut off from all others, he stood alone, finding his all in Christ. He often found it necessary to say, even as godly Asaph of old: **"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee"** (Psalm 73:25).

There is no place in the writings of Paul where the phrase "in Christ" can be made to mean "in the Christian community," as the writer quoted earlier declares. And in answer to his statement that he "who takes Christianity seriously is forced to take the Church seriously," many individual and personal believers in Christ will say, "We have taken the church seriously, but the church refuses to take us seriously." It makes little, if any, provision for the active believer in Jesus Christ who is deeply in love with God's truth as set forth in His Word. It pays lip service to Bible study,

but cannot allow that any truth will be found which will challenge its beliefs or creed. It may be a veritable beehive of activity, since it believes that everything can be accomplished by organizations and committees, but encourages no honest research that will face the facts declared in God's Word. It judges the active believer as being uncooperative because he fails to participate in its programs. It demands that he accommodate himself to its fickle membership with their moods, notions, and childish ideas. It insists that he participate in all its boondoggling and make-work activities which it puts forth as being service for God, usually as being God's program for His church. It demands conformity to traditions and established patterns of thought. Its spirit is ever that of collectivism, the subjugation of an individual to a group for the good of the group. It chains its members to collective thought and collective action for the good of the organization. It is forced by its very nature to deprive its members of their inalienable rights in Christ, that is, the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free.

Of course, this all works very well for those passive people who dread independence. We live in a world where the majority of people seem to be lost and alone. Much of this arises from the fact that they have always been taken care of by others and they want to continue to be taken care of by others. They want to be given directives to obey infallible ideas to be believed without study, question, or thought. They want to submit, to be regulated, to be told. They welcome any and every opportunity which eliminates the task of thinking and acting on their own initiative. They need to belong to something, and if that something claims to be an institution that represents Jesus Christ and will relate them to Him, they gladly give assent and give it this place in their lives. Christian Individualism is certainly not a way of life for passive people such as these.

Consideration of Terms

For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. Job 34:3.

It is my desire that the principles set forth in this study shall be understood. There are so many areas open to misunderstanding that it is too much to hope that none shall occur. But at least it is hoped that disagreements will not arise from misunderstanding of the terms used. Proper semantics will aid greatly in the presentation and understanding of any subject, but even perfect semantics can do nothing about the emotions of

a hearer or reader. It is just at this point that the semanticist comes so spectacularly wide of the mark when he insists that most of the misunderstandings among men could be cleared up by proper means of communication. He forgets that men are emotional beings, not just intellectual beings, and most of them are far more emotional than intellectual. Even perfect communications would not bring a good understanding as long as one drop of prejudice remains in any man.

I ask it to be noted carefully that by the phrase *way of life* I do not mean a way of salvation. I hold no ideas that forgiveness or redemption is to be found even in Christian individualism. Such blessings as these must always be founded upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. They cannot be related to what we are or what we are doing. Men are forgiven, redeemed, and justified, not on the basis of what they can do for God, but on the basis of what God has done for them. These blessings can become ours only through faith in Jesus Christ. By the phrase "way of life" I do not mean a way or manner of obtaining life. I mean a way or manner of living in respect to certain conditions and circumstances for the one who has obtained life through Jesus Christ.

The term *active believer* needs both to be defined and explained. *Some* will say that *belief* must be active or it could not be classed as belief. With this I agree. In these studies the word *active* is used by way of emphasis, not by way of contrast. It needs to be noted that Christian Individualism is being set forth as a way of life for the active believer. It is not for the nominal Christian. This way of living will not be satisfactory and will be of no help to that great multitude of people who at one time "professed faith" in Jesus Christ and then became passive about the whole matter.

Most of my readers, I am sure, are quite familiar with the pressure that in this day is brought upon people to join a church. It is much easier to yield to this pressure and join up than it is to withstand it and stay out. Vigorous programs of visitation evangelism are carried on in order that membership rolls may show a gain, the Sunday services may be better attended, and the budget may be balanced. Men are pressured into putting on "the form of godliness" and becoming members of a church. In order to join, some profession of faith is as a rule required. This is usually the assent given to certain questions asked of those seeking membership. They know they are supposed to answer "yes." After membership is established, the gregarious

and the convivial often become quite active in the work of the church, accepting appointments on committees, or being drafted for the men's bowling team, yet being completely passive in regard to progress in or continuance in the faith of Jesus Christ. Christian Individualism is certainly not for these.

Neither is it for those business and professional men who know the value of the contacts they can make in a church organization, nor is it for those who are seeking for community or neighborhood acceptance and approval by belonging to the right organizations, one of which must be the right church. This is not for the status seekers, nor is it for those who value so highly the "country-club religion" provided by so many churches today.

Christian Individualism is for the active believer in Jesus Christ who has discovered that his interest in God's truth and his growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ has brought him into conflict with the *status quo* that is so fervently maintained by the organizations that call themselves churches.

By the term *active believer* I do not necessarily mean a believer who is an active worker. In fact the active believer may find it very difficult to do much work. One of the most difficult things he will face, and must accept as part of his lot in Christ, is the limitation which "living for Christ" is going to force upon him in regard to those activities which so many engage in under the guise of Christian service.

The active believer may not find it possible to be an active worker since much so-called Christian service of today is based upon the worker compromising, temporizing, and keeping silent about his convictions. Much of the so-called "evangelism" of today is a grief to the active believer. He cannot sympathize with those who are always urging men to believe, yet they are never telling them anything to believe. They act as if there is no absolute truth concerning Jesus Christ, and if one speaks of "the truth" he is considered intolerant.

Since faith in Jesus Christ is belief in the record God has given of His Son, the active believer is one who is never satisfied with his knowledge and understanding of God's record. Creedal statements concerning Christ may satisfy many, but they do not satisfy the active believer. "That I may know Him" is the motive behind his perpetual and progressive studies in the Word of God.

The words *individualism* and *individualist* have no fixed meanings until they are given a context. If any should turn these words against me and make them to mean *egoism* and *egoist*, they will have to ignore the prefix *Christian* which I always place before these words.

There are many egoists today who are motivated by an excessive love and thought for themselves with a complete disregard for the feelings and wishes of others. There are many today who refuse to conform to anything. They do not like people, and anything people may be doing acts as a spur to them to do something different. As a rule their non-conformity concerns things of little importance. Thus they become peculiar, different, or eccentric, but they are not true individualists. I refuse to be individualistic in my dress, unless it be that neatness and good taste in dress are now considered individualistic. Since most men are clean shaven, I too shave every day. I am not individualistic as to my diet, eating that which is set before me and asking no questions thereof. I am not an eccentric, subsisting on fruits and nuts, and I do not wear robe or sandals. My individualism is something that is reserved almost entirely for the Lord Jesus Christ. **It** is for His glory, not mine. I do not think it is wise to try to escape the trend toward conformity so far as the material side of life is concerned.

In recent years there has been much written concerning individualism. This has been mostly in praise of it, and yet some of this has been nothing more than lip service. For individualism, so often honored in theory, is frowned upon in practice. However, much that has been written has helped greatly to bring this matter into sharp focus. At least the word *individualism* is now clearly understood and its meaning established.

Some years ago an article by the well known novelist Ayn Rand did much to clarify this word. She wrote on individualism as a way of life in relationship to our political and economic system. What she said might well be projected to take in individualism as a way of life for the active believer in Jesus Christ. In part she said:

The greatest threat to mankind and civilization is the spread of the totalitarian philosophy. Its best ally is not the devotion of its followers, but the confusion of its enemies. To fight it, we must understand it.

Totalitarianism is collectivism. Collectivism is the subjugation of the individual to a group whether to a race, class or state does not matter. Collectivism holds that man must be chained to collective action and collective thought for the sake of what is called "the common good." . . . No tyrant has ever lasted long by the force of arms alone. Men have been enslaved primarily by spiritual weapons. And the greatest of these is the collectivist doctrine that the supremacy of the state over the individual constitutes the common good. No dictator could rise if men held as a sacred faith the conviction that they have inalienable rights of which they cannot be deprived for any cause whatsoever, by any man whatsoever, neither by evildoer, nor by supposed benefactor.

This is the basic tenet of individualism, as opposed to collectivism. **Individualism holds that man is an independent entity with an inalienable right to the pursuit of his own happiness in a society where men deal with one another as equals.** .[Quoted from The Readers Digest, .January 1944. pp. 88-91]

Another clear delineation of individualism has come to us from the pen of **Robert Osborn**, the cartoonist-philosopher, whose words need to be read along with his drawings to be fully appreciated. In part he says:

Some of us do stand up for our beliefs - We try it "outside" for awhile but are soon frightened by solitude, contention, thought. . . so we crawl back into the tranquilized crowd - glad to be blurred in the massive herd. Well, enough of this nonsense ! Let us emerge - one by one - and remember that the only people who have accomplished anything in life have been individuals. . .thinking, feeling individuals - willing to sit by themselves and understand their OWN thoughts and their OWN beliefs (being in those quiet moments far beyond the range of loudspeakers, billboards, and mass motivations). They're the ones who aren't afraid to give thought to where they are going, and WHY..[Quoted from Better Homes and Garden, October 1957]

Words such as those quoted above are of special importance in view of that movement which is so active in religious circles today called the "ecumenical movement." There can be no doubt but that this movement has

as its goal the complete homogenization of all professing Christians, in which all ideas and values are to be mass produced, and in which any opinions which deviate will have no right to be heard. Those who are in a position to know tells us that the dynamic behind the ecumenical movement is almost frightening, that the commitment of the powerful churchmen concerned with this movement is a driving force, a faith, a passion. Many of them are willing to sacrifice every other loyalty to the goal of total ecumenism.

Many there are, both in churches and out of them, who believe that the goal of this movement is simply that **all Christians shall be united in one great church**, thus bringing to an end the disgraceful divisions that have existed almost since the time of Christ. But many of the declarations made by some of the leaders of this movement seem to indicate that the ultimate goal is a super-organization so powerful that it will in the end dominate the world.

Up to the present decade ecumenicity has always been a dream. However, the tendency toward standardization and uniformity which is sweeping the western world has given it great impetus. It is no longer a dream, it is a fact. It has received general acceptance from a majority of Protestant churches, and the whole ecclesiastical machinery is slowly grinding toward it.

The Christian Individualist stands aloof from all of this. He is unable to fellowship with those who worship the movements and programs which are motivating the churches today. He cannot go along with those whose sole desire is to merge their identity with a group. Some men simply do not want to be free, and an organization is often a spiritual sanitarium for men who are afraid to stand alone.

Some Questions and Objections

The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going. Proverbs 14:15.

The chief objection usually raised against the position set forth in these pages is that the church is a divine institution and he who does not participate in its life and work is failing to become a part of that which God

instituted upon this earth as a gathering place for His people. "Christ built the church as a gathering place for His people. He gave it to be used. Not to be spurned. Woe to such who do!" These are the words of a minister who wrote to me about this matter. Another has written me to say that "since the church is given such a prominent place in the New Testament we cannot be right unless we give it a great place in our lives."

Arguments such as these assume what needs to be proved. I do not accept the idea that "the church" is a divine institution. The institution that is quite prominent in the New Testament is "the ecclesia," concerning which Emil Brunner says: "In the last 50 or 100 years New Testament research has unremittingly and successfully addressed itself to the task of elucidating for us what was known as the *Ecclesia* in primitive Christianity - so very different from what is today called the Church both in the Roman and Protestant camps. It is, however, a well-known fact that dogmatists and Church leaders often pay but small attention to the results of New Testament research, and are only too ready to bridge the gulf between then and now by a handy formula such as that of development, or by appealing to the distinction between the visible and invisible Church, and thus to give a false solution to this grave and distressing problem." (*Misunderstanding of the Church*, page 5).

The believer in Jesus Christ has every right to refuse the *quid pro quo* that makes organized religion to be an enlargement or development of the New Testament *ecclesia*. My own studies in this subject confirm what Brunner declares unremitting research has found, namely that there IS NO similarity between the Biblical *ecclesia* and the churches of today. God's *ecclesia*, which is so prominent in the book of Acts, was **not** an organization which men joined. **God's *ecclesia* were individuals, outcalled men and women.** In the Acts period these out-called ones mediated between men and Christ, as their every act and work shows. **This mediatorial work came to an end at the close of the Acts period**, leading Paul to declare that there is "**one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim. 2:5). This is present truth. This is truth for today.

I reject all the numerous attempts that are made to attribute to present day believers all the positions, powers, and privileges that belonged to the believer of the Acts period. They were the out-called of God in fact and reality, and they acted as such. We are the out-called of God in promise and expectation, and any attempt to act as such will end in failure. The word *ecclesia* told them what they were. It tells us what we someday will be.

Many "churches" are good organizations and many of them do much good work, but this is also true of many *other* organizations such as synagogues. However, always lurking in the background of even the best churches are those unscriptural claims and false assumptions which are impossible for the active believer in Jesus Christ to accept.

Another objection to Christian Individualism as a way of life has to do with worship. "How can anyone worship if he does not go to church?" is the question often asked. This query does nothing more than reveal the ignorance of the one who asks its concerning the meaning and character of true worship. Here is another *quid pro quo* which would make worship to be that which men do in church on Sunday, therefore, he who does not attend church does not worship. This is denied.

True worship is always a personal and individual matter, which while it may be done with a company, it will not be at all unless it is done by an individual. **True worship is heartfelt adoration of God because of who He is, what He is, and what He does.** It is never dependent upon place or ritual. It needs no established forms or ceremonies. Whenever because of revealed truth a heart responds with adoration and gratitude because of what God is or what He has done, that is worship.

An objection is also raised because of sacraments and ordinances. The claim is made that "the church" is the custodian of the ceremonies called "means of grace." "How can we participate in these apart from the church?" Those who raise this question must be ignorant of the fact that there are non-sacramental churches, and there are also those which give no place to ritual and no place to ordinances. It is folly to try to bind "church ordinances" upon Christian individualists. The steadfast refusal of the churches to make any objective examination and appraisal of their ordinances is one thing that has driven many to Christian Individualism.

Then there is the matter of assembling together. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" is the crude way in which Hebrews 10: 26 is misquoted and hurled at us. These words are interpreted to mean "Go to church on Sunday." Thus those who go to church have assembled, those who do not have failed to do so. Permit me to answer this by a personal experience.

In the same week that this is being written a friend said to me: "Can we get together this week. I have many questions to ask and certain ideas that I would like for us to consider." To this I agreed and an evening was set. On that night for four hours, he on one side of my desk and I on the other, with concordances, versions and other tools at hand, we questioned, considered, and discussed matters that pertain to the message and meaning of the Word of God. Is there anyone who will say that we did not assemble ourselves together, and that this did not fulfill Hebrews 10:25? If so, then, "they say what they say, let them say it"

Christian Individualism does not mean that the believer stands alone. But it does mean that he knows how to stand alone, and that he will without complaint stand happily alone if he deems it to be a part of the worthy walk of his calling. He does not need to look to the right or to the left to see what someone else is going to do. He has a profound sense of his personal responsibility to God, therefore, he will put Him first and every other consideration must be subservient. While he earnestly desires fellowship and community with others, he refuses to allow this desire to be the reigning influence of his life. He dislikes isolation and aloneness as much as anyone, yet he will not compromise in order to belong. He cannot yield allegiance to any organization, since all organizations are composed of human beings who err and whose judgments are always less than divine truth.

In the December, 1959 issue of *Eternity* Dr. Raymond Ortlund, Pastor of Lake Ave. Congregational Church in Pasadena, Calif. had a tongue-in-cheek article under title of "Are You A Cookie-Cutter Christian?" In this he said in part:

Are you aware that you are under group pressure? Do you realize that we evangelical Christians would like to make you think, talk, dress, and act just like the rest of us? Are you aware that we are trying to make all Christians "cookie cutter Christians" - all stamped out in the same design? . . . We need not fear the lading of the Holy Spirit. We need not be nervous about allowing our brethren to follow God instead of us. He has made no two snowflakes alike - and yet they are legitimate snowflakes, perfect and beautiful. And so He has made you individually, given you unique talents, ideas, characteristics. Contribute them to the whole body of Christ ! He did not stamp you out mechanically. Spiritually it is important for you to be yourself. The Holy Spirit can accomplish peculiarly through you a part of His work and plan. Don't let someone else spoil His work !

When we try to push you around, don't let us ! If we eye you suspiciously because you aren't quite like us, forgive us - but resist us ! Use your Spirit-controlled mind to seek His will for you alone. Don't be a "cookie-cutter Christian I"

To these words the active believer in Jesus Christ will say, "Thank you, Dr. Ortlund we will not let anyone push us around, we will also forgive those who eye us suspiciously because we are not like them, and they can be assured of our stubborn resistance. However, we do not think we should try this as members of a church. A burned child dreads fire, you know, and many of us wear the scars of past experiences."

A Warning

**To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear?
Jeremiah 6:10.**

Those who have access to current Roman Catholic literature will find the title *Mary Mediatrix* appearing somewhat more frequently than ever before. This title means that she is "the mediatrix of all graces," the one through whom "all spiritual graces are distributed," and apart from whom Christ cannot be approached. While this is not yet Roman Catholic doctrine, many careful observers feel that Catholics are being softened up for an approaching ecumenical council in which it will be elevated to the status of a dogma, and Mary will be given the title of *Mary Mediatrix*. One Catholic bishop has proposed that the ecumenical council go further and proclaim Mary "co-redemptrix", a full partner with Christ in the redemption of the world from sin. Donald Grey Barnhouse has said that: "Already tracts are available in the racks of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York which state, 'Mary is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to Jesus except through Mary.'" This is deplorable, and many Protestants will shudder at the thought of it, but before they speak too strongly in condemnation they had better look first at their own house.

There is today a very large and powerful group among Protestants who are working to give "the church" the same place that the Catholics would give to Mary. They would make organized religion, called by them "the church" to be co-mediator with Christ. In order to soften up the Protestants for this idea, sermons are constantly being preached and books written under

the title of "I Believe in the Church." In these sermons and books unscriptural claims are made and false assumptions declared concerning "the church" which, if true, can mean nothing else but that churches mediate between man and Christ. The strength of this movement cannot be denied, and its growth and success sounds louder and louder the death knell of true Protestantism.

The sum and substance of true Protestantism is the powerful idea that a man needs no mediator between himself and God but the Lord Jesus Christ. It rejects all intermediaries such as a preacher, priest, or rabbi. It denies mediatorial values to institutions, organizations, ceremonials, ordinances, and liturgies. It denies that faith can be demonstrated by a prescribed ceremony. It insists that any man can face the problem of God, of Christ, of life, and of death for himself and by himself if he cares to do so. He should never need to do so, but he can if he must.

There is no doubt that being among the accepted and the acceptable has its advantages. This being true, most professing Christians have found their own little niche in an ecclesiastical caste system which, as H. Richard Niebuhr says, is determined more by nationalities, economic positions and geographical sectionalism than by spiritual or Biblical standards. This may seem good to many, but the active believer in Jesus Christ knows that his unique role as a believer in an unbelieving world will be lost in the process. The churches of today offer a security which relieves man of all personal responsibility, so far as study, thinking, and determining are concerned. This is a security which is sought after by many, but it has no attraction for the active believer in Jesus Christ. The active believer does not dread independence and he has no fear of being among the disinherited. He does not seek for a group to do his thinking, make his decisions, arrange his life, or order his worship.

There are active believers in Jesus Christ who are members of churches and who have found a place of service within its membership. Some of these feel that they have solved the great problem of how an individual can also be a member of a group and secure all the benefits of both ways of life. This is their right as an individual. I neither commend this nor condemn it. A believer's right to freedom certainly gives him the right to unite with a group. However, a difficulty arises when he begins to think that it is the duty of others to do the same. And it needs to be recognized that individualism has ceased when a man's acceptance by a group is based upon his silence.

In Exhortation

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation. Hebrews 13:22.

Christian Individualism is a way of life, not a way of escape. It consists of what an active believer does, not what he does not do. Let no careless, loveless, prayerless, selfish, anti-social person take refuge in it! Let no Sunday morning golfer or fisherman adopt it in order to free himself for the pursuit of his pleasures! Let not the stingy use it as a way to cease giving! Let none take this high and holy position unless his life is lived for the glory of Christ! Let none say, "I am a believer, this is all God requires!" Let none say "I have faith, that is enough!" It is not enough. Even as Peter declares:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 2 Peter 1 :5-9.

And now a word in defense. This study is a personal testimony, a record of deep personal convictions and experiences. It is therefore written in the first person. This makes possible a specious criticism which is anticipated. The personal pronoun "I" will be found about 75 times in this study. This will save *ad hominem* critics the trouble of counting them. Before I am criticized for this, let the critic consider the inspired writing of Paul in Romans 7: 15-25 in which the personal pronoun "I" is used 24 times in 233 words.

In Conclusion

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Ecclesiastes 12: 13.

The times in which we live are unique in many ways. One modern phenomenon is the trend of men toward conformity to moods, tastes, and opinions of the general public. It is now thought to be good if the individual

is lost in the crowd. Everyone is supposed to think and feel and act like everyone else, even in the most intimate personal pleasures and feelings. Whatever the public values must be valued by the individual, whatever the public despises, he must also despise.

Since men like crowds and worship numbers they cease to have any truly personal feelings or opinions. They are persuaded that if a thing is believed by enough people it must be true or right. Thus it is that men cease to have any real personality or character, because their springs of individuality have dried up. John Stuart Mill truly held that personality and character are built by the exercise of discrimination, evaluation and choice. If these personal faculties are not used, they grow blunt and dull and finally wither away. When this happens a man becomes depersonalized, a human automation.

On every hand men believe this to be an ideal situation in relationship to man's spiritual activities. In the realm of religion men are supposed to be depersonalized, and to act, think, and move as a unit, not as individuals. If they ask questions, they must be stock questions, to which they are expected to receive without further question stock answers. They are not supposed to exercise any discrimination or to evaluate anything.

This is an intolerable situation for the active believer in Jesus Christ. His greatest desire is to make progress in truth, to continue on in the faith. His chief activity is the study of the book he believes and confesses to be the Word of God. To know this Word and conform his thinking to it is the preeminent purpose in his life.

It is evident that in order to be obedient to the Word of God one must be acquainted with it, and in order to be acquainted with it, we must carefully study it. And how should we study it? Merely to find proof texts to support our own preconceptions and ideas? Or should we study it with an earnest desire to understand its contents, with profound reverence for its authority, and with an honest purpose to obey and conform to its truth, whatever it may cost us?

In most churches none but the minister is supposed to do any serious Biblical work. But as a rule it is painfully evident that he is not doing it. Furthermore, very few of his people would want it even if he did.

This is the situation that forces the active believer in Jesus Christ into that path of life which in this study is called Christian Individualism. In this way of life he can fulfill his place as a believer in this unbelieving world.

The End. #SS05