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Sermon- Romans 12:9-21
Sunday, September 10, 2017

What is a Christian vs. What does a Christian look like?

1. We all know how the argument goes. Christians are a bunch of hypocrites who demand that everyone else be before while they, themselves, are terrible people. There is some truth to this sentiment- in that some Christians really do shout very loudly about how others ought to look and behave, while paying no mind to how they are behaving. Jesus might suggest to these people to remove the plank from their own eye before trying to remove the speck from their neighbor's.
2. In actuality, the problem with these kinds of arguments, though, is that they conflate what a Christian is with how a Christian should look or behave. It isn't a surprise that outsiders wouldn't necessarily catch the distinction, as they aren't really expected to be versed in the intricacies of Christian theology and thought.
3. However, there are a fair number of Christians, people who *ought* to know better, who do not know the distinction. For too many, the understood definition of what a Christian is, is what the Christian does. In other words, a Christian is a good person; a Christian is one who loves others; a Christian is one puts others ahead of himself.
 - a. Does this actually describe what makes one a Christian?

What is a Christian?

1. So, what *is* a Christian? Paul says in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This helps us to understand what a Christian is. Combine that with statements such as those referring to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and we begin to get a clearer picture.
2. A Christian isn't defined but what he does or does not do, but by what Christ has done. When Paul speaks of confession and belief, he is telling us that there is something specific about which we profess and believe. He also tells us that this belief, or faith, is, itself, a gift from God.
 - a. The Christian is one who was dead in his trespasses, but has been made alive in Christ, having his sins paid for by Jesus on the cross, and receiving the righteousness of Christ in return.
 - b. In simpler terms, a Christian is one who, apart from their own works or behavior, have been saved by Jesus' death, and have been raised as new creations in Christ's resurrection.
 - c. In the simplest terms, a Christian is one who has received the free gift of salvation from Jesus.
3. If this is what a Christian is, then it also tells us what a Christian is not.
 - a. A Christian is not someone who was smart enough to figure it all out on their own. A Christian is not someone who is really, really good; or at least not quite as bad as the guy next to him. A Christian is not someone who has strived long enough and has finally earned the love of God.

What does a Christian look like?

1. A Christian is not a Christian by virtue of his own behaviors, but by virtue of his spiritual poverty being replaced with the richness of God's grace through Christ. For many, those

known as antinomians, in order to fully reject that our behavior is what makes us Christian, they go to the extreme and deny that behavior has any bearing whatsoever, since it is all of grace.

2. However, if we are to be disciples of Christ, we have to understand both what a Christian is, and what a Christian does. We are *not* what we do. But what we do goes a long way in showing what we *are*. I am sure you have all heard the saying, you can judge a tree by its fruit. That statement specifically references those who claim to be God's people.
 - a. My good behavior doesn't make me a Christian. But if my life is nothing but bad behavior- bad fruit- then perhaps I am still a rotten tree- an unsaved sinner.
3. So much of the epistle to the Romans is about outlining the Christian faith. Here, in Romans 12:9-21, Paul is not talking about what makes us Christian, but what marks us as Christian. In other words, what ought a Christian look like in thought and deed?
4. Look at it here in the bulletin. What we see is that Christians are known and marked by their love and virtue. (They will know we are Christians by our love.) The Christian isn't vengeful, angry, judgmental, and selfish. The Christian is loving, hates evil, delights in good, honors others, serves God, rejoices I hope, is faithful in prayer, is hospitable and generous. The Christian responds to evil and hate with love and kindness. Christians empathize with others in the good and the bad, don't seek to elevate themselves, but lower themselves in order to elevate others. The Christian lives, as much as it depends on themselves, peaceably with others, because he trusts that the Lord will handle the vengeance and the wrath.
5. All of these behaviors so that a person has been saved, and is being conformed to the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The degree to which these behaviors are refined in us is the degree to which sanctification- the process of having the sin in our lives replaced with holiness- is progressing in our lives.
6. We are not our behaviors. Yes, Christians still sin. Christians still struggle, fail, and fall. Christians make mistakes, act hypocritically, and often don't practice what we preach.
 - a. Remember, it is not our works that make us Christian- but Christ's work on the cross and in us.
 - b. However, the more we reflect these righteous behaviors in our lives, the more people will see Christ in us, they may be more willing to listen as we speak about the God whom we serve, and, if nothing else, we will be living in faithfulness to a God who rescued us when we were drowning in an ocean of our own sin.