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**THE GOOD LIFE: WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by

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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This not only helps in tracking expenses but also ensures compliance with tax regulations.

In the second section, the author outlines the various methods used for data collection and analysis. These include surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Each method has its own strengths and limitations, and the choice depends on the specific research objectives.

The third section delves into the statistical analysis of the collected data. It covers topics such as descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and regression analysis. The goal is to identify patterns and trends in the data that can inform business decisions.

Finally, the document concludes with a summary of the findings and recommendations. It highlights the key insights gained from the research and provides practical advice for implementing these findings in the business context.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of the data collected during the study. It shows the distribution of responses across different categories, allowing for a more granular analysis of the results.

Category	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3
Age Group	15-24	25-34	35-44
Gender	Male	Female	Other
Education Level	High School	Bachelor's	Master's
Income Level	Low	Medium	High
Usage Frequency	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Usage Duration	Less than 1 year	1-3 years	More than 3 years
Usage Location	Home	Office	Public
Usage Device	Smartphone	Tablet	Desktop
Usage Purpose	Work	Personal	Both
Usage Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Satisfied

The data indicates that the majority of users are in the 25-34 age group, with a higher proportion of females. Most users have a bachelor's degree and a medium income level. They use the product daily, primarily from their homes, and are generally satisfied with their experience.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the company focus on improving the user interface and adding more features that cater to the needs of the primary user demographic. Additionally, targeted marketing campaigns should be developed to reach these specific user segments.

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A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE.

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"I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full." (1) Jesus promised his followers abundant life. But, who are Jesus' followers? What constitutes the Christian "Good Life" and the means to achieve it? These questions have plagued Christianity from its inception.

Historical And Cultural Background

Jesus, was born and died a Jew as were most of his earliest followers. It was not their intention to create a new religion distinct from Judaism. Rather, they saw in Jesus a way of life which provided a model of spiritual vitality. They continued Jesus' ministry of healing the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and preaching the "good news" of the kingdom of God. Whatever their intentions, however, they soon established an identity distinct from the Jewish community.

Disputes over the requirements for being a follower of Jesus arose early. Some insisted that unless one were

circumcised and kept the complete law of Moses he could not be saved. (2) Others held that new believers ought not to be burdened with the whole law but only to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. (3) The new church quickly adopted the position that "God does not have favorites but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him." (4) Largely through the work of the Apostle Paul, the Jew Jesus became the founder of a distinctly new religion not only outside of but also in competition with Judaism.

The new church offered a world view at once distinct from its Judaic origins, its Roman persecutors and its Greek scoffers. It rejected scrupulous obedience to Judaic law, the authority of Roman paganism and the Greek view that one could achieve the good life by realizing the natural potential for virtue inherent in each individual. Instead, it portrayed the human soul as helplessly and hopelessly naked before a God against whom it had sinned. The sin of disobedience was seen to have alienated humans from God, from their neighbors and from themselves to such an extent that it could no longer be overcome by mere human effort. It was thought that restoration to the good life was possible only through the grace of God. For Christians,

belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provided the assurance of this divine grace.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul outlined what he believed to constitute this new life in Christ. For the most part, his instructions contrasted Christian values and behaviors with pagan practices. In particular, he criticized pagan promiscuity and fornication and instructed Christians to "be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way in the goodness and holiness of the truth." (5) Christians were also instructed to avoid lying and to speak the truth, to quell their anger, not steal and to refrain from obscene talk. They must not hold grudges, lose their temper or be insulting and spiteful. (6) And again, Christians were admonished not to even mention fornication, impurity or promiscuity in any form whether in salacious talk or jokes. "For you can be quite certain that nobody who indulges in fornication, impurity or promiscuity ... can inherit anything of the kingdom of god." (7)

During the Apostolic Age, faith in the eminent return of Christ was a major factor in determining codes of behavior. The Apostle Paul was frequently called upon to settle disputes over questions of belief and behavior in the newly emerging congregations. Instructions concerning

preparation for marriage, family relations and participation in worldly pursuits were all predicated upon the belief that Christ would soon return to lead all good Christians into his heavenly kingdom. It was during this period, with the eager anticipation of the second coming, that Christians were instructed in the preference of celibacy over the married state. The person who was willing to forgo marriage thus showed superior faith in Christ's return; those who could not accept celibacy might be thought to be either weak in flesh, faith or discipline. Thus, the celibate was viewed as religiously superior.

By the close of the apostolic age, the followers of Jesus had become more numerous and represented a wider diversity of national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This diversity plus the failure of Christ's return led to many disputes concerning proper Christian beliefs and ways of life. Individual churches began developing their own interpretations of Christ's teachings and standards for living. The Patristic Age was characterized by the attempt to unify and formalize orthodox canons of belief and behavior, in other words: to define what it was to be a good Christian.

One of the sects proclaimed to be heretical was the Gnostics. In addition to holding a number of unacceptable

doctrinal beliefs, the Gnostics also practiced their religion in ways that were anathema to the newly emerging central authority of the church. Gnostics believed in the essential equality of everyone baptized in the spirit. This led not only to their rejection of a hierarchical professional clergy but also to asserting the equality of women and men in the ministry of the church. Such egalitarianism was considered an affront to the power of the professional clergy of the authoritarian church. The Gnostic recognition of women as ministerial equals to men seemed to particularly infuriate the authorities of the newly centralized church. Tertullian, representing the view of the central church, ridiculed the Gnostics by proclaiming: "The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures--it may be even to baptize." (8) The church fathers quickly put these Gnostic heretics and "their women" in their proper place -- outside of official Christendom. Many of the issues they represented however, would only lie dormant to be resurrected once again in a then distant Christian future.

During the Middle Ages the Christian good life was characterized by martyrs, mystics and monks. Before Constantine made Christianity an authorized religion of the

Roman Empire, many a Christian went to their death happy to suffer in the name of Jesus. The church continued to enjoy political protection even after the death of Constantine and the redivision of his Empire into East and West.

With the fall of Rome in 476, the Church constituted the only stable organization of society. Church leaders quickly assumed civic responsibilities and political authority in the wake of the disentraining civil government. In particular, the Bishop of Rome -- the Pope -- established the Church as both civil and ecclesiastical authority in the model of Roman monarchies. For the Western Christian, the good life meant being part of this establishment, especially a member of the ranking clergy.

Meanwhile, Eastern Christendom had turned to monasticism and mysticism. Ironically, the worldly success of the Church drove many of those who might have previously sought holiness in martyrdom into monastic seclusion in order to escape the luxury and temptations of the Greco-Roman world. Monasticism naturally gave rise to mysticism by providing a retreat from the concerns of secular society and the encouragement of an intense life of prayer. The monastic sought the Christian good life through renunciation especially of wealth, self expression and sexual gratification.

Doctrinal disputes continued within and between Eastern and Western Christendom. But the religious life of each seemed less desperate. Western monasteries were organized in much the same way and for the same reasons as those in the Eastern Church. After the schism of 1054, Eastern Orthodox priests were allowed to marry. In the West however, Pope Gregory VII imposed celibacy on all clerics, secular as well as monastic. Nevertheless, violations of priestly chastity were rampant among the entire clergy of both secular and monastic vocations and irrespective of rank. Thus celibacy, in theory if not in practice, continued to be regarded as a superior religious state. The married state was not regarded as conducive to the religious good life.

The issues of doctrine which gave rise to the protestant reformation are too numerous and complex to discuss here. Yet, in addition to the many protests concerning beliefs there were also numerous protests concerning values and behaviors. Among these were the issues of clerical celibacy and the role of marriage in the life of a good Christian. Luther, Calvin and Zwingli all opposed priestly celibacy, as did virtually all protestant reformers. Each married and established Christian families. Luther took great exception to Catholic teachings regarding

marriage. He held that "the marriages of the ancients were no less sacred than ours" and that marriages between heathens and Christians ought not to be forbidden: "A heathen is just as much a man or a woman created by God as St. Peter, St. Paul or St. Lucy." He even argued that a woman married to an impotent man might, with the permission of her husband, have intercourse with another man in order to conceive a child. And, if the husband refused consent, she may divorce him. (9) To this day, Christians continue to hold widely conflicting views concerning the roles of sexuality and marriage in the Christian good life.

Diversity of opinion concerning the proper expression of human sexuality was by no means the only issue to divide Christians in their attempt to establish rules for good living. Another issue of at least as great concern was the acquisition and disposal of wealth. One of the most serious grievances against the Church at the time of the Reformation was its questionable acquisition of ecclesiastical wealth. It is estimated that in the sixteenth century three quarters of all French wealth was ecclesiastical (in Germany one third) and one third of Italy belonged to the church as Papal states. The Reformation could be seen in part as a revolution for the redistribution of wealth. (10)

Protestantism obeyed with a vengeance God's command to "go forth and multiply..." (11) Literally hundreds of denominations and sects, each with its own beliefs and visions of the Christian good life, have proliferated in an attempt to fill, if not to conquer, the earth. Some of these churches had very strict rules concerning sexuality, others were quite liberal; some forbade drinking others did not; some saw the Christian good life intergrated into the world, others did not; some believed that the good life should be achieved through strict organization; others opposed formal structures. Hardly any facet of human behavior exists which has not found diverse and even contradictory expression among those communities of people who call themselves "Christian."

The question of whether the Christian good life was compatible with having slaves drove a wedge between Northern and Southern Baptists. The Shakers believed the sex act to be the source of all human sin and depravity and proscribed marriage and sexual activity in favor of a simple celibate life of abstinence and service. The Oneida community on the other hand, took a very different view of marriage and sexual behavior. Like the Shakers, they also saw the Christian good life in terms of communal living but unlike the Shakers their communal relationships extended to

marriage as well. They practiced a system of "complex marriage" in which every woman was regarded as the wife of every man and each man the husband of every woman. (12). Many Christian communities encouraged missionary efforts in spreading the Christian good life while others forbade them. Primitive, Old School, or Anti-mission Baptists were opposed to the establishment not only of missions but also of Sunday Schools, Bible societies and a professional clergy.

While most Christians pursue the good life in integration with the larger cultures in which they live, some renounce the customs of their places and times in favor of pursuing the good life within communities which resist conformity to the world. Thus, for example, the River Brethern, Dunkards, and Amish (despite other differences) teach that the Christian good life is to be pursued in a life of nonresistance and nonconformity to the world. Instead, they live unostentatious lives segregated from the world. While many Christian communities seek to achieve the good life through formally structured organizations, others repudiate such efforts. The Catholic Church is well known for its hierarchical organizaional structure. The Salvation Army is organized on a decidedly military model in which even military titles and uniforms are characteristic of their expression of the Christian good life. On the other

hand, communities such as the Society of Friends (Quakers) (like their Gnostic forebears) reject the establishment of professional clergy and hierarchical organization in favor of communities based upon the equality of all believers regardless of sex or station in life.

Who is Christian and who is not? If we approach this question from a historical and cultural perspective of describing the beliefs and activities of all who have claimed themselves to be Christians then one despairs of finding any common or universal Christian lifestyle. The historical and cultural diversity of Christianity defies any attempt to identify practically anything at all which could be called "The Christian Good Life."

Much of the diversity in lifestyle among Christians is due in part, at least, to their various interpretations of the nature of the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus. Thus, we have those who see the Gospel as a set of instructions for the attainment of the good life through worldly renunciation: for others, through service to society, for others still, through strict obedience to divine ordinance, and for still others, through personal achievement of health, wealth and prosperity.

The United States has recently been the scene of scandal and religious infighting among some of the most

prominent evangelists of the "television ministry." And, like the disputes and abuses of earlier times, the issues have focused on sex, money and power. One evangelist declared that it had been revealed to him that unless the faithful contributed eight million dollars to his ministry he would be "called home" by God. (13) Another evangelical couple were forced to resign their lucrative television ministry in the midst of sexual scandal. They began their ministry as itinerate preachers living in a mobile home. Eventually however, their experience of the Christian good life included six homes, fourteen furs, Gold-plated bathroom fixtures, dinners with nine thousand dollars worth of imported truffles, a 1938 Rolls-Royce, two Mercedes Benz, and airconditioned houses for their dogs. Their 172 million dollar empire included a Christian amusement park and condos for Christians, all paid for by contributions from the faithful, solicited through their television ministry. In order to maintain themselves in the manner of the "Christian good life" to which they had become accustomed, they requested \$400,000 a year lifetime income, "hospitalization insurance, bodyguards, rights to books and records, a church owned house and its furniture and a year's worth of free telephone calls, secretarial help and maid service." (14) Much of the expense for such lifestyles are paid for from

contributions donated by people who are themselves devout believers living in poverty. (15)

If one considers lifestyle as constituting what is meant by the Christian good life, then it ranges from the simple life of peoples like the Amish and Shakers to the princely status of the Pope and from the poverty and renunciation of a Christian hermit to the opulent wealth and social influence of television evangelists.

One characteristic which many who call themselves Christian seem to have in common is the habit of denying that others who call themselves Christian really are. This tendency for prescriptive exclusion has existed in Christian history from the time of the disciples to the present. (16) Nevertheless, Christian history has consisted largely of this attempt at self justification through the disavowal of others who claim discipleship in Jesus in a manner different from their own. The expansion of protestantism, not to mention the almost legion examples of new religious groups recognizing the teachings of Jesus, renders ludicrous any attempt to prescriptively define specific ununique and uniform cannons of lifestyle for the Christian good life. To attempt to do so would be nothing less than self-righteous arrogance.

The essence of the Christian good life however may not consist in what is visible to the world but in the interior life of each believer. In other words, living the Christian good life may not be so much a matter of cultural lifestyle as it is the quest for the personal development of a Christian self in response to the demands of the world.

Besides differences of opinion concerning appropriate Christian lifestyle, Christians are divided against one another on a host of issues involving metaphysical beliefs. Questions concerning the natures and existence of heaven and hell, good and evil, Christology and systematic theology, not to mention disagreements concerning the understanding of scripture, provide thousands if not millions of reasons for Christians to "justify" their failure to heed Christ's admonition: Love thy neighbor! The former are matters of belief, the latter is a question of practice. Whatever is meant by the Christian good life it must in the end be a matter of practice.

Practicing The Christian Good Life

The notion of practicing Christianity -- like that of practicing anything else (for example, medicine, a musical instrument, or a sport) does not entail that one have perfected that which is practiced but only that one is committed to the improvement of the skills required toward

that end. Yet, there is an important difference between the conception of oneself as practicing to be something and conceiving of oneself as already being that thing practicing. Practicing to be a physician is very different from being a physician practicing. Those who conceive of themselves as practicing to become Christians place themselves at an important disadvantage to those who conceive themselves as Christians practicing. The former by their own self conception place themselves outside and separate from that which they hope to obtain. The latter on the other hand, offer themselves the advantage of the confidence which is born out of the conception of oneself as already having the benefit of the power and authority which makes their practice possible. As long as one continues to operate under the first conception, s/he cannot succeed; if one committs oneself to the second, s/he cannot fail.

Life In The Spirit

Practicing the Christian good life is more a matter of following a spiritual ethic, not a cultural life-style. To be sure, a spiritual ethic has important implications concerning life-style but their relationship cannot in all respects be determined merely by the evidence of worldly behavior. Hence, Jesus wisely warned his diciples: "Judge not that ye not be judged." (17)

A spiritual ethic is one concerned with habits of the soul. Whatever else the Christian good life is, it is concerned primarily with the life of the spirit. The ancient Greeks saw ethics as both a descriptive and prescriptive discipline. The word 'ethics' is derived from a Greek term meaning customs or habit. The science of ethics involves understanding descriptively the relationship between specific habits and their consequences. Prescriptively, an ethic presupposes some concept of the good as the goal or consequence for the sake of which one would develop habits of one kind rather than another. A spiritual ethic then is one concerned with guiding the soul to a specific goal through the development of particular habits of mind, i.e. intentions and thoughts. In a word, the ethic of Christianity is: Love! The Christian good life consists in practicing the habit of love.

The Christian concept of love is perhaps best understood in the context of the story of humanity's fall from grace as told in the third chapter of Genesis. For, it is fundamental to Christian faith that in Christ, the grace lost through Adam is restored. The central theme of Christian salvation is Christ's victory over the suffering and death inherited in Adams sin.

If the Christian ethic is an ethic of love and Adam's sin is restored in Jesus, then that sin was in some way a transgression against love. (18) Many are the interpretations given to the story of the fall in Genesis Three. Regardless of the specific interpretation of symbols and events, the underlying issue is a failure to trust the love of God. Adam's sin consisted not so much in his failure to obey God's command as it did in his failure to trust His love.

As the story goes, Adam and Eve were instructed not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, lest they die. Eve was tempted by the serpent's claim that eating the fruit of the tree would not cause them to die but rather to become like gods. Having eaten from the tree, Adam and Eve hid from God "because they were naked." God called out to the man: "Where are you?" to which Adam replied: "I heard the sound of you in the garden, I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." God replied: "Who told you you were naked? Have you been eating of the tree I forbade you to eat?" Adam responded by saying: "It was the woman you put me with she gave me the fruit and I ate it." God then asked the woman: "What is this you have done?" To which she replied: "The serpent tempted me and I ate." (19)

Here we have not only a story of disobedience but also of distrust. Adam's judgment of his own and Eve's nakedness as shameful was more than enough evidence for God to know of their transgression. How else could they have made such a judgment without having crossed over the line that separated the authority of the Gods from that of humans? Yet God would not, on that basis alone, have condemned them to a life of alienation and suffering. Adam's failure to acknowledge and accept responsibility for his act was a failure to trust God's love. His attempt to place blame for his act upon Eve, and indirectly upon God Himself, constituted a failure to act with love. There is no mystery in the fact that alienation -- sin -- was the result; it was and is the natural consequence of such failures of love. Whenever and wherever we fail to accept responsibility for our transgressions, we alienate ourselves from ourselves and those to whom we are responsible; attempting to blame someone or something else for our transgressions only compounds that alienation by further alienating us from those whom we blame. (20)

If indeed God is as Jesus taught, then Adam would not have had to suffer -- nor would we -- the alienation of sin. Had Adam faced God by accepting responsibility for his act and asking forgiveness with trust in His love, he would not

have had to live outside His grace. Adam's "original sin" is one we have inherited; it is one we repeat practically every day of our lives.

The Christian ethic of love cannot be understood apart from responsibility and suffering. Jesus is seen by the Christian as conquering suffering by accepting responsibility for sin. The crucifixion is the focal point of the Christian understanding of both suffering and salvation. The Gospels are testimony to Jesus' confrontation with the realities of suffering (not only in others but in his own person) and victory over them. Christ's acceptance of the responsibility for sin is the model upon which practicing Christians are expected to meet the realities of suffering which they find in and around themselves.

The essence of the Christian's response to suffering is Christ's revelation of God as a loving father. The proper Christian response to suffering is to be like Christ: That is, to be responsible for and forgiving of sin. Sin is that state of separation which alienates would-be lovers. Its power is derived from the fear which is the consequence of a failure to trust. Since sin is a failure in the relationship of love, its eradication can only be accomplished by each and every party accepting

responsibility for it through the positive act of reaching out with, and accepting the others', pleas for reconciliation. Thus, if a state of sin exists between two individuals and one offers reconciliation but the other does not, the sin continues by the failure of the non-reconciling party to accept responsibility for the sin. John tells us that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said: "Receive the holy spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." (21) A state of sin may continue either because of the failure to accept responsibility or request reconciliation, or by the failure to grant forgiveness when it is requested. Both are failures to love.

The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament offer not only the general requirement of the ethic of love, they also provide specific habits conducive to its practice. Because the essence of sin consists in an alienated relationship, one of the most important habits of mind is forgiveness. Paul instructs the Colossians: "Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same." (22) And, when Peter asked Jesus: "How often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?" Jesus replied: "Not

seven I tell you, but seventy-seven times." (23) There cannot be reconciliation without forgiveness; without it, love is not possible and sin is the necessary consequence.

Another habit of mind which is necessary for the cultivation of love is compassion. Compassion in the relief of suffering is the mark of the true disciple. Christ's victory over suffering, if it is to be more than a mere abstract fantasy, must be realized in specific concrete cases. Christian teachings constantly urge practical action in the relief of suffering. Each concrete act of compassion in ministering to those who suffer constitutes a replication of Christ's victory over suffering and demonstrates the power of the love he taught. Jesus equated each such act of compassion toward those who suffer as an act of compassion toward himself: "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did it for me." (24) The habit of compassion, in other words, requires more than wishful thinking or mere good intentions. It requires facing the hard realities of life in a practical way. James reminds us that: "If one of the brothers or sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that." (25)

Expressions of polite concern may be momentarily comforting, yet their significance fades in the shadow of the importance of meeting with love the practical situations and challenges of life. Such empty expressions of compassion are frequently motivated more out of the speaker's need to comfort him/herself than a genuine concern for those s/he finds in suffering. Yet, even the habit of mere compassionate thinking is better than no compassion at all. For compassionate thinking is presupposed by, and provides the predisposition toward, compassionate action.

For Jesus compassion is also related to the habit of refraining from being judgmental: "Be compassionate as your father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned." (26) Ironically, Jesus illustrated the truth of this principle through his condemnation of his contemporaries and their consequent condemnation of him. Compassion, in other words, must not be equated with weakness but must always be attendant with the courage of the truth. By accepting the condemnation of his contemporaries, Jesus showed the true meaning of his compassion and acceptance of responsibility. He illustrated compassion, responsibility and forgiveness when, hanging on

the cross he said: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." (27)

Time and again the scriptures warn against having a judgmental attitude. Making a judgment was the precursor to Adam's sin; failing to accept responsibility for that judgment was its consumation. The failure to accept responsibility for ones judgements and their consequences is insidiously destructive of love. Judgmentalness naturally and inexorably leads to anger and where there is anger there is alienation. The scriptures counsel: "Never have grudges against others, or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or allow any sort or spitefulness." (28) The habit of anger equated by Jesus with the sin of murder: "You have learned how it was said to our ancestors: you must not kill...but I say this to you: Anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it..." (29) Anger kills love. Just as a compassionate attitude is the predisposition for charitable acts, so is anger the predisposition to violence. Yet the scriptures are not so unrealistic as to assume that people will never become angry. They instruct us that anyone who becomes angry, "must not sin: never let the sun set on your anger." (30) Forgiveness and reconciliation are the cures for an angry heart.

In addition to being generated by judgmentalness, anger may grow out of frustrations over things of the world, especially in response to the fear of losing one's worldly possessions. The scriptures counsel against attachment to things of the world. Jesus placed so much importance on not attaching oneself to worldly possessions that he equated doing so with the loss of one's life: "What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and loses his life?" (Mat. 15:26) Jesus counseled his disciples not to be anxious about their worldly security but rather to be confident and to experience the freedom of a soul liberated from dependency on material goods. (32) It was not wealth itself which he condemned as evil but ones attachment to it. When the rich young man came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded by telling him to keep the commandments. When the young man replied that he had kept all the commandments from his earliest days Jesus responded: "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (33) The scriptures tell us that in hearing Jesus' response, the young man was saddened for he had great wealth. (34) The young man's attachment to his wealth prevented his liberation into the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus'

disciples heard this story, they were concerned that no one of wealth could enter the kingdom of God. Yet, Jesus responded to them by saying: "Things that are impossible for men are possible for God." (35)

In the final analysis the means for achieving the Christian good life rest upon basic principles of common sense and a dedication to promoting love. The principles of Christian thinking and behavior are the necessary consequences of the possibility of love; they present the parameters for our choice to love or not to love in specific situations by outlining the consequences of our attitudes and behaviors. Choosing in one direction naturally and necessarily results in alienation and sin; choosing the other just as naturally and necessarily results in reconcilliation and love.

There can be no doubt that love forms the basis of the ethic for the Christian good life. Scripture makes it clear that the commandment: "Love God above all else and your neighbor as your self!" is the cornerstone upon which the Christian good life rests. (36) Nor, can there be any doubt that Jesus' revelation consists in the asertion that his God is a god of love. One of the most eloquent expressions of this love is found in the first letter of John where we are told simply and boldly: "God is love!" (37) The

Christian's affirmation of this revelation is perhaps best expressed in the often quoted passage from John's gospel:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life." (38)

The Apostle Paul made clear his belief that nothing is good without love:

If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, It will do me no good whatever. (39)

It is the habit of a loving attitude, not spiritual gifts nor pious acts, which the true Christian holds to be of greatest worth. The supreme worth-ship of love is the essence of the Christian good life.

The Christian ethic of love is not a command imposed from without but resides in the heart of every human. Regardless of whether Jesus was divine, he did not require divine insight to be able to recognize this commandment. For it is necessarily implied by the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you! Only those who

desire not to be loved can deny Jesus' commandment. Ultimately failure to heed this commandment can only stem from a failure to love oneself. For not to follow it is to place oneself in a state of alienation, sin, and suffering. No one who loves would do that to the one s/he loves. One cannot love oneself without loving others.

Postscript

This paper began with the questions: "Who are Jesus' followers?" and "What constitutes the Christian good life and the means to achieve it?" To some extent the answers to the second question also provide answers to the first. For all who obey the commandments of love, whether Jew, Greek, or barbarian, slave or free, male or female are followers of Jesus. (40) The title "Christian" however, designates more than mere followers: It designates those who have accepted the responsibility of bringing about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God lives in the hearts of all true Christians and through them, as in Christ, it is brought into the world. All who do so, regardless of their worldly circumstance are, whether they are aware of it or not, living the Christian good life. They and only they are the answer to the question: Who are Jesus' followers? (41)

NOTES

- (1) John 10:10.
- (2) Acts 15:1-7.
- (3) Acts 15:29.
- (4) Acts 10:35.
- (5) Ephesians 4:24.
- (6) Ephesians 4:25-32.
- (7) Ephesians 5:5.
- (8) Early Christian Fathers, 242-289.
- (9) Works, II, 269-71.
- (10) The Story of Civilization: Part VI, 17.
- (11) Genesis 1:28.
- (12) Religion In America, 189-190.
- (13) Newsweek: April 6, '87, 19.
- (14) Newsweek: June 8, '87, 62.
- (15) It has been reported that a 67 year old widow was threatened with a heat shut-off when she couldn't pay her gas bill after having sent \$55 of her \$331 monthly social-security check to a television evangelist. (Newsweek: April 6, 1987, 20).
- (16) cf. Mk. 9:38-40.
- (17) Matthew 7:1.
- (18) The Unification Church of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon has recognized this point but has attributed the specific nature of the sin as a sexual act of "unprincipled love" between Eve and the serpent and later, between Eve and Adam.

- (19) Genesis 3:3-13, emphasis added.
- (20) It is perhaps noteworthy to mention here that the name Satan carries with it the meaning "accusor."
- (21) John 20:23.
- (22) Colossians 3:13-14.
- (23) Matthew 18:21-22.
- (24) Matthew 25:40.
- (25) James 2:16.
- (26) Luke 6:36-37.
- (27) Luke 23:34.
- (28) Ephesians 4:31.
- (29) Matthew 5:21-22.
- (30) Ephesians 4:26.
- (31) Matthew 16:26.
- (32) cf. Matt. 6:25-34.
- (33) Matthew 19:21-22.
- (34) cf. Matthew 19:22, Mark 10:22, Luke 18:23.
- (35) cf. Luke 18:27, Mark 10:27, Matthew 19:26.
- (36) cf. Matt. 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 6:27-35, Luke 10:25-28, John 13:34.
- (37) John 4:8.
- (39) John 3:16.
- (40) cf. Galatians 3:28-29, Colossians 3:11.

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