

THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST: BELIEFS AND HISTORICAL EFFECTIVENESS

By Ely Camas

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The apostle Paul spoke in the following manner: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In the context of the Biblical passage we find a church with every kind of problems, from issues about foods to moral problems such as adultery. He had preached to them and they knew the Gospel, but many of them were living in manner contrary to it. Because of this, the apostle Paul challenges them to live a Christian life like the one he was living, giving himself as an example, in a way that the church would not have any excuse in asking how they should live a Christian life.

In the Book of Acts it says: “...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people...” (2:47). The question that arises immediately is, “Why did they like the first Christians?” To find out we have to read the previous verses which talk about the kind of life that they practiced: a life that reflected Christ.

The theme of the **likeness of Christ** is something the primitive church took very seriously, not in just discourse, but in practice, as we can see in the examples mentioned previously; on one side Paul, challenging the church to live like him because he was sure that his life modeled Christ’s character; on the other side, the people learning to see in the first Christians, individuals with a different life style, who reflected in their being that something had changed in their lives, and at the same time showed in what they did.

“What is Christ like?” would be the question that we need to ask now, because if we are to be like Him, if we are to look like Him, this needs to be very clear. We can say many things about Jesus, but because of limited space given for this document I will address a few that, without doubt, I think will be of great importance for the Christian to know, and at the same time, reflect in their daily life.

Christ and His love. We cannot understand the wonderful work on the cross of Calvary to save sinners if not for His great love, a love that He gave without an exchange of something, an action that has transformed millions of people through the centuries. The love of Christ was inclusive; He took time for Zacchaeus, a publican that was not accepted in his society, and He took time to take care of his friend Lazarus, a man recognized by the society where he lived. In His love He took time to take care of the classes that were looked down on: children, widows, prostitutes, lepers, etc., as well as to talk to important men like Nicodemus.

Christ and His compassion. The compassion of Christ was something that accompanied Him every moment. It was not a program the He created to help once in awhile someone who had a need. He helped the widow of Nain by resurrecting her son, as this young man represented future support and sustenance to this weary mother; He fed the five thousand that had followed Him and listened for a long time, even when His disciples asked Him to send them away; He

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healed the lepers who came close to Him, even when the law had other indications. His compassion was known by the people in such a way that where He was, they searched for Him so that He could help them.

Christ and His message of salvation. We cannot see Christ without His message of salvation, a message that is clear and direct. As He said Himself, “I have come to save sinners,” and His purpose did not deviate from that. That is to say, that although He helped with the needy and healed the sick, He took time to talk to all kinds of people, time that He used to preach the message of salvation. This was His priority, above all the good He did.

Christ and His discipler model. Of the things that Jesus developed in ample manner was discipleship. We all know that He took the twelve, day and night, where he went and took them with Him. He taught them with words; constantly He directed them with instructions, and He taught the practical because He first did the things that He asked His disciples to do. After He had prepared this group of persons He entrusted His entire ministry to them.

Christ and His message of holiness. Christ’s message of holiness was very practical; He did not get it tied up in terminology, nor in concepts. When they were about to stone the woman caught in adultery He didn’t take time for enter into theological discussions about the issue; He just said to them: “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7), allowing those who accused this woman to have their consciences touched. They left because their lives were not consistent with what they were trying to do. When we read the Sermon on the Mount we find a series of instructions that call for a holy life, in a way that the disciple of Christ understands the high and supreme of being His follower.

The inheritance of the Church of the Nazarene in regard to the 18th century Wesleyan Revival shows us the previously mentioned characteristics of Jesus Christ. It was a movement characterized by caring for the poor, by evangelism and by a strong discipleship program in such a way that even today this experience is one of the most referenced to in the context of holiness churches. When reading carefully the works of John Wesley, we realize the impact of change in the English society is mostly based on the model of life of those who proposed this change. It was not just another sermon; it was also a proposal to change through the Holy Spirit, but modeled by those who preached it.

In the time we live, there are revealing facts that we should not ignore about this theme. The Church of the Nazarene is part of the Holiness movement, and according to data that exists in Latin America, this group, that is to say holiness churches, only represents a little more than 4% of all evangelicals. This raises the question, how is it that a church with a holiness doctrine does not have explosive growth? I do not pretend to know the answer, but call attention to this issue, because perhaps—and I only express it in this brief conjecture—perhaps, we are not living the doctrine that we have, that there is a divorce between what we practice and the theory. Because of this we need to reinforce the teaching of this doctrine and for the other, begin to live it.

The life of holiness should lead us to be like Christ, we should be like Him, but I believe and am sure that this likeness should not be just in idealistic terms, or, using contemporary

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terminology, *it should not be virtual*, but real, affecting all the areas of our lives. William Greathouse in his book, *Christian Perfection*, says that the passage in Matthew 22:37-39, “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ ...And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ summarizes what we would call Christian perfection. And if we are talking about looking like Christ, or having the likeness of Christ, we must love God and our neighbor as He asks. Only then can we fulfill our objectives and call.”

It is of great importance that the example of Christ, with the model of His life and His work of discipleship, among other things, had impacted the world in His time, in such a way that the disciples that He called not only fulfilled what He had entrusted to them but also revolutionized their world. On the other hand, in the case of Paul, who dared to say, “follow my example because I am imitating Christ”, his impact was of such magnitude that the Greco-Roman world was touched. And of course, what can we say about John Wesley from whom the Church of the Nazarene has taken its doctrinal legacy, and who with a life of seeking the likeness of Christ in his actions, helped to transform the England of his day, not only in religious aspects, but in other areas of the life of the society?

Therefore, since the Church of the Nazarene has inherited such a legacy, there is nothing else to do except set forth the necessity of living in the likeness of Christ, and to impact the world in which we are living. But as I said earlier, we have to know how to transmit good teaching and good practice in the books that are the lives of each one of its members, leaders, programs and structures. To be like Him is to live like Him, and practice the things that He practiced.