

# Christ's Wisdom and Man's Methods

By

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Just how orthodox is today's New Testament Christianity? Do we really want to restore the original teaching of Christ?

The rules Jesus laid down for His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount are the very opposite of what we consider normal for getting on in the world. How can one accomplish anything if he is rated among the poor? To be meek and turn the other cheek is to become vulnerable to all kinds of abuses. And how can one attain success and security for self and family if he fails to lay up treasure on earth? Persecution, Jesus said, is not the occasion for sorrow but happiness! No wonder Kierkegaard said that nothing displeases us or revolts us more than new Testament Christianity when it is properly acclaimed (Insight, page 167).

The extent to which we have managed to get around the simple but difficult platform for discipleship which Jesus gave is easily seen in the way the church presents itself to the world. Not poor in spirit but proudly competitive; not mourning the sinful condition of members and of society but promising excitement and diversion; not the spirit of meek power but the spirit of compromise and get-alongness; not hungering and thirsting for righteousness but for recognition and satisfaction. The leaders feel compelled to see that the church grows, that it is filled with people. True conversion is too demanding; the way is too narrow, so it is broadened to accommodate those who want to accept the fellowship and the promises without giving up the world's esteem, its riches, and without any great risk of persecution.

The way Jesus prescribes is absurd to the natural man. It requires that we act on the word of Jesus, against the wisdom of man, against the acceptable approach, and against the normal impulses ingrained into our very nature. Does the kingdom of heaven really belong to the poor in spirit? Does having your desires set on righteousness bring happiness and fulfillment? If you make your chief ambition the kingdom of God and His righteousness, will all your needs be available?

For most of us the risk is too great. To be despised by the world would be unbearable for many, and to give up the security in the world would be absolute idiocy. Yet this was the normal course for Christians in the first century. They went out boldly defying worldly standards. They were called fools and heretics. They were accused of being cannibals because of eating the Lord's supper and of being traitors and enemies of the state because they confessed Jesus rather than Caesar as Lord. Yet they counted the world's persecution the greatest honor it could bestow upon them. Most of the apostles had no formal training and no credentials from the world. Yet they confronted the powerful religious leaders in the synagogues and the kings on their thrones and "turned the world upside down" in giving the message of Jesus. Indeed, everything was provided for their lives and for their work, just as Jesus had promised.

The apostle Paul had very little to enhance his resume according to modern church standards. Yet he proceeded to tackle gigantic tasks with no guaranteed support from men because he knew that God, the Creator of all things, could make him sufficient

for what he needed to do. Not only did he depend upon God to make available the material needs but to supply him with the spiritual strength for the extraordinary work given him. He was rejected by some in the church, criticized by friend and foe, physically tortured and unjustly imprisoned. To add to all that, he suffered some kind of bodily affliction. God's word to him was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul's response to this was, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weakness, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:9–11).

True service to God requires faith that he will provide all that is needed to accomplish it. Adam and Eve were provided thoroughly for the work God designed for them. It was when they doubted God's wisdom and believed He was denying something they really ought to have that they started down the slippery slope of humanistic methodology and lost their way. The church, in the effort to insure its own power and success, has turned the focus of trust from the promises of Christ to the programs of men. The power of the gospel is not enough; it must be packaged by super-star performers, charged with the hidden persuasion of psychology, and carefully screened for all elements that might offend the proud sinner.

The church must grow. As one church faced financial problems, a board member remarked, "We need more members so we can meet these expenses." The professionals are sought after. Not men noted for preaching and teaching the doctrine of Christ but men noted for their methods, their personalities, their skill at raising funds and their ability as administrators. Jesus founded a church that was to grow by the application of His simple commands. But man in his cleverness has devised one that can grow without ever knowing the meaning of humility, meekness, persecution, self-denial and deep yearning for righteousness. The church has become pragmatic. The end justifies the means. Use whatever means appeals to the world (in its corrupt state), as long as it results in a full house and a healthy budget. This condition prevails because we have come to trust man and doubt Christ.

There is a saying that nothing succeeds like success. People gravitate to that which is big, exciting and led by men displaying power. Witness the Roman Church Papacy. But in Christ's church the greatest people are those who serve, not those who control or exercise power. Power for the body of Christ is to come from Him and not from the hired professionals and elected or appointed officials. This is not to suggest that it is wrong to pay the preacher. "The laborer is worthy of his hire," and in spite of the deceivers and TV hucksters, most preachers earn their pay. But if he is a true servant of God, he claims no power or authority in the church and wants none. Man can generate no power to do God's work; he can only proclaim God's word. The power is in the truth, not in the vessel through which it comes.

Neither does the success of Christ's people depend upon the size of the group. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," Jesus said, "there am I in their midst." It is ironic how a small group, when starting to meet together as a church, delights in the presence of Christ and the power He gives to enable them to witness and worship, but as soon as they begin to increase in numbers, they begin to boast of their growth and start applying the human methods and tricks learned from older, larger churches. Simply trusting God is all right when you can't do anything else, but to amount

to anything in this world we have to flex our own muscles and exhibit our own power and wisdom—to our own detriment.

In spite of all man can do to change Christian faith and discipline into its opposite, that the world may accept it, there remains a true church, a remnant based firmly upon the rock that is Jesus. It consists of those everywhere whose faith is not in self or organization or the power of man but in God; who trust not in themselves and their own wisdom, and methods but in the wisdom and power of God. These believers, who believe in the real sense and not merely in the sense of being identified with Christianity in general, make up the church which Jesus said could not be held by the power of death. “The gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” This is the great under-girding beam of our faith, that God performed the impossible when He raised up Jesus from the dead and is able to reverse any other adversity we may face, including death.

There are awesome enemies of Christ seeking our destruction. They seek to destroy our freedom, our homes, our morals, our standards, our economy, our republic, our churches and even our faith. They seem to have the big weapons on their side, and they outnumber us with great odds. But we are not surprised nor afraid. The scenario was revealed long ago. Jesus promised persecution, hatred and tribulation from the world but said that we are not to worry or fear. “Be not anxious.” All power is in His hands. We are to obey, with confidence that in doing so His will is being done. This is the purpose that outweighs all other considerations.

His kingdom is not of this world, is not measured by worldly standards and does not rely upon worldly powers. Not only are His disciples different from the world, but they are to judge the world’s standards and not the other way around. It is His disciples who are the salt of the earth. The church is not to get its flavor from the world but to make the world taste the uniqueness of Christ. We are to give the light of truth to society, not to let society’s darkness blind our spirits with its false glitter. We must not harmonize the church with the world by rationalizing away the demand of Jesus.

Two things are necessary: unconditional faith that Christ’s way is the right way, without modification; and trust, trust that the result will be as Jesus promised. To confess Jesus is nothing if we insist on trusting our own system instead of His wisdom and power.

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