



CWRm

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COSTLY GRACE

What's So "Christian" About Christianity?

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates is famous for saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Those words have become something of a Philosophy 101 cliché since Socrates first uttered them centuries ago, but they're as true today as they were in ancient Greece—and should be just as convicting. Particularly for those of us who call ourselves Christians.

I worry that far too many of us attach the name "Christian" to ourselves without ever really stopping to consider what that name implies or the demands that name should make upon our lives.

For example, we wouldn't call ourselves vegetarians if steak was a regular part of our diet, because vegetarian describes a particular way of life. You can't just believe that vegetables are a good thing. To be a vegetarian, you have to actually live like a vegetarian. And if you eat meat while claiming to be a vegetarian, people will call you out for your gastronomic hypocrisy.

In theory, the name Christian should work the same way. Yet we seem to feel free to call ourselves Christians so long as we simply believe in Jesus and agree to a certain list of beliefs.

But is that really all that Christianity is about? Shouldn't Christianity be more than just a list of beliefs? Shouldn't it also be a particular way of life? And shouldn't that particular way of life resemble the life of the person who gives Christianity its name?

If so, then don't we have an obligation to our integrity and our faith to pause, examine our lives, examine the Church and ask, "What's so Christian about Christianity today?"

How well do we who call ourselves Christians actually resemble the Christ we claim to be following and embodying for the world? Because if we're honest and compare our lives with the life of Jesus, then I'm afraid the answer is not so much—or at least not nearly enough.

Jesus made love the foundation of his ministry. We make doctrinal purity the foundation of our faith and treat love as a nice afterthought.

Jesus called his followers to love their enemies. We call for bombs to be dropped on their heads.

Jesus grew in wisdom. We already know the absolute truth about absolutely everything.

Jesus fellowshipped with sinners. We damn them to hell.

Jesus looked at the big picture of Scripture in order to liberate people from legalism. We take a microscope to Scripture in order to shackle people to rules and dogma.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." We try to sanctify America through the ballot box.

Jesus blessed the poor, declaring that the kingdom of God belonged to them. We blame the poor for their poverty and treat them as charity cases instead of brothers and sisters.

Jesus made women a central part of his ministry. We bend over backwards to keep them out of ministry.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God is made up of little children. We too often do too little to protect them from systematic abuse at the hands of religious leaders.

Jesus never stopped forgiving. We hold grudges in the name of righteousness.

Jesus died to bring the "wrong" people into the Kingdom. We fight to keep them out.

Don't get me wrong. I'm just as guilty of most of these things as the person sitting next to me in the pew. But it's because of that, my own complicity, that I worry that being a Christian today has come to mean little more than believing in a list of doctrines.

If that is true (if our identity as Christians is primarily found in our heads and not in our lives) then perhaps that is part of the reason why so many of us in the Church today feel persecuted for our Christian faith.

Perhaps, like a vegetarian eating steak, the world recognizes our hypocrisy, the chasm that exists between our lives and the life of Jesus, and we're being called out for living a life that looks almost nothing like what we preach. □