

#20 Northside Natter

5 August 2020

Today I'm looking at the topic of **Christians**.

What a week or so we've had with further virus cases emerging, people demanding criminal charges against the two young women who lied to authorities resulting in many Southsiders tested while borders were closed to Sydney residents. So many angry people, so many fearful families, and so many financially struggling business-owners frustrated with some very upset over closing. It's all understandable.

However, there were a couple of comments that I read online that made me cringe. One commenter mentioned the two women were Christians and made very disparaging remarks about *all* Christians (after all, we're all the same, aren't we?). His comment received this reply; "*Christians are all liars!*"

I must admit that I wanted to reach into the internet and grab that person by the throat. However, it made me think. I remember seeing a sign on a church board once that read: *If you were charged with being a Christian would the evidence convict you?*

Many people purport to be Christians but their lives never reflect it. Before I came to the Lord, I was a catholic. On Sundays at church, I would look around at the people there, and eventually, some faces became familiar. I never knew them by their names but if I saw them down the street, I would recognise them as a catholic and feel a kind of affinity towards them. Many of these people and I include myself in that, did what every other person in town did when Sunday mass was over. They drank, they smoked, they swore like troopers, behaved immorally, and turned a blind eye to all the wrongdoings around them. Some even dabbled in cannabis and hard drugs. When they were asked what their religion was, many would puff out their chests and proudly proclaim, "*I'm a Catholic!*" They truly believed Catholicism was going to get them into heaven regardless of the way they lived their lives the other six and a half days of the week.

When I see the question on a form asking me what religion I am, I hesitate. I don't want to write the word *Christian*. My wife writes, 'Born-again Christian' on her form because she too feels the word Christian is abused.

The world has taken the word Christian and made it into something else. One internet commenter said, '*Christian means follower of Jesus*'. It doesn't. The word Christian comes from the Greek word Χριστός (Christos) and means anointed. Interestingly, it is a translation of the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ (Mashiyach). In English, this Hebrew word is spelled messiah. The word messiah also means anointed. So, the religious people in the world are unknowingly calling themselves anointed when they are not. Hence the misrepresentation of themselves.

What I also find interesting is that in my hometown, about forty years ago, Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans and the like never referred to themselves as Christians. That practice came later. It may have come from The World Council of Churches (formed in 1948). This is a group of various denominations, mostly mainstream, who profess a similarity in their overall beliefs allowing them to worship together.

I find it amusing that the Catholic church is not a member of this group, yet sends a representative to all their meetings. These days, it seems the nondenominational approach is realigning many mainline churches with a future hope of a one-world religion to unite all nations in peace. You can probably guess which religion expects to trump in this process and I doubt it will ever lead to peace.

I found a site online (*BBC Future*) that had a heading titled '*Tomorrow's Gods: What is the future of religion?*' Mainstream religions have continually evolved with the wants and cultures of the people and always have. This makes them, in my view, people-pleasing organisations whose end goal is to fill seats, rake in money, and further their power base. Not really about God at all. The author of the site had this to say about religion's future:

If you believe your faith has arrived at ultimate truth, you might reject the idea that it will change at all. But if history is any guide, no matter how deeply held our beliefs may be today, they are likely in time to be transformed or transferred as they pass to our descendants – or simply to fade away.

On reading this comment you may think that it's not relevant to us. Perhaps where our beliefs are concerned, you may be right. However, I think there is a real cause for concern.

Matthew 7:14 *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Luke 18:8 ... *Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

We know that many saints have already walked away from us. Mostly, they have cited these reasons:

- Someone hurt them badly and they couldn't find it in themselves to forgive the offender
- They were high-minded believing they could do a better job than those in charge but weren't given the chance
- They became enamoured of earthly pleasures, stopped fellowshiping and eventually forgot about their experience
- They started listening to their friends in the world who pecked away at the seeds sewn in their spiritual lives causing them to stop believing

Yet the bible says they walked away because: **1 John 2:19** *they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

To recover some of these people brings us great joy indeed. Yet we know most will never return for the reason John gave.

To be perfectly honest, most of us experience moments in our walk where we question our faith or belief. Many of us have been offended by others but we know deep down that no harm was meant even though hurt was felt. We understand that our leaders and pastors are doing the best they can, we're all only human, and we support them as much as we are

able. We know that to have a good solid walk in the Lord we need to read, pray, witness, and fellowship. We also know that shedding the ways of this world is a part of making ourselves stronger in who we have become.

I feel that we, us, this current generation, are the last bastion of hope for our church's future. The way things are turning out in this world, it is up to us to be earnest in our walk and to teach that earnestness to our children and to all those new folks who come along, and to those who are struggling. It is up to us to preach the gospel and find the lost souls who will hear his voice. If we don't do these things know-one else will and our children will struggle to keep the fellowship going when we're gone. Our church will simply disappear and we will have failed our commission.

I can tell you that there have been times in my walk when I found it too hard, but another saint has spoken the right words to my heart that turned me around. If I hadn't spent time in fellowship with that saint (my friend, my family), perhaps I would not be here now. Fellowship is vital to our walk. It's not that everyone else is smarter, it's that they are willing to be used by the Lord as his mouthpiece. The words they speak are his, not theirs. If the words touch our hearts, we can be confident of that.

The comment that *all Christians are liars* was unfair to Christians, excepting the two young women who were caught in their lie (and apparently much more). What they did highlights how important it is to keep away from all appearances of evil. Let our yay be yay and our nay be nay. In other words, be honest and truthful in all our dealings with others. Before we do anything, we need to ask ourselves, *'is this going to be a good testimony for the Lord?'* If the answer is *'no'*, then don't do it. If the answer is, *'I don't know'*. Don't do it. We must be careful in all things so we do not tarnish the Lord's reputation.