

ARE YOU A SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN?

By

Curtis Dickinson

Fortunately, the Lord has never required us to answer this question. Just the same, it is bugging millions of believers who are made more and more discontent by the belief that they are failing as Christians because they have not found the key to health, wealth and happiness.

Lecturers, evangelists and authors gain popularity by promising that Christ will make people happy and help them to find success if they will follow the rules laid down in seminars, tapes and books, Special retreats, designed to remove all barriers to happiness, feature speakers who are hailed for their great success in the world. One such speaker told me that he wore expensive suits and drove a luxury car in order to uphold the image of success and happiness.

It is difficult to imagine Jesus or the apostles participating in such goings on. Jesus said, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). Although He did not condemn riches, He indicated that their possession is a hindrance to following Him. "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" Jesus promised to bless the poor, not to make them rich financially. If the blessing the poor is seeking is material, then they are in the same category as the covetous and greedy rich.

Success in God's eyes is not reflected in the accumulation of things nor the attaining of the world's acclaim. "That which is exalted among men is an abomination with God," He said.

In spite of this the church is right in there with all the world upholding the false goal of health, wealth and the pursuit of happiness as the criteria of successful Christian faith.

Whether we have the talent to make money or whether we are destined to live in poverty, neither condition says anything about Christian success. Some may be rich, yet fools, as declared in Luke 12:20. A person successful financially may be considered a failure as a Christian because he has family problems or because he does not radiate happiness. The fact is that with material benefits God also bestows burdens and responsibilities. The measure of true success is how one responds to God in his difficulties and burdens, not whether or not God removes them.

Another symptom of the "success syndrome" is the effort through speakers and books to get the Christian to rid himself of all emotions that do not describe the perfectly happy and tranquil mind. If there is sadness, sorrow, grief, loneliness or pain, the believer is coached on how to get rid of it. Some go so far as to suggest that if you have physical illness or emotional distress, it is a sign that you are an immature Christian lacking in faith.

The success cult is fed by the multitude of books, and tapes about perfect relationships, total happiness, fulfillment and ideal husbands and wives. Millions of Christians are reading these books, to the neglect of the Bible, and acquiring a grater burden of guilt and failure.

By standards of the modern religious hucksters of success Jesus was not a happy man. He often was “troubled” and on occasions gave way to open weeping. (What would the church think of their preacher if he were caught weeping in public? Not a very stable and happy man. Not a good image of a successful preacher!) Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...that mourn...that hunger and thirst after righteousness...that are persecuted.”

Paul spoke of his being in deep sorrow, of crying over the church day and night, of being under great stress and tension and suffering dishonor along with physical afflictions. Yet he was a successful Christian.

Being Christian is being united with Christ — actually “in Christ.” It is a covenant relationship by which sins are removed and righteousness is imputed. It changes one’s purpose, from pleasing self for the temporal success in the world, to pleasing God for eternal blessings and life in the world to come.

Happiness for the Christian is knowing that he is pleasing to God, and assurance of God’s ultimate reward. It may mean tears, poverty, illness, sorrow of the deepest kind and a total failure in the eyes of man. Jesus failed, as far as the world is concerned.

Christ’s purpose for coming into the world was not to alleviate all the difficulties and problems of daily life. Jesus explained His own purpose: “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for man.” “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” Coming into the world, He said, “I am come to do thy will,” with reference to dying upon the cross. He said, “I always do the things that are pleasing to my Heavenly Father.” Since the Father was well-pleased with Jesus it follows that obtaining success in the world, reaching a plateau where He could relax from the world’s pressures and problems and be considered a success, was not what God wanted.

The example that Jesus set was not that of one who had found a way to avoid serious confrontations and making enemies. He was generally rejected and even hated by His peers. He was not popular with the style-setting crowd. The religion that teaches us that we are to aspire to popularity, getting along with everyone in the world, is not from Christ. He promised that those who follow Him would suffer persecution and be hated by the world.

We often hear the cliché that “Christ is the answer to our problems.” This is true only in that all the problems we face in the world help us to grow in character to be like Him; they drive us to Him in faith, and make us realize that glory and a perfect state of peace can be obtained only in the New Creation after Judgment.

The fact that Christ suffered “being tempted in all points the same as we are” and, therefore, is able to sympathize with and help those who are tempted today, is proof that He expects Christians to suffer and be tempted. He was criticized by his family, ostracized from the community and opposed by respected religious citizens. It is hard to figure how His disciples should ever get the idea that being like Christ means one is to be relieved of burdens, sorrows and common ordinary failure so that he can live the “good life” which the world admires.

A Christian is one who recognizes his own inefficiency and the total efficiency of Christ. He is an unfinished piece of material out of which the Creator is carving an molding a perfect image, which is never finished in this world. Therefore, we do not expect to reach a time in this life when the sharp wounds of the knife can no longer be

felt. In fact, were the pain of being carved and chiseled and drilled and hammered to cease it would mean the Creator had given us up and cast us on the scrap heap. It is the fruitful branch that is pruned. The fruitless branches suffer no pruning but ultimately are cast into the fire and burned as worthless.

What, then, is success but this: to bear patiently all ills, insults, hardships, suffering and losses; not only to bear them patiently but to have perfect faith that Christ is with us, that He loves us and is using all such affliction to make us like Himself. This is the goal.

Success with God is found in the midst of failures in other relationships. One does not have to have a perfect marriage or security in his career in order to be a servant of God and to have the peace and joy which Christ promised. Jesus said, "My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives give I unto you." Our peace comes from Christ, not because we are meeting the peace-conditions set by the world, but because we have renounced the world.

Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his Lord," and explained this to mean that his disciples may expect to be treated as He was. Most of us would agree that human nature has not changed. Man is still sinful by nature until regenerated by Christ. But many seem to think that at least things have changed in this regard: exaltation of the world is no longer an abomination to God but a sign of God's approval, and following Jesus no longer means sharing His suffering but avoiding it in every way possible in order to be successful. Who ever thought of a sick, poor and despised person as a great success! He may be looked upon as a Christian but by most people as a weak and unsuccessful one.

What we must do is center our attention on Jesus "Who suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow His steps" (I Peter. 1:21). We must never measure ourselves by the list in "Who's Who" or by the computerized system of the modern happiness hucksters, but by Christ. We must spend less time with the successful of this world and more with the poor, the sick and the despised.

Christ calls us to die to ourselves. He demands that we deny ourselves and take up the painful and disgraceful cross, if we would follow Him.

How, then, do we measure our success as Christians? When physical pain keeps you awake so that you spend the night tanking God for His grace, love and glory to come; When slander and false accusations shut you out of fellowship with your brothers and you can sincerely pray God to bless your persecutors; When trials and temptations leave you melted and trembling with joy that God loves you enough to prove you; When all comfort and support is gone but you can rejoice in Christ and sing praise for His goodness and tender mercy; When you confidently affirm that Christ gives happiness without anything else — Then you may be a successful Christian.

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XXII, Number 1.
.....