

## **The Program of Christ**

Matthew 5:48

The purpose of the gospel of Christ is to produce character in the life of the believer, not simply a formal state of pardon. When a person comes to Christ in faith, repentance, and baptism certain things happen: the forgiveness of their sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life. But, this is only the beginning! Jesus wants us to be perfect just as our Father in heaven is perfect. This is the program of Christ, one of the basic truths of the Christian faith.

Pardon is a formal term signifying the blotting out of the record of sin held against the sinner. It represents the promise of the Lord that we have entered the new life of faith. Faith and obedience constitute our entrance into the kingdom of God. Pardon brings relief to the person bearing the heavy load of sin, but it also brings an opportunity to acquire Christian character. Our presence in the kingdom must be justified by conduct becoming that of a citizen. It is interesting to note that of the 27 books of the New Testament, one book, Acts of the Apostles is devoted to accounts of conversion, but 21 books, the epistles are devoted to Christian growth and conduct.

In the program of Christ, our model and inspiration must be the Lord Himself. The faith of Jesus must be ours. His humility becomes our pride. His beauty of spirit the garment we seek to wear. His serenity should be the peace that fills our souls. His righteous anger our indignation against the evils that deface the world. His sympathy must become the outstretching of our hands to help our fellowman. His patience should be the quality by which we suffer and are strong. His forgiveness becomes the measure of our love and forgiveness of others. His prayerfulness is the secret of our communication with God. His fullness becomes the inspiration of our body and soul. His joy should be

the gladness of our redeemed lives. His obedience the childlike watchfulness by which we seek the Father's will. His power becomes the might by which we are strengthened in the inner man.

Brother Willett wrote all of these attributes nearly a century ago, but they resound with the same truth today as when they were first penned. It is only through the program of Christ that we can achieve the character that will enable us to be productive citizens of the kingdom of God.

As Christians, we will seek as Paul did, to press on that we may lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of us (Philippians 3:12-16). As Paul stated, "not that I have already attained", we should likewise press on. As Paul said, "I do not count myself to have apprehended", but that he would do one thing-forget those things that are behind-and reach forward to those things that are ahead. Like Paul we will press toward the goal. We will seek after the prize of the call of Christ. Paul realized that he had not attained or apprehended that for which he sought. He was willing to press on, forget his sinful past and reach forward to what was ahead. We must also.

As Christians, we will heed the words of Peter, and be diligent to add to our faith the characteristics of virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity (2 Peter 1:5-11). Peter was adamant about the necessity of adding these qualities to our faith. He tells us to give all diligence to this task. We must understand that our faith is not the end of our Christianity, but only the beginning. Peter tells us that if these things be in us and abound, not just present, but an abounding presence that we will not be barren or unfruitful. He tells us that to the extent these qualities are missing from our lives that we will be blind and will even forget that we

have been cleansed from our sins. The hope and security of the believer is found in this passage, as Peter tells us emphatically, that if we do these things we will never fall and that our calling and election will be sure.

As Christians we will affirm with the Apostle John that we know that the Son of God has come. We will affirm that we know and are in Him who is true, that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 John 5:20)! As we follow the program of Christ we will confess with John that Jesus is the Son of God and abides in us, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:12-16). The only way this is possible is through the program of Christ.

How is it that we accomplish things through the program of Christ? It is not by our own strength, but rather by the imparted life of Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. When we look at the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15) several things are readily apparent. Jesus asked His disciples to pray for several things relative to the program of Christ: the coming of God's kingdom upon the Earth, and that God's will would be done on Earth as it is in heaven. These things will be possible only through our activities. We can pray for these things to happen all that we want, but until and unless we make the effort to accomplish these things they will not happen. The world will know God through the transformed lives of Christian men and women.

Remember that Jesus tells us, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Notice that it is not simply the one who says, "I believe in Jesus", but the one who endures. This is only possible by following the program of Christ (Matthew 7:13-14 where Jesus speaks of the narrow way; Matthew 7:15-20 where Jesus tells us we shall know the true believers by their fruits; and Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus tells us that a simple acknowledgment of the fact that He is Lord will not suffice). Jesus

illustrated this principle with one of His parables in Matthew 7:24-27. In this parable, Jesus tells the story of two men, one who built his house upon the rock and one who built his house upon the sand. We can easily see that when we hear the words of Jesus and do what He asks that we are following His program. These are the ones who build their house upon the rock. When the rain descends and the floods come this house will not fall. As long as we continue in the program of Christ we are secure. But, if we hear the words of Christ and ignore them we build upon the sand. When the rains descend and the floods come this house will be destroyed. What a profound parable! We must follow the program of Christ in order to enjoy the benefits of our pardon from sin. When we add to our faith the characteristics Christ would have us possess we will be well pleasing to Him. This is the program of Christ, one of the basic truths of the Christian faith.