

Red Letter Exhortations!



By
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A Christian!

Introduction

Some Christians are referring to themselves as "**Red letter Christians.**" By this designation they mean that their emphasis is upon the words and exhortations of our Lord as they appear in **red letter editions** of the Bible. Since hearing this expression I have given it some thought and have come up with my own take on this concept, hence this booklet.

I am one of those followers of Jesus Christ who believes and accepts the Bible as the God-breathed uniquely inspired written Word of God. I am not necessarily a strict literalist on every section of the Word. Some sections were written specifically to an individual, a group and of course many parts were written with Israel in mind. Neither am I a **King James Version only** advocate. In my personal study of the Word I usually consult a number of translations and versions. Presently my priority is the **TNIV (Today's New International Version.)** I especially like this version because it has made an effort to render the English translation of the Bible in a more inclusive manner. Generally it appears to do a better job than does the **NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)**. I continue to read and study the King James as well as the New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version and others.

My theological equipping and training originally took place in churches and Bible Colleges that were **Dispensational** adhering to **the Scofield Reference Bible**. I've since broadened my understanding of God's written Word and am no longer a strict dispensationalist. However, I have not rejected dispensationalism in total and now hold a more moderate dispensational theological position in my understanding of the Bible.

I want to dedicate this material to **the sister house group that meets in Los Lunas, NM** and especially to the group's facilitators **DJ and Georgia Ann**. My prayer is that what is written in this booklet will aid believers in living lives that lift-up Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Frederick of Strawberry

Becoming Red Letter Christians



Though there are merits to interpreting and understanding the Bible from a dispensational perspective I am somewhat turned-off when I hear or read Christians of this theological bent totally **dismissing the exhortations of Jesus** recorded in the four Gospels. Though I acknowledge that the apostle Paul was **the prime teacher** of the apostolic faith, yet I become concerned at the teaching that we should dismiss what is recorded in the Gospel accounts because it is not for this dispensation. In this respect I hold **the Anabaptist position** in these matters rather than my former strict fundamentalist position.

I'm not overly fond of labels. Yet, I am aware that of necessity we all wear **certain labels**. For instance I am a **Christian**. It describes my faith, belief and allegiance to Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I also wear the label **male**. This distinguishes me from being a female. I am an **American** indicating my native land. I could go on and on but I'm sure you get the idea. When it comes to my faith in Christ I get tired of having people ask me as to what I am, i.e., *Baptist, Catholic, charismatic, or what*. To the individual who is "**in**" Christ the church label is secondary. The important factor is that when an individual is "**in**" Christ they are a believer, i.e. *a disciple and follower of Christ*. The sinner is brought into the family of God **by adoption** upon their spiritual rebirth. Salvation is God's doing. It is solely by God's grace through faith in Christ as Savior and Lord that one is placed "**in**" Christ. **See** – Eph. 2:8-9.

First and foremost an **authentic Red Letter Christian** is just that: a **Christian**; a Christian in the full meaning of what being a Christian is. **See** – 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

I cannot overemphasize that being a Red Letter Christian **does not mean** that one dismisses the rest of God's written Word. While on-the-other-hand **it does mean** that the Red Letter Christian seeks to adhere to what our Lord said in his teachings and exhortations to his disciples. When we are "**in**" Christ we are his disciples.

What Gandhi Observed



History reveals that *Mahatma Gandhi* was greatly impressed with the life and teachings of the Man Jesus. Although Gandhi himself was not a Christian, but a Hindu, he had read the Gospels. It is said that he considered becoming a Christian. However, **he was turned away** from the faith because of some of the actions, practices and lives of those who professed to be followers of the Christ. Upon reading the Gospels he is reported to have said,

“Everybody in the world knows what Jesus was teaching in those verses – except Christians!”

WOW! A Hindu, a man who was the father of modern day India, a man who could have influenced India and the world for Christianity, turned aside and away from becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ because of Christians. **How tragic!**

The challenge is given for Red Letter Christians to prove **“the Mahatma”** wrong.

Becoming a Radical Christian

Even as the Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation was dubbed *‘radicals’* in like manner it behooves us, as Red Letter Christians to **become radical followers** of Christ in this twenty-first century. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is by beginning to take the exhortations, the message, of Jesus Christ seriously. **Our Lord’s exhortations were radical.** Spend some time reading, pondering, exploring, studying and then **putting into action and practice** what is taught in his **Sermon on the Mount** as recorded in the Gospel of **Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7.**

Evangelical Arrogance

At this point please don’t turn me off. If you are a Christian who is an evangelical, I too, am an evangelical. I accept the evangel, i.e., *the gospel*, as **the bottom line** of New Testament Christian faith. The evangel or gospel is that our Lord died for our sin, was buried, rose in the body literally from the grave, ascended back to the Father’s presence and will one day return. **A legitimate evangelical** is one of those people who believes in and accepts the Gospel as **the Message** that needs to be shared with humankind; wherever and whoever.

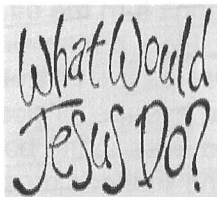
By evangelical arrogance I am referring to the fact that many people who call themselves evangelicals, who march under the banner of evangelicalism, **have aligned themselves** with a teaching that at times does not appear to be the simple faith and practice of the earliest original disciples of our Lord. Many people who claim to be evangelicals have bought into what I often term **“the party line.”** American evangelicals appear to have become obsessed with but two issues, namely: **abortion and homosexuality.**

But wait! As we read and study the four Gospels and the exhortations of our Lord we discover **that the abovementioned two issues** which appear to be the total concern of many evangelicals are **but a tip of the iceberg** of concerns addressed. **What about** such issues as:

- plight of the poor of the world;
- environmental issues;
- military aggression;
- blatant discrimination directed against women, people of color, native Americans, sexual orientation, etc.
- use of torture by governments;
- civil religion.

I could go on-and-on with **numerous other issues** that too many evangelicals seem to turn a **blind eye** to. Red Letter Christians seek to take a **close look** at our Lord’s exhortations. I am convinced that these exhortations were not given solely to his immediate disciples. They were and are given to his disciples living today; **to you and me** who follow him. It is to Jesus Christ that we as his disciples give our allegiance.

WWJD and WDJS?



A few years ago the motto: "**What Would Jesus Do**" became popular among Christians. It's a good concept to follow. Someone has suggested that we also ask "**What Did Jesus Say**" as a principal for believers to explore. In our study of our Lord's exhortations this becomes **increasingly more meaningful** to us. In the list above we might want to reread and re-study the Gospels to discover just what our Lord did say about these various issues. **Not what the evangelical party line dictates** but what does Jesus say. It cannot be denied that our Lord was vitally concerned about such issues as poverty, discrimination, etc. He continually **displayed compassion** on the wandering sheep of the world. Much of the organized Church has become like Sodom of old whom the prophet wrote about,

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen." (Ezekiel 16:49-50)

It should matter to us what our Lord taught. Note what the above passage from the prophet Ezekiel says. In like manner **we American Christians** have become arrogant, overfed and largely unconcerned to the needs of the people of the world let alone even people in our midst. **The poor and needy** we often view as the concern of government agencies, not the concern of our super and mega-churches. After all we have greater and more expensive buildings to erect, salaries to be paid, utilities to be met and entertainment to draw in the crowds. I am convinced that **in God's sight** the organized Church has become haughty and is doing detestable things. We've aligned ourselves with promoting a **form of religion** that is far from the simplicity of New Testament Christian faith.

Both the so-called "**right-wing**" as well as the "**left-wing**" political movements are **alive and well** in many of our churches and denominations. We need to once again **turn** our full attention to **the exhortations** set forth by our Lord. **We are exhorted** to become peacemakers, merciful, pure in heart and life, seeking to help eliminate poverty, spreading the Gospel, loving those whom we may consider our enemies, those who hate and use us, building strong families. Our churches are called forth to be prophetic. In informing society as to what God requires will not cause us to be popular. We will not be acceptable with organized institutional Christendom. We will be **the outcasts and pilgrims** that Scripture speaks of. Reminiscent of our Lord as he cast out the moneychangers from the temple we, too, should be seeking to drive out those forces that have perverted the faith of the apostles. If we really are to take our Lord seriously at his word then we will begin putting our actions where are words are. We will begin seeking to live out the exhortations spelled out by him.

I came across the following on the internet written by *Randall Balmer*, a Columbia University professor and expert on American religious history:

"The evangelical faith that nurtured me as a child and that sustains me as an adult has been hijacked by right wing zealots who really have no real understanding of the teachings of Jesus. They have taken the Gospel the Good News of Jesus Christ, something that I consider to be lovely and redemptive, and turned it into something ugly and punitive. They have cherry picked through the Scriptures wrenching verses out of context and used those verses as a bludgeon against their political enemies."

I fear that the brother in the above quote is pretty much on target. But all is not lost. As disciples of Jesus Christ **we can and we must regain** the old landmarks of the faith of the prophets and the apostles of old. Someone has aptly said of the modern church that:

"Prophetic ministry must not be allowed to degenerate into pathetic ministry."

God is still on the throne of heaven. As the Gospel song implores: *"Let us all go back . . . to the old landmark!"*

And **what is that "old landmark?"** It is the teachings given by our Lord to his disciples, to his followers, **to you and me** who claim the name of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

If you concur with the message set forth in this booklet we would like to hear from you. We are:

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