

“The Christian Life Without Christ?”

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by Matt Peery

American Christianity is trendy; in every generation popular trends influence our churches. A current trend is to break down the spiritual life to practical steps: 5 steps to have a joyful marriage, 3 steps to be a better steward of money, etc. The Christian life then becomes, like Alcoholics Anonymous, a step by step program with each area of life (parenting, time-management, etc.) having so many steps the faithful Christian should dutifully put into practice.

What is missing from this picture? Jesus Christ is missing! The central focus of Christianity is Jesus Christ, not us. While it is often unintended, the “steps” approach to the Christian life places the focus on us. If “I” want to be a good parent, then “I” must put into practice these steps. The emphasis, though not always intended, is placed on us and what we do.

Biblical Christianity however is first and foremost concerned with Jesus Christ: who Christ is, what Christ has done, and what He is doing. Hebrews 12 says, “let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” The Christian life is not lived looking to ourselves but looking to Christ. In fact Jesus tells us that we cannot live for God, or for one moment, apart from Him. In John 15:5 Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” The Christian life cannot be lived apart from Christ living in and through us.

This is an important truth because so much of American Christianity today is telling us to how to live the Christian life apart from Christ. Living the Christian life on our own, by our will power, without the power of Christ’s resurrection, without the power of the Spirit, treating the Bible as a “How to Guide” or “Worker’s Manual” is not Biblical Christianity. The truth is that no matter how many steps we are given to be joyful, or disciplined, or whatever else, we simply cannot unless God supernaturally enables us through the salvation of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit cannot be mustered by grit. The spiritual life cannot be lived devoid of the Spirit. The supernatural life cannot be lived naturally.

This is why Christ came, died and was resurrected: Not to tell us “We Can Do It!” as the Nike slogan goes, but to make it clear by the Law that we cannot do it. Our spiritual cancer called sin goes to our very core, our hearts, and only God by the gospel of Jesus Christ can change our hearts. God in Ezekiel 36:26-27 says, “I will remove your heart of stone and put my Spirit within you.” May all of Christ’s redeemed people live by the Spirit, by faith in Christ, only living for Him by Him.