

The Way for a Christian to Follow Lord

Keeping a Secret Covenant Before the Lord

We have mentioned before that when John Wesley married in his twenties, he made a secret covenant with the Lord once and for all to settle his standard of living. Even before his marriage, the Lord had called him to serve; afterward he gave up his occupation and went forth to labor for the Lord. From that time until his death, he never altered his standard of living.

After he passed away, his income was recorded in detail. In his later years his earnings increased, amounting to at least ten to twenty thousand British pounds each year. Both he and his brother Charles Wesley wrote hymns, so they received steady copyright royalties. In the year before his departure, his income reached over twenty thousand pounds. Yet his manner of living remained exactly the same. All his surplus money was laid aside for the gospel, for publishing books and gospel tracts, and consecrated fully to the Lord's work, so that many more believers could go out to serve the Lord.

Therefore, brothers and sisters who have a career or occupation, as well as sisters who are homemakers, ought to make a clear list and settle their standard of living before the Lord. Once this covenant is fixed, you must maintain a clear conscience. You cannot later regret it, claiming you are unable to keep it, that you cannot endure it, or that you lack faith.

Husband and wife should not only discuss this together, but also come jointly before God to pray and establish this covenant.

There was a brother in Fujian who resolved to spend only four silver dollars each month, and many praised him for such strict self-discipline. Yet I would say his way was not right. We ought not to torture ourselves willfully, nor endure hunger and cold by mere self-effort. If one continues in such extreme self-denial, sickness will eventually follow, costing far more in the end.

Many brothers and sisters are shrewd and clear-minded about money, yet utterly dull in spiritual things. But there are others who were once spiritually insensitive; after consecrating themselves and their substance to the Lord, their spiritual understanding was opened.

Do not belittle the practice of making and keeping a secret covenant before the Lord.

To forsake all and follow the Lord seems to the world a reckless, life-costing decision; but to Christians, it is only a small part of serving God. We must also consecrate our occupation, physical body, time, future, and all else to Him.

When brothers and sisters hand in their consecration lists, we keep them strictly confidential. They are given only to the responsible brothers, that they may know your situation and render spiritual help. If one's consecration is too little or overly harsh, the responsible brothers can assist in adjusting it properly before the Lord.

The Standard of a True Christian

I often ponder that God's love is frequently misunderstood, yet even more misunderstood is Christianity. The term "Christianity" does not appear in the Bible at all. The Scripture only calls individual believers Christians, and the whole body of believers the Church. It never uses the word Christianity.

What is a Christian? One who believes in the Lord and possesses the Lord's life. Many brothers and sisters live as Christians, yet they themselves do not clearly know what a Christian truly is. If you ask a believer, "What is a Christian?" I am afraid many would give strange answers.

Some may reply: A person who has Christ within and possesses the life of Christ is a Christian. Even such an answer is not easy to live out. It may only be a statement on your lips, while you yourself have not yet become such a person. Only when God opens your eyes will you truly understand what a Christian is. Today, those who genuinely know what a Christian is are as rare as morning stars.

Then, in the natural thought and opinion of people, what is a Christian?

Some suppose a Christian is one who keeps the teachings and creeds of the faith, attends Sunday worship, gives offerings, and the like. Strictly speaking, being a Christian does not focus on these outward practices.

A Christian is not merely someone belonging to a religion or following a set of doctrines, who takes the Bible as a rule and zealously obeys its teachings. A Christian focuses on what is inward; he lives in that which is of Christ. A Christian is a person in Christ.

This statement is rather objective, yet abstract and not concrete. Let me put it another way: a Christian is one who has Christ dwelling within him.

If you are a Christian today, by what standard do you live as one? Is the standard of being a Christian merely keeping religious rules and biblical ordinances? We must all answer: No.

May I ask Sister Ni: Do you live as a Christian according only to the teachings, slogans and creeds of the second floor at No.7 Jordan Road? (She shook her head and said no.)

What about Brother Ma? How do you see it? (Brother Wei answered: We live according to the requirement of Christ who dwells within us.)

There are two kinds of answers people give. The first: to be a Christian, one must follow the teachings of the Bible. The second: one must live by the inward sense and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Some say we ought to imitate Christ to be Christians. Yet Christ is not easy to imitate. It is not that Christ walks ahead and we merely copy His outward steps. All genuine spiritual experiences of a Christian are never outward in origin; they flow forth from within. Though there may be outward actions at times, their source must always come from the inner life.

Consecration Comes from the Demand of the Inward Life

Then I asked Brother Hsieh: Why do you consecrate yourself?

He replied, “Because my inner being delights in it, just as a child loves to eat chocolate.”

I then asked, “Why do you delight in it?”

He answered, “Because the life within me delights to do so.”

That is exactly right. Our consecration springs from the delight of the divine life within us. When we act accordingly, our inner being is filled with joy and spiritual liberty.

In 1943, there was a great move of consecration among the believers in Yantai. Toward the end of the previous year, I saw clearly that if the matter of money was not settled among the brothers and sisters, the gospel could not spread freely, nor could the believers experience genuine revival.

On December 12, 1942, the Lord moved in Yantai. That afternoon I shared a message concerning consecration. From that time on, the Lord began to touch the inward being of the saints, calling them to consecrate all they had. Over the next three and a half months, some six to seven hundred believers fully consecrated their possessions, and many also yielded themselves, ready even to relocate for the Lord’s work.

During that season, the saints were in the midst of rich revival. Many dared not even lay hold of their own clothes when returning home, fearing the Lord would ask them to consecrate those as well. They consecrated their all to obtain inward peace; to hold back anything would leave their conscience unsettled. The same spiritual atmosphere took place in Fuzhou in 1948. The believers offered themselves and their possessions simply to respond to the demand of the inward life.

Let me share a personal testimony. Back in 1928, twenty-three years ago, I was still a young man in my early twenties. Often I would go up into the hills, crying out to the Lord aloud, willing to consecrate all I had to Him.

It was not until 1933 that the Lord truly touched my heart, calling me to give up myself and serve Him full-time. I struggled greatly at that time, reasoning with the Lord with many excuses, yet the Lord only answered me by His precious presence.

On the day I yielded to give up my occupation, tears welled up from deep within

me. Kneeling before the Lord, I told Him I was willing to lay aside everything and commit all into His hands. In that moment, calling upon the Lord's name became fragrant and sweet; my inward being was filled with overwhelming joy. I was ready to surrender anything and everything to Him. That joy, release and spiritual refreshment was as if I had been caught up to heaven—beyond all words to describe even to this day.

In short, my inner man was perfectly rested and satisfied. Remarkably, up to that time, I had never yet heard messages on consecration or forsaking all to follow the Lord. Yet when I obeyed the inward demand, I simply did it spontaneously.

Likewise, if you live by the life of Christ, the call to consecrate will lead you to lay everything at the Lord's feet. You may give up your entire estate, yet your inner being will remain at rest, because you have yielded to the voice and requirement of the life within.

Being a Christian to Have Inward Rest and Satisfaction

Let me ask you again: Why do you want to be a Christian?

Brother Ma replied, "If I do not live as a Christian, I will be unhappy."

My own answer is this: I am a Christian that my inner being may be at rest and satisfied.

To be a Christian merely for going to heaven or for the forgiveness of sins is not enough to satisfy my inner man. Our Christian walk ought to become increasingly joyful, thorough, and unreserved as we go on with the Lord.

If we do not forsake all to follow the Lord, our inner heart will feel unsettled and ill at ease. But when we truly lay everything aside for Him, there is unspeakable rest and comfort within.

May we all yield to the demand of the inward life. Being a Christian is never merely a matter of diligently keeping biblical teachings, rules, moral standards, or being zealous for the Lord. If you are zealous for the Lord yet your inner being is not at rest, your Christian walk is wrong. If you have outward zeal but no inward

sweetness, there is something flawed in your living as a Christian. It is not right for a Christian to lack sweetness, joy, and inward peace. Even if someone lives an upright, moral, blameless, and humble life outwardly, yet lacks spiritual freshness, sweetness, and gladness, it is not because of sin, but because the inward man has not answered Christ' s requirement. The power for preaching the gospel certainly comes from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, yet a greater source of gospel power is answering Christ' s demand within. A person preaches with power precisely because he has forsaken all. The measure of your forsaking determines the measure of the Spirit' s power you receive. The reason many Christians are dull in spiritual things is this: they cling to something they refuse to let go, or are unwilling to abandon certain things. Dull and insensitive spiritual feeling always stems from failure in genuine forsaking. The more earnestly you follow the Lord, the more you will answer His inward demand.

A Christian may appear blameless outwardly, yet if inwardly he lacks clarity, sensitivity, and joy, there is something wrong within. Take a piano for example; it may look fine on the outside, yet if its inner strings are faulty, every note will be out of tune. The only reason for a dull inner being is failure to respond to Christ' s requirement within. Therefore, if you feel trapped spiritually, cannot enter into fellowship with brothers and sisters, and receive no strength from the spiritual supply of the church, I tell you, do not strive to do anything for the Lord first. Instead, ask the Lord what He requires you to lay down, and then answer His demand. What you cannot let go of is exactly what keeps you from rising spiritually. All inward darkness, unrest, bitterness, and spiritual dullness in a Christian come from not responding to Christ' s inward requirement.

We must not regard the words spoken by Christ in the Gospels merely as outward teachings; they are in fact His inward demand within us. For instance, Matthew chapters five to seven are all the requirements of Christ in the inner man. I do not believe anyone who draws near to the Lord can avoid touching Christ' s inward demand. Every word Christ spoke in the Gospels is His requirement within us. When you answer His first requirement, it does not end there; one requirement will follow

another. Just like the rich young ruler who claimed he had kept all the commandments, yet the Lord said to him, “You still lack one thing.” (Luke 18:18 – 22.)

Christ’ s requirement is also His supply

Some may feel that Christ makes too many demands and is hard to satisfy. Yet the moment you yield to His inward requirement, your inner being is filled with freshness and joy. Whenever you sense Christ’ s demand within and obey it immediately, you will experience inward rest. For when He makes a demand, He also provides the supply at the same time. Only then can we testify and partake of Christ’ s riches, transcendence, and preciousness. The Christian life is like a piano; it matters not whether the outer shell is worn, but whether the inner tone is true. (I do not say this to excuse careless outward conduct.)

I long that more brothers and sisters would rise up to touch Christ’ s inward requirement. Naturally, some may hear messages on consecration and yielding all, see others doing the same, and follow suit out of outward imitation. But merely copying others’ zeal, consecration, and surrender is not enough. Your consecration and yielding must spring from a genuine inward requirement from Christ. To give all opens your spiritual sensitivity to the Lord’ s voice and enables you to enjoy the precious Lord in richer measure.

If we fully answer the Lord’ s requirements unreservedly, the way becomes easy and light. Partial obedience, by contrast, is wearisome and difficult. If you only obey sixty to seventy percent, you will find the way hard. But when you yield one hundred percent, it becomes effortless. Disobedience brings no joy; half-hearted obedience brings even less; reluctant obedience is burdensome. Only those who lay down everything completely receive the fullest joy and spiritual supply. Today we ought only to fear giving too little. The Christian walk can never be lived well with hesitation and compromise. May the Lord have mercy on us, that we may clearly see the Christian life hinges entirely on Christ who dwells within us. To follow Christ and answer His inward demand is our path of service and the way of life. I say again, our

Christian life must be measured by whether our inner man is strong, sweet, at peace, clear, and full of light.

Spiritual Defect Comes from Not Answering the Lord' s Requirement

Today in the church, we can see two kinds of brothers and sisters. Many brothers and sisters are joyful, yet a few are sorrowful. It may be that right beside your seat are these two different kinds of Christians. If I asked you to select who are the most joyful, those who are without fault would surely say that they themselves are the most joyful. Therefore, if any of you are not joyful, you ought to question yourself; there must surely be something wrong with you, some spiritual defect. The reason for this defect is that the Lord has laid down a requirement, yet you have not responded to it. This is a matter of spiritual experience, not merely doctrine. You may say, "I was very joyful before you brothers preached this word, but now after hearing it, my joy is gone." Yet such a message is precisely the requirement of Christ. When a Christian fails to answer this requirement, sorrow will naturally follow. Our doctrines, messages, and exhortations are not for mere outward teaching; our voice is like a loudspeaker, simply making clearer to you the requirement of Christ that is already within you.

The Way Today Is to Obey the Inward Voice

If any brothers and sisters still refuse to answer the Lord' s requirement after hearing this word, I can only say that it is already too late for you. If you did not want to be a Christian, you should have refused long ago; but now you already have the life of Christ within you, and it is no longer possible for you to turn back. Since you are already a Christian, you must resolve today: I will follow the Lord. Why are you unable to answer the requirement of His great love? For many years, you have covered, suppressed, and confined the voice of His demand within you through money, the world, and earthly anxieties. None of the teachings we share here are new truths; we merely speak forth the word that you ought to listen to inwardly every day. We do

not speak novel words here, nor do we have any desire to deliver extraordinary messages. We simply declare the plain truth to you: the more a Christian clutches worldly things in his hands, the more bitter he becomes; eventually he will walk away sorrowfully like the rich young ruler. Yet if you forsake all things, you will rejoice like Zacchaeus and receive the Lord ' s salvation. (Luke 18 - 19.) If you bring an unbeliever here to hear these words, he will surely go away saying that those who preach are out of their minds, urging people to abandon everything. Unbelievers will feel no inward conviction after hearing such words, and some may even treat them as a joke. Only those who truly have Christ dwelling within as their life can understand the meaning of this message. To be a Christian is to walk this seemingly unreasonable path and live this seemingly unreasonable life. May the Lord have mercy on us, that we may see the true way of the Christian right now.